Differences in Discipline Consequences as a Function of Economic Status by Gender

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Abstract

The extent to which differences were present in the assignment of in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension as a function of economic status for Texas Grade 4 and Grade 5 girls and boys for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years was determined in this investigation. Statistically significant differences were present between boys and girls and by poverty status in the assignment of in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension for both school years. For girls and boys, students who were Extremely Poor were assigned in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension at statistically significantly higher rates than both Moderately Poor and Not Economically Disadvantaged in Grade 4 and Grade 5. Of importance were clear disproportionalities in exclusionary discipline assignments for students who were economically disadvantaged. Implications of results and recommendations for future research were provided.

INTRODUCTION

"Children growing up in poverty have a higher likelihood of exposure to multiple forms of adversity that jeopardize their chances of academic success" (Friedman-Krauss & Raver, 2015, p. 1). In addition to jeopardizing their chances of academic success, children with higher levels of poverty perform more poorly on measures of emotion and cognitive deregulation when compared to their more advantaged peers (Friedman-Krauss & Raver, 2015). Heberle and Carter (2015) determined that students who are economically disadvantaged have higher than average rates of externalizing behavior problems in addition to lower cognitive and academic performance than their peers who are not economically disadvantaged. Many factors contribute to their lower academic, emotional, and cognitive success. Children from poverty are more likely to attend lower quality schools, have less qualified teachers, have less access to cognitive enriching materials, and experience disruptions in their home environments (Friedman-Krauss & Raver, 2015).

According to The National Assessment of Educational Progress (2016), "Large and persistent poverty-based disparities continue to characterize the nation's academic achievement" (p. 10). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (2016) documented a gap in proficiency exists between low income students and students of higher income increased by about four points. Of note, the percentage of students who were enrolled in the free or reduced price lunch program increased from 39.7% in 2003 to 51.5% in 2015 (Student Achievement in the Era of Accountability, 2016). In 2010, the United States Census reported that 22% of all children in the United States were under the Federal poverty line (Heberle & Carter, 2015). Therefore, not only does a poverty-based disparity in academic achievement exist in the United States, but the gap is widening and the poverty population is growing.

In the federally mandated *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, the U.S. Department of Education (2001) declared that all students are to have an equal opportunity in obtaining a high-quality education. Skiba (2014) described academic engagement as the number one variable for student academic achievement; however, when students are disciplined in an exclusionary manner, such as suspension or expulsion, the academic engagement is lost, and so is the equality, equity, and goals of our nation's education legislation. Furthermore, exclusionary discipline practices have not shown to improve student behavior (Noguera, 2003). In the 2011-2012 school year, the U.S. Department of Education documented that 3.45 million students received an out-of-school suspension (Skiba, 2014), thus contributing to a loss in academic engagement. More recently, in 2015, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* was passed. Focused on in this new legislation is the importance of equality for every child regardless of race/ethnicity, income, background, or zip code (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

The Federal Gun Free School Act of 1994 originated zero tolerance policies within public schools in the United States. Zero-tolerance policies implemented in the 1990s included exclusionary practices that have been used with increased frequency (American Psychological Association, 2008). Since the implementation of zero-tolerance policies, discipline inequities associated with exclusionary consequences among students of different ethnic/racial backgrounds have increased (Englehart, 2014; Noguera, 2003; Skiba, 2014). Under the zero-tolerance policy, circumstance or context of an incident are not considered when an assignment of predetermined exclusionary consequences are given to students (Englehart, 2014).

Zero-tolerance policies were created to provide a safe school climate by using exclusionary practices when responding to serious behavior. The expected effects of the implementation of

zero-tolerance policies have not been seen (Englehart, 2014). On the contrary, an overuse and misuse of exclusionary discipline has occurred. These policies have promoted inequities between boys and girls, between different ethnic/racial groups, and between students from different economic backgrounds. Unfortunately, over time, the policies developed have been used to respond to minor offenses (Casella, 2003). In the end, it has been found that exclusionary punishments promote more negative behaviors than they do positive behaviors (Noguera, 2003; Skiba, 2014). Over the past 30 years, negative effects such as poor academics, increased negative behavior, and school drop outs for Black and Hispanic students have increased due to the assignment of exclusionary measures (Skiba, 2014). Even though exclusionary assignments have been connected to negative effects for Black and Hispanic students, evidence is not available to show that zero tolerance policies have influenced discipline in schools in a positive way (Englehart, 2014), nor is there evidence that exclusionary practices are capable of reducing disruption or improving the school environment (Skiba, 2014).

In a recent investigation in the state Texas, Khan and Slate (2016) analyzed differences in the percentage of Grade 6 Black students, Hispanic students, and White students who were assigned to in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and disciplined via an alternative education program, as a function of student economic status. Their analysis yielded statistically significant results. In every instance, Grade 6 Black, Hispanic, and White students who were economically disadvantaged received more instances of in-school suspension, out-of- school suspension, and discipline via an alternative education placement, in comparison to their ethnic/racial peers who were not economically disadvantaged. Although not addressed in the study, a clear lack of equity in discipline consequence assignment by student ethnicity/race was also demonstrated in these results. Regardless of economic status, Grade 6 Black and Hispanic students received more discipline consequences than did their Grade 6 White peers. In their study, Khan and Slate (2016) documented that Black students who were enrolled in middle school were two times more likely to be suspended and expelled, in comparison to their White peers.

Ethnic/racial gaps in the administration of discipline consequences have been extensively documented. However, an economic disproportionality of school disciplinary assignments also exists. Over the past 25 years, an economic and racial disproportionality has been consistently documented in the administration of school discipline (Skiba et al., 2002). A frequently documented fact in the school discipline literature is that students of color, particularly Black males from low income populations, are at an increased risk of receiving exclusionary discipline sanctions (Butler, Lewis, Moore III, & Scott, 2012). More specifically, academic success is greater for White students who typically have a higher economic status than for students of different races/ethnicities and economic status (Cheem & Galluzzo, 2013; Hilberth & Slate, 2014a, 2014b; Wallace Jr. et al., 2008). Additionally, students are at an increased risk for school suspension if they are economically disadvantaged (Skiba et al., 2002).

To further investigate the relationship between school suspension and students who were economically disadvantaged, McElderry and Cheng (2014) analyzed exclusionary discipline practices and the relationships with student characteristics, mother characteristics, parental involvement, school location, and service provision. Analyzing a national dataset of Grade 7 through Grade 12 students, they determined that students had an increased risk of school exclusion if the students' mothers received public assistance or were employed full-time. The emotional and financial stress of providing resources for family survival was surmised to prohibit these parents from active parental involvement.

In another recent investigation in Texas, Lopez and Slate (2016) investigated the extent to which differences might be present in disciplinary alternative education placements for Grade 7 and Grade 8 White students based on their economic status. Grade 7 and Grade 8 White students who were economically disadvantaged were placed in disciplinary alternative education program placements statistically significantly more often than were their counterparts who were not economically disadvantaged. Student economic status was statistically significantly related to higher rates of discipline (Lopez & Slate, 2016).

Although inequities in discipline between boys and girls and ethnic/racial groups have been documented, Henkel (2015) investigated the consequences of the discipline inequities received by students. Henkel examined the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) Reading and Mathematics test scores of White, Hispanic, and Black boys and girls assigned in-school suspension and their peers who were not assigned in-school suspension. Those students who were assigned in-school suspension had statistically significant lower TAKS Reading and Mathematics scores, with the mathematics scores being more adversely influenced than were the reading scores. Henkel concluded that students who were suspended from school struggled more academically compared to students who were not suspended. Instructional time missed contributes to the student's academic struggles (Miles & Stipek, 2006; Pokorski, 2010)

Another consequence associated with the inequities of public school discipline are the effects it has on student graduation rates in high school and a student's future involvement in the juvenile justice system. More than 80% of Texas adult prison inmates are school drop outs (Fowler et al., 2010). The single most important predictor of student future involvement in the juvenile justice system is a prior history of disciplinary referrals at school (Fowler et al., 2010). Additionally, where students attend school is the greatest predictor of whether or not students will be assigned a discretionary in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, or a disciplinary alternative education placement (Fowler et al., 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Low student achievement and higher student dropout rates have been linked to exclusionary discipline assignments (Christle et al., 2004; Henkel, 2015; Hilberth & Slate, 2014a; Skiba et al., 2009). Disproportionality of discipline consequences between boys and girls combined with inequities in discipline consequence assignment among different economic status groups (i.e., Not Economically Disadvantaged, Moderately Poor, and Extremely Poor) may lead to disproportionate effects on student academic achievement by gender within an economic status group. Gender and economic discipline gaps contributes to the academic gaps present in public schools. Academic gaps are apparent between students who are not economically disadvantaged and students who are economically disadvantaged and these achievement gaps are widening (George, 2015; Mendez et al., 2002). Important to note is that exclusionary discipline assignments have also been linked to an increase in high school drop-out rates (Fowler et al., 2010; Skiba, 2014), contributing a disproportionally higher percentage of the nation's prison inmates and a higher unemployment rate (Fowler et al., 2010).

Purpose of the Study

One purpose of this article was to examine the degree to which differences were present in the assignment of discipline consequences to Grade 4 and 5 girls as a function of their economic status. A second purpose of this article was to examine the extent to which differences were present in the assignment of discipline consequences to Grade 4 and 5 boys as a function of their economic status. As such, the presence of any inequities in the receipt of disciplinary consequences for boys and girls by their economic status will be established.

Significance of the Study

Substantial research literature (e.g., Arcia, 2007; Gregory et al., 2010; Hilberth & Slate, 2014a, 2014b; Wallace Jr. et al., 2008) exists in which student discipline consequences and student demographic characteristics such as ethnicity/race (i.e., White, Hispanic, and Black), gender, and economic status are directly connected. Additionally, Skiba et al. (2009) suggested the school discipline consequences being used, such as exclusionary practices, appear to provide short-term solutions to school disciplinary problems by separating disruptive students from the educational environment. Of importance is that Christle et al. (2004) and Skiba et al. (2009) have determined that schools with higher rates of exclusionary practices had poorer achievement outcomes. Many researchers (e.g., Fowler et al., 2010; Henkel, 2015; McElderry & Cheng, 2014) have established that school discipline efforts lead to, not only poorer achievement outcomes, but lower student graduation rates and a high percentage of students involved in the juvenile justice system. Few researchers, however, have examined the disproportionality of discipline consequences separately for boys and girls as a function of their economic status for students in elementary school. As such, the presence of any inequities in receipt of disciplinary consequences for boys and girls as a function of their economic status will be established. The findings of this study may have practical applications for school administrators and classroom teachers in ensuring their pedagogical practices and disciplinary efforts are equitable for elementary school boys and girls regardless of their economic status. In addition, findings may provide educational institutions important empirical data for sound policymaking.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study: (a) Is there a difference in the assignment of in-school suspension for Grade 4 girls as a function of their economic status (i.e., Not Economically Disadvantaged, Moderately Poor, and Extremely Poor)? (b) Is there a difference in the assignment of in-school suspension for Grade 4 boys as a function of their economic status? (c) Is there a difference in the assignment of out-of-school suspension for Grade 4 girls as a function of economic status?; (d) Is there a difference in the assignment of out-of-school suspension for Grade 4 boys as a function of economic status?; (e) Is there a difference in the assignment of in-school suspension of Grade 5 girls as a function of economic status?; (f) Is there a difference in the assignment of in-school suspension for Grade 5 boys as a function of economic status?; (g) Is there a difference in the assignment of out-of-school suspension for Grade 5 girls as a function of economic status?; (h) Is there a difference in the assignment of out-of-school suspension for Grade 5 boys as a function of economic status?; (i) What consistencies are

present in the assignment of in-school suspension to Grade 4 and Grade 5 girls and boys?; and, (j) What consistencies are present in the assignment of out-of-school suspension for Grade 4 and 5 girls and boys? The first 8 research questions were repeated for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years whereas the last two research questions involved both years of data.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A non-experimental, causal-comparative research design (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2012) was used for this study. In this investigation, the independent variable could not be manipulated. Due to the design of the study, the independent and dependent variables had already occurred and extraneous variables were not controlled. The archival data that were utilized herein represented past events (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The independent variable in this article was student economic status (i.e., Not Economically Disadvantaged, Moderately Poor, and Extremely Poor). For each grade level, the dependent variables involved in this research article were the receipt or non-receipt of in-school suspension and the receipt or non-receipt of out-of-school suspension.

Participants

Participants in this study were Grade 4 and Grade 5 students in Texas who received a discipline consequence in the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. Data were obtained from the Texas Education Agency Public Education Information Management System through completion and submission of a Public Information Request form. Specific data requested from the Texas Education Agency were: grade level, student gender, economic status, and discipline consequence. These data after being obtained were then imported into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software program. Subsequently the data file was converted into a SPSS data file and labels were assigned to relevant variables used in this study.

For this investigation, the following definitions were used. In-school suspension was defined as the first method of disciplinary consequence for students. An in-school suspension consequence is the removal of a student from the regular classroom as a disciplinary consequence by placing the student into a separate classroom (Texas Education Agency, 2010). An out-of-school suspension consequence referred to the removal of a student from the regular classroom as a disciplinary consequence that did not allow the student to attend school for a day and did not exceed three days in a row (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

The following definitions were used to describe the degrees of economic disadvantage: Not Economically Disadvantaged (i.e., students who did not qualify for the free/reduced price lunch program); Moderately Poor (i.e., students who qualified for the reduced price lunch program); and Extremely Poor (i.e., students who qualified for the free price lunch program). A family's income needed to be 131% to 185% of the federal poverty line to be eligible for the reduced price lunch. However, to be eligible for the free price lunch program, a family's income needed to be below 130% of the federal poverty line (Federal Register, 2016).

RESULTS

To ascertain whether statistically significant differences were present in the assignment of either in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension as a function of economic status (i.e., Not Economically Disadvantaged, Moderately Poor, and Extremely Poor) for Grade 4 and Grade 5 girls and boys, Pearson chi-square procedures were conducted. This statistical procedure is the optimal statistical procedure to use because frequency data were present for economic (i.e., Not Economically Disadvantaged, Moderately Poor, and Extremely Poor), gender, and discipline consequences (i.e., students either received a consequence or did not receive a consequence). Therefore, chi-squares are the statistical procedure of choice when both variables are categorical in nature (Field, 2009). In addition, with the large sample size, the available sample size per cell was more than five. The sample size for the 2013-2014 school year for Grade 4 students was 181,211 girls and 190,658 boys for a total of 371,869 students. With respect to the 2014-2015 school year, the sample size for Grade 4 students was 183,993 girls and 194,889 boys for a total sample of 378,882 Grade 4 students. With these large sample sizes present for the two school years, the criteria for utilizing chi-square were met (Field, 2009).

Research Question One

For the first research question, the focus was on the extent to which differences were present in the assignment of in-school suspension by economic status (i.e., Not Economically Disadvantaged, Moderately Poor, and Extremely Poor) for Grade 4 girls in Texas for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. A statistically significant difference was present in the assignment of in-school suspension, $\chi^2(1) = 738.77$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .06, a trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988), as a function of economic status for Grade 4 girls. In the 2013-2014 school year, over 4,000 Grade 4 girls were assigned an in-school suspension. Grade 4 girls who were Extremely Poor were almost three times more likely to be assigned in-school suspension than were Grade 4 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Grade 4 girls who were Moderately Poor were more than twice likely to be assigned an in-school suspension than were Grade 4 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Frequencies and percentages of Grade 4 girls by economic status who received an in-school suspension are delineated in Table 1.

Table 1

Percentages and Frequencies of Grade 4 Girls Who Were Assigned an In-School Suspension by Economic Status

	2013-2014		2014-2015	
Economic Status	*n*	%	*n*	%
Extremely Poor	95,012	3.2	95,472	2.8
Moderately Poor	13,087	2.1	12,464	1.8
Not Poor	73,112	1.2	76,057	1.1

With respect to the 2014-2015 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of in-school suspension for Grade 4 girls, $\chi^2(1) = 612.14$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .06, a trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988), by student economic status. In the 2014-2015 school year, almost 4,000 in-school suspensions were assigned to girls. The assignment of in-school suspension was more than two times higher for Grade 4 girls who were Extremely Poor and almost twice the rate for Grade 4 girls who were Moderately Poor than for Grade 4 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged.

Research Question Two

In the second research question, the assignment of in-school suspension by economic status was investigated for Grade 4 boys in Texas for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. A statistically significant difference was present in the assignment of in-school suspension, $\chi^2(1) = 1748.78$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .10, a small effect size (Cohen, 1988), as a function of economic status for Grade 4 boys. In regard to the 2013-2014 school year, over 15,000 Grade 4 boys were assigned an in-school suspension. Grade 4 boys who were Extremely Poor were more than twice as likely to be assigned an in-school suspension than were Grade 4 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Grade 4 boys who were Moderately Poor were almost twice likely to be assigned an in-school suspension than were Grade 4 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Frequencies and percentages of Grade 4 boys by economic status who received an in-school suspension are revealed in Table 2.

Table 2

Percentages and Frequencies of Grade 4 Boys by Who Were Assigned an In-School Suspension by Economic Status

	2013-2014		2014-2015	
Economic Status	*n*	%	*n*	%
Extremely Poor	100,009	10.5	100,752	9.8
Moderately Poor	13,829	7.8	13,483	7.3
Not Poor	76,820	5.0	80,654	5.0

Regarding the 2014-2015 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of in-school suspension for Grade 4 boys, $\chi^2(1) = 1435.70$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .09, a trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988), by student economic status. In the 2014-2015 school year, about 15,000 in-school suspensions were assigned to Grade 4 boys. Grade 4 boys who were Extremely Poor had an in-school suspension rate that was almost two times the in-school suspension rate of Grade 4 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Grade 4 boys who were Moderately Poor were assigned in-school suspensions almost twice the rate as Grade 4 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged.

Research Question Three

For the third research question, the assignment of out-of-school suspension by economic status was addressed for Grade 4 girls in Texas for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. A statistically significant difference was present in the assignment of out-of-school suspension, $\chi^2(1) = 575.90$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .06, a trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988), as a function of economic status for Grade 4 girls. In the 2013-2014 school year, almost 2,000 Grade 4 girls were assigned an out-of-school suspension. Grade 4 girls who were Extremely Poor were almost five times more likely to be assigned an out-of-school suspension than were Grade 4 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Grade 4 girls who were Moderately Poor were more than twice likely to be assigned an out-of-school suspension than were Grade 4 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Table 3 contains the frequencies and percentages of Grade 4 girls by economic status who received an out-of-school suspension.

Table 3

Percentages and Frequencies of Grade 4 Girls by Who Were Assigned an Out-of-School Suspension by Economic Status

	2013-2014		2014-2015	
Economic Status	*n*	%	*n*	%
Extremely Poor	95,012	1.4	95,472	1.4
Moderately Poor	13,087	0.6	12,464	0.5
Not Poor	73,112	0.3	76,057	0.4

Regarding the 2014-2015 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of an out-of-school suspension for Grade 4 girls, $\chi^2(1) = 500.97$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .05, a trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988), by student economic status. In the 2014-2015 school year, almost 1,300 out-of-school suspensions were assigned to girls. Grade 4 girls who were Extremely Poor had an out-of-school suspension rate that was more than three times higher than the out-of-school suspension rate of Grade 4 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Grade 4 girls who were Moderately Poor were less likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than were Grade 4 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged.

Research Question Four

In the fourth research question, the degree to which differences were present in the assignment of out-of-school suspension by economic status for Grade 4 boys in Texas for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years was determined. A statistically significant difference was present in the assignment of out-of-school suspension, $\chi^2(1) = 11831.26$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .10, a small effect size (Cohen, 1988), as a function of economic status for Grade 4 boys. In regard to the 2013-2014 school year, over 7,000 Grade 4 boys were assigned an out-of-school suspension. Grade 4 boys who were Extremely Poor were more than three times more likely to be assigned an out-of-school suspension than were Grade 4 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Grade 4 boys who were Moderately Poor were almost twice likely to be assigned an out-of-school suspension than were Grade 4 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Revealed in Table 4 are the frequencies and percentages of Grade 4 boys by economic status who received an out-of-school suspension.

Table 4

Percentages and Frequencies of Grade 4 Boys by Who Were Assigned an Out-of-School Suspension by Economic Status

	2013-2014		2014-2015	
Economic Status	*n*	%	*n*	%
Extremely Poor	100,009	5.6	100,752	5.2
Moderately Poor	13,829	3.0	13,483	2.6
Not Poor	76,820	1.7	80,654	1.8

Concerning the 2014-2015 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of out-of-school suspension for Grade 4 boys, $\chi^2(1) = 1512.98$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .09, a trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988), by student economic status. In the 2014-2015 school year, over 7,000 out-of-school suspensions were assigned to boys. Grade 4 boys who were Extremely Poor had an out-of-school suspension rate that was more than twice as high as the out-of-school suspension rate for Grade 4 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Grade 4 boys who were Moderately Poor had an out-of-school suspension rate that was almost twice as high as the out-of-school suspension rate of Grade 4 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged.

Research Question Five

For the fifth research question, the assignment of in-school suspension by economic status for Grade 5 girls in Texas for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years was determined. A statistically significant difference was present in the assignment of in-school suspension, $\chi^2(1) = 1460.06$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .09, a trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988), as a function of economic status for Grade 5 girls. In the 2013-2014 school year, almost 7,000 Grade 5 girls were assigned an in-school suspension. The in-school suspension rate for Grade 5 girls who were Extremely Poor were almost three times as high as the in-school suspension rate of Grade 5 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Grade 5 girls who were Moderately Poor were almost twice likely to be assigned to in-school suspension than were Grade 5 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Presented in Table 5 are the frequencies and percentages of Grade 5 girls by economic status who received an in-school suspension.

Table 5

Percentages and Frequencies of Grade 5 Girls by Who Were Assigned an In-School Suspension Economic Status

	2013-2014		2014-2015	
Economic Status	*n*	%	*n*	%
Extremely Poor	58,104	5.5	93,012	4.9
Moderately Poor	13,451	3.5	12,688	2.9
Not Poor	74,315	1.9	77,325	1.8

With respect to the 2014-2015 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of in-school suspension for Grade 5 girls, $\chi^2(1) = 1242.80$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .08, a trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988), by student economic status. In the 2014-2015 school year, more than 6,000 in-school suspensions were assigned to girls. The in-school suspension rate for Grade 5 girls who were Extremely Poor was more than twice as high as the in-school suspension rate for Grade 5 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Grade 5 girls who were Moderately Poor were assigned an in-school suspension about twice as often as Grade 5 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged.

Research Question Six

In the sixth research question, the degree to which differences were present in the assignment of in-school suspension by economic status for Grade 5 boys in Texas for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years was investigated. A statistically significant difference was present in the assignment of in-school suspension, $\chi^2(1) = 2691.80$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .12, a small effect size (Cohen, 1988), as a function of economic status for Grade 5 boys. In the 2013-2014 school year, over 20,000 Grade 5 boys were assigned an in-school suspension. Grade 5 boys who were Extremely Poor were more than twice as likely to be assigned an in-school suspension than were Grade 5 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Grade 5 boys who were Moderately Poor were almost twice likely to be assigned an in-school suspension than were Grade 5 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Contained in Table 6 are the frequencies and percentages of Grade 5 boys by economic status who received an in-school suspension.

Table 6

Percentages and Frequencies of Grade 5 Boys Who Were Assigned an In-School Suspension by Economic Status

	2013-2014		2014-2015	
Economic Status	*n*	%	*n*	%
Extremely Poor	98,183	15.1	97,498	13.8
Moderately Poor	14,399	11.2	13,458	10.4
Not Poor	77,287	7.1	81,357	7.0

Regarding the 2014-2015 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of in-school suspension for Grade 5 boys, $\chi^2(1) = 2187.41$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .11, a small effect size (Cohen, 1988), by student economic status. In the 2014-2015 school year, almost 15,000 in-school suspensions were assigned to boys. For Grade 5 boys who were Extremely Poor, their in-school suspension rate was almost twice the in-school suspension rate for Grade 5 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Grade 5 boys who were Moderately Poor had an in-school suspension rate that was almost twice as high as the in-school suspension rate of Grade 5 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged.

Research Question Seven

For the seventh research question, the assignment of out-of-school suspension by economic status was examined for Grade 5 girls in Texas for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. A statistically significant difference was present in the assignment of out-of-school suspension, $\chi^2(1) = 919.58$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .07, a trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988), as a function of economic status for Grade 5 girls. In the 2013-2014 school year, almost 1,700 Grade 5 girls were assigned an out-of-school suspension. Grade 5 girls who were Extremely Poor were four times more likely to be assigned an out-of-school suspension than were Grade 5 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Grade 5 girls who were Moderately Poor were more than twice likely to be assigned an out-of-school suspension than were Grade 5 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Delineated in Table 7 are the frequencies and percentages of Grade 5 girls who received an out-of-school suspension.

Table 7

Percentages and Frequencies of Grade 5 Girls Who Were Assigned an Out-of-School Suspension by Economic Status

	2013-2014		2014-2015	
Economic Status	*n*	%	*n*	%
Extremely Poor	93,495	2.4	97,498	2.2
Moderately Poor	13,451	1.3	13,458	0.8
Not Poor	74,315	0.6	81,357	0.6

Concerning the 2014-2015 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of out-of-school suspension for Grade 5 girls, $\chi^2(1) = 879.54$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .07, a trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988), by student economic status. In the 2014-2015 school year, approximately 2,600 out-of-school suspensions were assigned to girls. For Grade 5 girls who were Extremely Poor, their out-of-school suspension rate was more than three times as high as the out-of-school suspension rate for Grade 5 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. However, Grade 5 girls who were Moderately Poor were assigned out-of-school suspension only slightly more often than were Grade 5 girls who were Not Economically Disadvantaged.

Research Question Eight

In the eighth research question, the focus was on the degree to which differences were present in the assignment of out-of-school suspension by economic status for Grade 5 boys in Texas for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. A statistically significant difference was revealed in the assignment of out-of-school suspension, $\chi^2(1) = 2776.15$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .12, a small effect size (Cohen, 1988), as a function of economic status for Grade 5 boys. In the 2013-2014 school year, over 10,000 Grade 5 boys were assigned an out-of-school suspension. Grade 5 boys who were Extremely Poor were more than three times as likely to be assigned an out-of-school suspension than were Grade 5 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Grade 5 boys who were Moderately Poor were almost twice likely to be assigned an out-of-school suspension than were Grade 5 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. The frequencies and percentages of Grade 5 boys by economic status who received an out-of-school suspension are revealed in Table 8.

Table 8

Percentages and Frequencies of Grade 5 Boys Who Were Assigned an Out-of-School Suspension by Economic Status

	2013-2014		2014-2015	
Economic Status	*n*	%	*n*	%
Extremely Poor	98,183	7.8	97,498	7.1
Moderately Poor	14,399	4.2	13,458	3.7
Not Poor	77,287	2.2	81,357	2.4

With respect to the 2014-2015 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of out-of-school suspension for Grade 5 boys, $\chi^2(1) = 2187.41$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .11, a small effect size (Cohen, 1988), by student economic status. In the 2014-2015 school year, over 9,000 out-of-school suspensions were assigned to boys. For Grade 5 boys who were Extremely Poor, their out-of-school suspension rate was almost twice as high as the out-of-school suspension rate for Grade 5 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Grade 5 boys who were Moderately Poor had an out-of-school suspension rate that was almost twice as high as the out-of-school suspension rate of Grade 5 boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged. Table 8 contains the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

DISCUSSION

In this investigation, two school years of data were analyzed to determine the degree to which inequities occurred in the assignment of in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension by the economic status of Grade 4 and Grade 5 girls and boys. Inequities were clearly documented in this multiyear investigation. The extent to which the inequities occurred for in-school suspension rates as a function of economic status for Grade 4 girls and boys are presented in Figure 1. The data for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years were consistent in the apparent discipline gap for both girls and boys and by poverty status. Clear inequities were evident in the out-of-school suspension rates between girls and boys and are depicted in Figure 2.

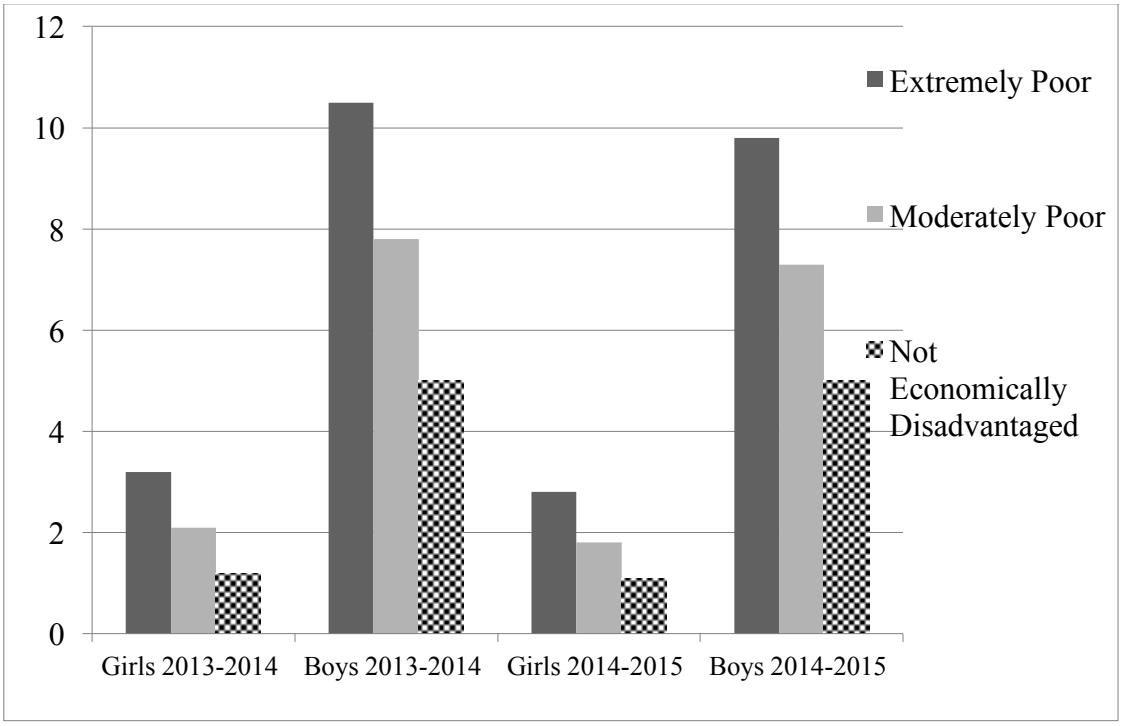

Figure 1. In-school suspension assignments by economic status to Grade 4 girls and boys for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years.

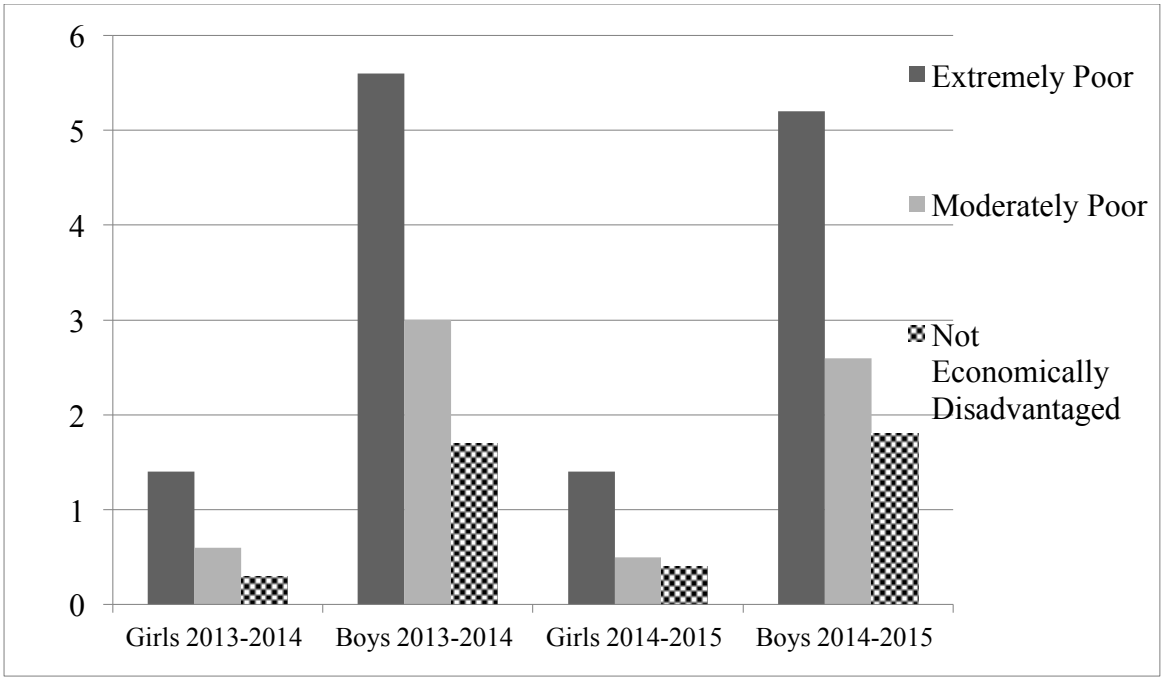

Figure 2. Out-of-school suspension assignments by economic status to Grade 4 girls and boys for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years.

With regard to Grade 4 girls and boys in the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years, readers should note that Grade 4 girls and boys who were Not Economically Disadvantaged had a low in-school suspension rate in comparison to the in-school suspension rates of Grade 4 girls and boys who were either Moderately Poor or Extremely Poor. Grade 4 boys regardless of economic status were more than three times more likely to be assigned an in-school suspension consequence than were Grade 4 girls. For each year investigated, for both girls and boys, the highest rates of in-school suspensions occurred for the Extremely Poor group of students. The ordering of Extremely Poor, Moderately Poor, and Not Economically Disadvantaged girls and boys, with respect to the rate of in-school suspension rates, was consistent for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. Depicted in Figure 2 are the in-school suspension rates for these three groups of students. These data are consistent with previous researchers (e.g., Lopez & Slate, 2016; National Assessment of Education Progress, 2016) who have documented the presence of strong disparities among students by their economic status in the receipt of exclusionary discipline consequences.

Furthermore, in this investigation, the degree to which out-of-school suspension was assigned in a disproportional manner to Grade 4 and Grade 5 girls and boys by economic status was determined. The extent to which the inequities occurred are revealed in Figures 3 and 4. For the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years, for both girls and boys, the highest rates of out-of-school suspension occurred for the Extremely Poor group of students. This result was consistent with other researchers (e.g., McElderry & Cheng, 2014; Skiba, 2002). Grade 4 and Grade 5 students who were Extremely Poor were not only overrepresented in regard to receiving discipline consequences, but Grade 4 and Grade 5 boys were disproportionally overrepresented when compared to Grade 4 and Grade 5 girls who were Extremely Poor. Results of this investigation are congruent with Lopez and Slate (2016) who established that student economic status was statistically significantly related to higher rates of discipline.

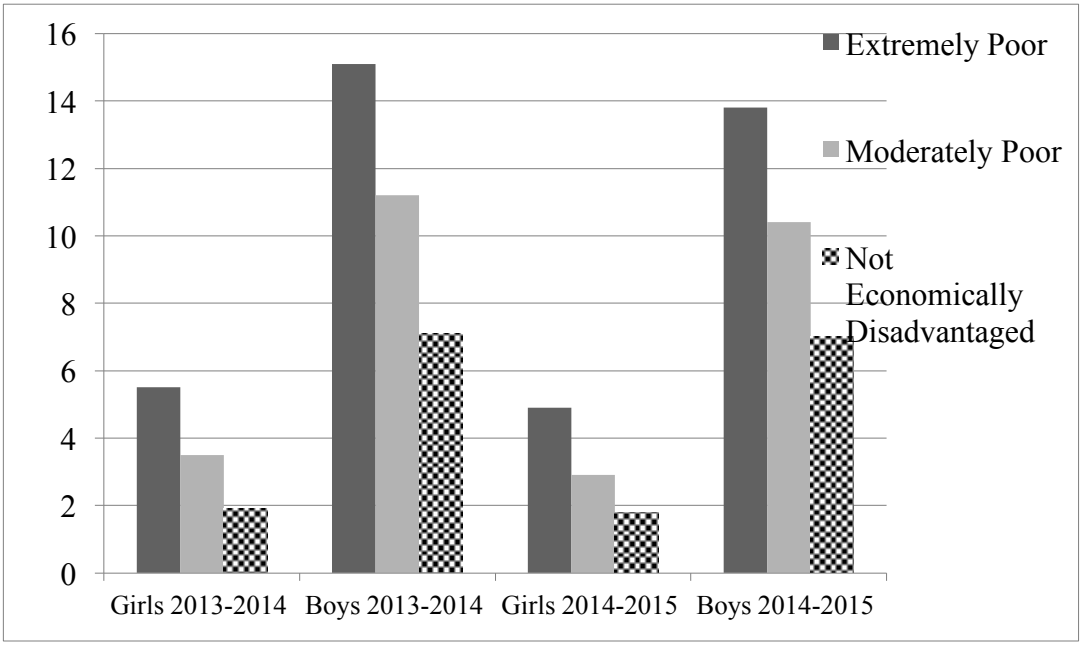

Figure 3. In-school suspension assignments by economic status to Grade 5 girls and boys status for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years.

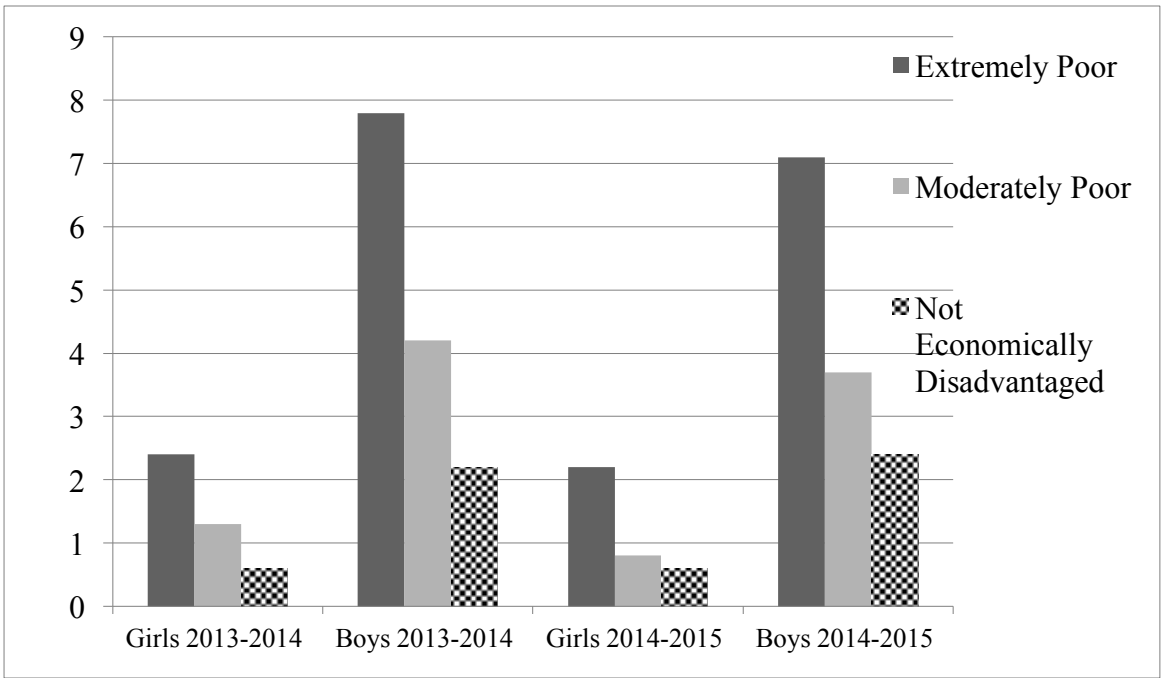

Figure.4. Out-of-school suspension assignments by economic status to Grade 5 girls and boys for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Distinct and strong inequities were present in the rates of in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension by student economic status. As a result, school district and school campus leaders are encouraged to conduct audits of their discipline programs and practices. Audits will vary depending on the district or school; however, they should include an analysis of the current discipline program being practiced along with current problems associated with the program. Specifically, the audits should include the amount of in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions given, identify the main reasons for suspensions, and lastly identify the students who are receiving exclusionary discipline based on economic status. The teachers who assign discipline referrals, the time of day, and the other students who are involved are other important factors to consider in a discipline audit, to fully understand the current state of a district or school's problem. In these audits, the demographic characteristics of students who have received discipline consequences should be examined and compared to the student enrollment characteristics of the school. Inequities will be presented in the degree that disparities exist in the demographic characteristics of students who receive discipline consequences, in comparison to the demographic characteristics of student enrollment.

Discipline practices that improve student behavior should be practiced in place of exclusionary methods that have yet to demonstrate improvement in student behavior. Restorative justice (Van Ness & Strong, 2014) is an example of a positive discipline strategy that provides an opportunity for dialogue, reflection, and character education. Restorative justice is a discipline model in which inclusive processes are used to engage stakeholders and shifts the focus of punishment as discipline to dialogue, learning, and involving the community. Regular classroom

circles, training teachers and staff, and using peer juries and community fairness committees are examples of restorative justice practices (Van Ness & Strong, 2014). Scholars who have promoted a focus on evidence-based practices provide insights to such strategies (e.g., Flannery, Fenning, Kao, & McIntosh, 2014; Horner, Sugai, & Fixsen, 2017).

In addition to educational leaders of school districts reviewing their current discipline programs, school district administrators and educational leaders should examine discipline methods, student engagement, and cultural relevant practices that enhance student success. To assess and conclude how to improve student behavior, student needs assessments and school culture audits are necessary. Student needs assessments should include student interest surveys as well as a survey for parents to assess their needs. The student interest surveys and parent needs assessments are tools to use to understand what a district or school is exceling in and what areas need improvement, therefore making decisions with all stakeholders involved and considered. Similarly, when creating or adopting a school culture audit, all stakeholders are to be considered. Therefore, students, teachers, parents, and community members should be assessed on their perceptions of the district's or the school's overall culture. Additionally, a thorough understanding of student needs based on student gender and economic status would be beneficial to improve teacher and student relationships. Lastly, community engagement and research based student discipline trainings should be provided to teachers in an effort to reduce exclusionary discipline consequences.

Suggestions for Future Research

Several recommendations for future research can be generated from this empirical investigation. First, researchers are recommended to investigate whether discipline inequities exist for students from low income and poverty in Grade 4 and Grade 5 in other states. Such studies could provide information regarding the generalizability of the results delineated in this article. Secondly, because of the large numbers of exclusionary discipline consequences assigned to Grade 4 and Grade 5 students, expanding the study to incorporate more grade levels would be helpful.

Further research focused on following individual students over a multiyear period to study whether the assignment of in-school suspensions leads to the assignment of out-of-school suspension, Disciplinary Alternative Education Program, and/or Juvenile Alternative Education Program is suggested. Additionally, an investigation to follow individual students to study the relationship of their discipline consequences to their academic achievement over a multiyear period is recommended. These studies would add to the current discipline literature, and would give policymakers, district leaders, and teachers more data to improve current discipline policy and practice. Additionally, determining the reasons for exclusionary discipline assignments by economic status could help school leaders ascertain whether differences exist and could help establish whether students perform better and have less discipline consequences based on different discipline practices.

CONCLUSION

In this investigation, the extent to which in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension were assigned differentially by economic status to Texas Grade 4 and 5 girls and boys was

ascertained. Texas statewide data on all Grade 4 and 5 students for two school years were obtained from the Texas Education Agency Public Education Information Management System. Statistically significant differences were present in the assignment of in-school suspension and in the assignment of out-of-school suspension for Grade 4 and Grade 5 girls and boys on the basis of their economic status. Boys, particularly boys who were Extremely Poor, were disproportionately assigned to both of these disciplinary consequences.

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