An Examination of Teacher Bias in Special Education Referrals Based Upon Student Race and Gender

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This dissertation titled
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and Gender

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An Examination of Teacher Bias in Special Education Referrals Based Upon Student Race and Gender (157 pp.)

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Research indicates that minority males, especially Black males, are often overrepresented in special education programs. While the reasons for overrepresentation vary from school to school and from district to district, the literature reveals that many special education referrals for minority males are generated as a result of non-academic issues.

The purpose of this study was to determine if gender and racial bias influence teachers’ decisions when referring students, specifically Black males, for special education services and attempted to answer two questions: Are teachers biased in making referrals to special education services based upon student race and/or gender? and Are teachers biased in making referrals to special education services, specifically for Black males? An ANOVA procedure was used to analyze the relationship between teachers’ ratings of how likely they were to refer a student for special education services and how certain they were of their ratings of a student’s need for referral. While the study produced some interesting patterns, no definitive conclusions could be drawn from the study due to a limited sample size. Additional research is needed to either support or refute the hypotheses that teacher bias does influence one’s decision to refer a student to special education services.

Approved: ________________________________

Dianne M. Gut

Associate Professor of Teacher Education
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to several people, both living and deceased. First, in the memory of my dear brother, William Dewitt Taylor, a.k.a. “Dee Dee,” I say WE did it. I love you with all of my heart and wish that we had more time to spend with one another. While I was the older brother, you began to teach me a lot about life as we grew older. I will never forget those lessons and please know that your death represents a lesson in life—to live life to its fullest and to have no regrets. Thank you for being who you were because you helped me become who I am.

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Next, I would like to dedicate this work to William Douglas “Bill” Taylor and family and Will “Boyd” Smith and family. Thank you for the support and encouragement over the years. You and all of the different branches of your respective families have welcomed me and have treated me like a blood relative.

To the next generation of our family, Eric, Brandon, and Ebony, this one is for you. Never allow your circumstances or your environment to define your altitude. Work hard and set a good example for the younger cousins that follow. The future is in your hands and I expect greatness from you. Mediocrity is not an option!
This dissertation is also dedicated to those students who lack a voice and an advocate in our K-12 system. Stay strong and keep your heads held high. Despite the obstacles with which you are faced, I deeply implore you to remain persistent and hope you persevere so that you can help the next student who may be mislabeled. Become the change that you need.

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Lastly, this dissertation is dedicated to the current and future students, parents, and teachers of our public schools. You deserve the best available resources and I pray that you begin to demand them. Hold one another accountable, yet support one another in every way possible. Let us make the necessary improvements so that we can all prosper.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

For years, special education services have been second-guessed by stakeholders within the education profession. While some opponents of special education services have questioned the legitimacy and quality of academic preparation offered in special education programs, others have focused their attention on the rising costs associated with providing supplemental services to students. However, lost in the political, social, and financial milieu of this debate is the disproportionate percentage of minority males who are placed in special education programs. In fact, Kunjufu (2004) argues that while Black children compose 17% of all U.S. students, they account for 41% of all children placed in special education classes. According to Harry and Anderson (1994) and Mills (2003), overrepresentation in special education programs is evidenced when the difference between the proportion of ethnic students enrolled in a school or school district is equal to or greater than 10% of their proportion in special education programs. This criterion is also known as the “10% rule.” Based upon this rule, and using the statistics cited by Kunjufu (2004), the percentage of Black students who receive special education services in the K-12 school system should range between 15.3% and 18.7%, strikingly different from the reported 41%. [These figures were derived from the mathematical computation that 10% of 17%, (the total number of Black students in the U.S.) is equal to 1.7%. In order to determine the anchors of this range, one must subtract 1.7% from 17% yielding 15.3% and adding 1.7% to 17% yielding a sum of 18.7%]. Moreover, while teachers cite a litany of reasons for generating referrals to special education services, it is a commonly
held belief that race serves as an underlying agent in the referral process (McIntyre & Pernell, 1985).

While statistics vary from source to source, it is estimated that Black students are twice as likely as their counterparts to be recommended for special education services (Harry & Anderson, 1994). Consequently, Black males are overrepresented in every special education category. In a study conducted by Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Shinn, and McGue (1982), it was revealed that many professionals in the field of learning disabilities (LD) believe that too many students, who are simply underachievers, are being identified by schools as having LD. This misidentification results in both limitations and stigmas being placed on students’ life opportunities. Based upon the data, the authors concluded that 40% of the students participating in the study were misclassified or misidentified as having learning disabilities (Ysseldyke et al., 1982).

Statement of the Problem

It was the researcher’s belief that most teachers’ reasons for generating special education referrals are arbitrary and non-academically related. In fact, this assertion is supported by Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Gladen, Wesson, Algozzine, and Deno’s (1983) findings that state “the special education decision-making process is one in which a student is referred, often for vague and subjective reasons” (p. 87). Hutton (1985) recorded and analyzed the responses of classroom teachers, exposing some of the most common reasons given by teachers making special education referrals. Reasons included: (a) poor peer relationships, (b) displays of frustration, (c) below academic expectations, (d) shy and withdrawn behavior, (e) disruptive behavior, (f) fighting, (g) refusal to work,
and (h) short attention span (Hutton). In a separate study, additional factors considered in the referral process were (a) low achievement, (b) poor attendance, (c) low socioeconomic status, and (d) attendance at schools with large numbers of poor students (Dean, 1991). Results from yet a third study identify additional indicators used in the special education referral process as (a) transient rates (students who attend multiple schools within the same district during the course of a school year), (b) lack of effort demonstrated by the student, (c) whether or not a student has a sibling that has been identified with “special needs,” (d) family mobility rates (families that transfer from district to district), (e) tardiness, and (f) Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) (Gottlieb & Weinberg, 1999).

In addition to revisiting and illuminating the aforementioned reasons for generating referrals, this study addresses communication differences between teachers and students; potential lack of cultural awareness exhibited by teachers (as it pertains to their students’ backgrounds); the influence of teacher efficacy, teacher qualifications, and teacher bias when interacting with students; and the stigma associated with being identified as a student with “special needs.” Additionally, this study addresses various cultural theories that attempt to explain some of the behaviors displayed by Black males; explores overrepresentation of Black males in greater depth; addresses the rates that Black males are disciplined in comparison with other groups of students; discusses the incarceration rates of Black males misidentified with “special needs;” acknowledges the influence of self-perception on
academic performance of Black males; and lastly, recognizes the graduation and drop-out rates of Black males at both the high school and collegiate levels.

Research Questions

This dissertation explores two research questions. However, since both questions address teacher bias, it is important that an operational definition be provided that attempts to demystify the ambiguity surrounding teacher bias. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the researcher has defined teacher bias as any thought, belief, or behavior that adversely influences how a teacher perceives and ultimately interacts with a student(s). The first research question addressed in this study is: Are teachers biased in making referrals to special education services based upon student race? Second: Are teachers biased in making referrals to special education services, specifically for Black males?

Research Hypotheses

Three hypotheses were tested in this study. Hypothesis one: Teachers demonstrate a gender bias when referring male students for special education services. Hypothesis two: Teachers demonstrate a racial bias when referring Black students to special education services. Because it is the researcher’s belief that gender and ethnicity do indeed interact, hypothesis three was: Teachers demonstrate a bias when referring Black males to special education services. The three null hypotheses in this study were: first, teachers do not demonstrate a gender bias when referring students for special education services. In other words, each student, irrespective of his/her gender group, has an equal probability of being referred for special education services as does the next student. Second, teachers do not demonstrate a racial bias when referring students to special
education services. All students, irrespective of their ethnicity have an equal probability of being referred for special education services. And third, gender and race do not interact with one another and therefore are not influential in teachers’ decisions to refer students to special education services.

Significance

This study is important for a multitude of reasons. First, this study examines teacher bias in the special education referral process. By examining teacher bias, this study attempts to identify the factors, if any, that contribute to teachers generating special education referrals. Gathering this information is important because it will help determine whether or not special education referrals are based on academic factors, or can be attributed to other factors. Second, this study is important because it addresses the overrepresentation of minority males, especially Black males, in special education programs. Once causes of overrepresentation are identified, educators can begin to address these concerns and reconcile the issues that contribute to this problem.

This study contributes to the field of education in several ways. First, this study addresses the issue of teacher bias and attempts to identify some of the factors that influence teachers’ decisions to generate special education referrals. Second, this study provides recommendations for educators to employ that will assist them in minimizing and preventing the misidentification of students recommended for special education services.

The researcher decided to investigate the special education referral practices of teachers on Black males because of the personal significance of this topic. As a young
child, I personally experienced and endured the tribulations of being subjected to the special education referral process as a result of my consistent misbehavior in the traditional classroom setting. A lack of academic challenge resulted in the manifestation of inappropriate behaviors, causing me to be consistently reprimanded for misbehaving. Frequently, this misbehavior served as a tool to occupy my time and unfortunately, served as a learning deterrent to my classmates. Because my misbehavior was so frequent, the classroom teacher arrived at the conclusion that I suffered from a Behavior Disturbance (BD). Were it not for my mother, who tenaciously and adamantly opposed my placement in the special education program and who persistently advocated for me to be assessed to disprove and refute the classroom teacher’s recommendation, I would have been erroneously misidentified and removed from the “regular” education classroom.

Years later, realizing that my experience was not unique, I began pondering the probability of other Black males being misidentified through the special education referral process. My early childhood experience served as an impetus and an inspiration to conduct this study. Moreover, I reflected on the actions taken by my mother and wondered “what would happen to other Black males if their parents/guardians were not as informed or familiar with the special education system as was my mother?” Furthermore, what would be the final outcome of a student’s placement, if a parent/guardian did not advocate for his/her child?

Delimitations of the Study

There were several known delimitations of this study. The first delimitation was that this study examined the referral practices of teachers from urban districts within the
State of Ohio. Six districts were selected for this study: Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, Cincinnati, and Mansfield. Consequently, the results from this study can only be generalized to referral practices by teachers in those districts. The second delimitation of this study was that it addressed the referral practices of elementary school teachers, grades K-5, and not middle school/junior high or high school teachers.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are relevant to this study and definitions are provided to delineate how they are used in this study.

At-Risk: Students who fit one of the following criteria: (a) students who are unlikely to complete high school, (b) students who are unlikely to leave school with an adequate level of basic skills, (c) students who have failed one or more grades, or (d) students who have been found eligible for special or compensatory education programs (Miller, 1991).

Behavioral Disturbance (BD): A disorder characterized by displaying behaviors over an extended period of time that significantly deviate from socially acceptable norms for the individual’s age and situation (Sadock & Sadock, 2003).

Black: Black will be used synonymously with African American and/or Afro-American in this study. While these terms are used interchangeably throughout the literature, in keeping the language consistent, Black is the preferred term used in this study.

Emotional Disturbance (ED): A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance:
i. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;

ii. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;

iii. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;

iv. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression;

v. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance (Ohio Department of Education, Operating Standards for Ohio’s Schools Serving Children with Disabilities, 2006).

*Learning Disability (LD):* A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia (Ohio Department of Education, Operating Standards for Ohio’s Schools Serving Children with Disabilities, 2006). This term would also include Specific Learning Disability (SLD).

*Referral:* The established process whereby the names of children suspected of having a disabling condition that may require special education and related services are forwarded to a designated person in writing, for a multifactored and multidisciplinary evaluation
(Ohio Department of Education, Operating Standards for Ohio’s Schools Serving Children with Disabilities, 2006).

Special Education: Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals, and institutions, and other settings, and instruction in physical education (Ohio Department of Education, Operating Standards for Ohio’s Schools Serving Children with Disabilities, 2006).

Teacher efficacy: The beliefs teachers hold about the effectiveness of teaching with particular students and their own competence to teach those students (Miller, 1991).

Underachiever: A student who does not produce academic work or perform at the appropriate grade-level benchmarks but does not qualify for special education services as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Summary

According to the literature, Black males are disproportionately represented in special education categories and/or programs. As a result, this study attempts to examine factors that influence teachers’ decision to refer students for special education services and identify reasons that may contribute to this overrepresentation. Specifically, teacher bias and non-academically related factors are explored in greater detail.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

It is no secret that special education services are a controversial topic among educators. With issues such as inclusion and adequate funding adding to the controversy, many educators acknowledge the fact that some sort of reform needs to occur within the special education system in order to provide services that best serve students. However, one topic that is often overlooked during special education reform conversations is the disproportionate percentage of minority males who are placed in special education programs. More specifically, the statistic that is ignored most often is the overwhelmingly high number of Black males receiving special education services. Kunjufu (2004) states that while Black children constitute 17% of all students in the school setting, they comprise 41% of the children receiving special education services.

While there are a multitude of factors considered when generating special education referrals, a student’s race can also serve as an underlying influence in the referral process and may inadvertently contribute to the plight of many non-white students, in particularly Black males, in the K-12 public school system (McIntyre & Pernell, 1985). Further supporting this line of research are the findings of Tobias, Cole, Zibrin, and Bodlakova (1982), who conclude there is a strong proclivity for teachers to refer students from different ethnic groups more frequently than students belonging to the teacher’s own ethnic background. The purpose of this study is to determine if gender and racial bias influence teachers’ decisions to refer students, specifically Black males, to special education services more than any other racial or gender group.
Prior to delving into the factors guiding referrals for special education services, it is important to provide a description of the students who are referred. Many students who are referred for special education services are labeled “at-risk” students (Miller, 1991). For purposes of this paper, “at-risk” students are defined as those who fit one of the following criteria: 1) students who are unlikely to complete high school; 2) students who are unlikely to leave school with an adequate level of basic skills; 3) students who have failed one or more grades; 4) students who have been found eligible for special or compensatory education programs (Miller, 1991). In addition to these criteria, additional factors used to identify “at-risk” students are socioeconomic status and whether students attend schools with predominantly minority enrollments (Holzman, 2006).

Given the fact that Black males are overrepresented in every special education category and are twice as likely to be referred to special education services as compared to their counterparts (Harry & Anderson, 1994), there may be a link between special education referrals and teacher bias. The next section discusses teacher bias and the impact this bias can have on a students’ learning opportunities.

Teacher Bias

Teacher biases can range from innate personal beliefs about students to racial preferences for particular students. There are multiple studies that indicate race as an influencing factor on teacher recommendations for special education services (Acker, 2006; McIntyre & Pernell, 1985; Tobias, Cole, Zibrin, & Bodlakova, 1982). Unfortunately, some research also indicates that teachers have a tendency to refer students to special education services who are not of their own ethnic group more frequently than
students who share their ethnic heritage (Thrasher, 1997). Further exacerbating the plight of Black males being referred to special education services are the adverse comments placed in students’ files by some teachers (MyIntyre & Pernell, 1985). Some teachers may read these comments and allow themselves to become unduly influenced by remarks of previous teachers. Additionally, while instructing Blacks, especially Black males, many teachers also subscribe to a deficit model perspective, causing erroneous assumptions to be made about what students know or do not know (Villegas, 1991).

Teacher bias also presents itself in the form of a teacher being “bothered” by a student (Knotek, 2003). This assertion is further supported by a study conducted by Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Gladen, Wesson, Algozzine, and Deno (1983), concluding that “teachers tend to refer students who bother them” (p. 81). It is also suggested that some teachers are unable to “manage trouble students” and consequently, seek to have them removed from their classrooms. According to Matuszek and Oakland, (1979) “behavior problems are a common reason for referring a child for special consideration in the first place” (p. 123). Other forms of bias relate to stereotypes about Black males (i.e., Black males require greater control than their peers and are unlikely to respond to nonpunitive measures) (Monroe, 2005); or institutional racism (i.e., the deplorable lack of Black male teachers in the K-12 system); the inclusive nature, or lack thereof of a school’s curriculum with regard to information about Blacks; and a lack of role models engaged in positive activities within the Black community (Thrasher, 1997).
Factors Influencing Referrals

There are many factors identified in the literature that influence teachers’ decision-making when referring students to receive special services. While all of those factors are valid, in terms of actually being considered in the referral process, many of them can be considered illegitimate as they cannot be attributed to an actual identified disability. These factors are identified as illegitimate because theoretically speaking, they should not be considered in the referral decision-making process. The following sections explore such extraneous and potentially illegitimate factors. Illegitimate reasons include poor peer relationships, displaying frustration, shy and withdrawn behavior, fighting, refusal to work, poor attendance, low socioeconomic status, and student’s home situation. Also included are transient rates, lack of effort, having a sibling previously identified as special needs, family mobility rate, tardiness, the attractiveness, and physical appearance of a student, parents’ education level, and attendance in schools with a large minority population. By contrast, legitimate reasons for referring a student include performing below academic expectations, engaging in disrupting behavior, low academic achievement, and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder or other co morbid disability that adversely affects academic achievement.

Hutton (1985) recorded and analyzed responses from classroom teachers who supplied some of the most common reasons for special education referrals. Reasons included (a) poor peer relationships, (b) displays frustration, (c) below academic expectations, (d) shy and withdrawn behavior, (e) disruptive behavior, (f) fighting, (g) refusal to work, and (h) short attention span. Of the eight aforementioned reasons, five
could potentially be linked to socialization practices utilized and reinforced by a student’s family or peer social group. For example, students might hail from a family in which their parents or guardians tell them “You’d better be good in school or else you’re going to get in trouble when you get home.” The students interpret this message by keeping to themselves at school so as to prevent getting into trouble at home. However, the school may inaccurately interpret this behavior as being anti-social, and attribute the withdrawn behavior to the student having a disability.

The preceding example potentially nullifies the referral practice based on shy and withdrawn behavior due to the difference between home standards and school standards (Heward, 2003). An additional reason that could be nullified as a legitimate referral practice is a student who maintains poor peer relationships. If a student is an only child or spends an inordinate amount of time in the presence of adults, that student might not possess the social skill set necessary to effectively interact with peers. This lack of peer interaction does not mean that the student is incapable of interacting with his peers; it just means the student does not know how to do so. Since the student lacks exposure to peers outside of school, it is incumbent upon the school to provide structured or guided opportunities for the student to develop socially. In fact, according to a study conducted by Shechtman, Vurembrand, and Hertz-Lazarowitz (1994), it was concluded that when schools provide small mixed-gender therapy or counseling groups for students who demonstrate social inefficacy, students experience growth in their interpersonal skills and are better equipped to interact with their peers. In other words, if socially inept students
are shown how to interact effectively with their peers, they are more likely to be successful in doing so.

Poor peer relationships could manifest themselves in situations where the lesson of “sharing” has not been taught. When students are not afforded opportunities or do not participate in certain experiences, they cannot be expected to conduct themselves in a manner that warrants a particular behavior or one that is deemed appropriate. For example, if a child is not taught what respect is or how to show it, then how can that child be held responsible for not giving another person the respect that he or she demands?

Factors considered in the special education referral process are low achievement, poor attendance, low socioeconomic status, attendance in schools with large numbers of poor students (Morris, 1991) and a student’s home situation (Harris & Mamlin, 1998). Transient rates, lack of effort, whether or not a student has a sibling that has been identified with “special needs,” family mobility rates, tardiness, and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) are also factors used in the referral process (Gottlieb & Weinberg, 1999). Students who attend schools with a predominantly Black student body, as opposed to a White student body, are at a greater risk for being referred to special education services (Mills, 2003). Parental education level is also a significant predictor in determining whether or not a student is referred for special education services (McIntyre & Pernell, 1985; Mills, 2003). Moreover, some researchers believe that parents’ education level is a good predictor of a student’s school achievement (Cross, 1997-1998). Other reasons for referrals include discrepancies between ability and achievement (Coffey & Obringer, 2000; Mamlin & Harris, 1998), conduct disorders (Gottlieb & Weinberg,
1999), attractiveness and physical appearance (Miller, 1991), adaptive behavior (Matuszek & Oakland, 1979; McIntyre & Pernell, 1995), and a lack of teachers’ cultural awareness (Villegas, 1991). Lastly, according to Acker (2006), “a classroom teacher’s referral decision is the most significant factor leading to the eventual placement of students in special education” (p. 1).

Peer Influence

Teachers mistakenly underestimate the influence that a peer group or neighborhood norms can have on a student. Berndt (1999) concluded that students are most influenced by their close friends. More specifically, his study found that students can either be influenced by certain characteristics exhibited by their friends (i.e., behaviors, attitudes, etc.) or by the quality and/or stability of that friendship (Berndt, 1999). In either scenario, the influence may be positive or negative. An example of a student being positively influenced by his/her peers is when the peer group values education. If a student observes his/her friends working hard, consistently studying, and applying themselves academically, then the student is likely to imitate those same behaviors. Conversely, Witherspoon, Speight, and Thomas (1997) indicate that “students from various racial or ethnic backgrounds may experience negative labeling for high academic achievement (e.g., a brain, nerd, and bookworm)” (p. 345). This type of verbal taunting may dissuade a student from excelling academically. Moreover, if a student observes his/her friends engaged in inappropriate behavior, there is a high probability that the student may adopt those same undesirable behaviors as well (Berndt, 1999).
If a student comes from an environment where it is socially permissible and acceptable to fight, then that student internalizes the message that fighting is okay and natural. When immersed in a school environment where fighting is a violation of the school rules, only then is the student told fighting is wrong. When comparing the “home” message to the “school” message, the “school” message is in direct opposition to what is taught and accepted at “home” and, as a result, a student may “buck the system.” This avenue of discussion provides a perfect segue into the communication differences that exist between Black children and other minority groups.

Communication Differences

Sherwin and Schmidt (2003) state that “African American children employ different communication codes because they are more actively and openly expressive than Euro American children” (p. 46). Furthermore, “communication styles can be defined as the behavioral and/or verbal skills of African-American students that are different from those of other students” (Acker, 2006, p. 3). Generally speaking, the emphasis of eye movement, posture, speech, and dress (ways of expressing themselves) are means to an end in terms of justifying the existence of Black men (Thrasher, 1997). As a result, many of the behaviors exhibited by Black children, especially Black males, are perceived as being aggressive. Hwa-Froelich, Kasambira, and Moleski (2007), chronicle the fact that many Blacks engage in a behavior called “signifying” or “playing the dozens.” “Signifying” or “playing the dozens” is a verbally offensive exchange that takes place between two or more parties and is predicated on embarrassing one’s opponent. To be victorious in this exchange, one must be more witty and “quicker-to-the-punch” than
his/her opponent. While this behavior is common practice for many individuals in the Black community, for cultural outsiders who witness this exchange, it appears as if “fighting words” are being exchanged and may foreshadow a physical altercation between combatants. While “signifying” or “playing the dozens” is done in a jocular manner, the winner may be erroneously identified as being aggressive by the teacher. Given the fact that nationally, schools are implementing zero tolerance campaigns against bullying and enacting specific protocols for handling bullying offenses, some teachers misinterpret “playing the dozens” as bullying, and students could be unjustly or harshly punished. Due to the cultural misunderstanding and the mismatch in communication styles (exhibited between the teacher and student), a referral is generated and identification of a social-emotional or communication problem is identified (Hwa-Froelich, Kasambira, & Moleski, 2007). While society expects a young Black man to obey authority, be quiet, and do his work, any deviation from this script erroneously renders the child as having a “problem” (hooks, 2004).

Based upon the perceived social-emotional or communication problems that teachers may believe students exhibit, teachers may begin to contemplate whether or not the student has an emotional or a behavioral disorder. If it is determined that a student has an emotional disorder, he/she is labeled as Emotional Disturbed (ED). Students with ED exhibit characteristics that adversely affect their learning (Ohio Department of Education, Operating Standards for Ohio’s Schools Serving Children with Disabilities, 2006). Examples of these characteristics include an inability to establish and/or maintain relationships with their peers, experience bouts of depression, develop physical fears
associated with school, or are diagnosed as schizophrenic (Ohio Department of Education, Operating Standards for Ohio’s Schools Serving Children with Disabilities, 2006). Additionally, if a student is identified as having a behavior disturbance (BD), he/she has a disorder characterized by the display of behaviors over an extended period of time that significantly deviate from socially acceptable norms for the individual’s age and situation (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). In light of the two definitions pertaining to ED and BD as presented in chapter one, a teacher can mistakenly interpret “signifying” or “playing the dozens” and “shadow boxing” (play fighting) as aggressive behaviors and conclude that a student is unable to control his/her emotions and/or behavior. Consequently, a referral may be generated and a student misidentified, and in some cases, inappropriately placed in a special education program. Due to the differences in communication styles exhibited by Black males and Caucasian female teachers, it is imperative that educators be cautious of, attuned to, and aware of their own cultural communication practices, but more importantly, open to and understanding of the communication practices of their students.

Aggressive behavior is the most common presenting problem among youngsters classified with ED or BD (Sherwin & Schmidt, 2003). Further supporting the findings of Schmidt and Sherwin, “most special education teachers continue to plan instruction and activities based on their students’ disabilities, with little consideration given to the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students” (Franklin, 1992). Additionally, Harry and Anderson (1994), identify several behavioral profiles that exacerbate the average White female teacher’s negative view of Black males. Behavioral profiles include high physical activity levels of Black males and the patterns of language learning and usage exhibited by
Black males (Harry & Anderson, 1994). Due to the scrutiny and voluminous attention paid to the behaviors exhibited by some Black males, the following section discusses a few select theories that attempt to explain those behaviors.

Theories Explaining Black Males’ Rebellion Towards Academics

In an article entitled, *Unraveling Underachievement Among African American Boys from an Identification with Academics Perspective*, Osborne (1999) postulates three theories that address and explain social and cultural factors that inhibit academic excellence among Black youth. These three theories are the: 1) stereotype threat model by Claude Steele; 2) cultural-ecological perspective by John Ogbu; and the 3) aforementioned “cool pose” theory by Richard Majors and Janet Billson. Briefly, Steele’s stereotype threat model identifies negative stereotypes as a culprit in academic underperformance of students of color. Additionally, Steele suggests students who are members of minority groups for which negative group stereotypes concerning academic ability abound, suffer from additional anxiety. For these individuals, a wrong answer is not only personally damaging, but confirms the negative group stereotype. This theory factors into the discussion of why Black males are referred to special education services more than any other race or gender group because it highlights a fear that consumes a young man in relation to education. Nobody wants to be identified as being “dumb,” especially in the presence of their peers.

Most Black males struggle with their own image and that of their race due to negative stereotypes. As a result, they adopt the mentality of not wanting to prove those stereotypes right and consciously disengage from activities they deem as harmful. This
action reduces any stress or anxiety experienced by the student. Unfortunately, this behavior not only has a negative impact on how students are viewed by the “majority” culture, but it also has a negative impact on how they are viewed within their own community.

Ogbu’s cultural-ecological theory separates minorities into two groups, those who reside in a country or society voluntarily (immigrant or voluntary minorities), and those who have been subjugated and/or brought into a country or society against their will (i.e., slaves). Ogbu argues that the social realities for students from these two groups are very different and as such, lead to very different outcomes (Osborne, 1999). Osborne suggests that:

African American students tend to view education as a system controlled by the group that subjugated and oppressed them and their ancestors. School for them, is seen as an inappropriate aspect of what they deem “proper” African American identity. As a result, African American children are instead encouraged to value other aspects of society-usually whatever is in opposition to European American values- as appropriate for themselves. (p. 558)

The cultural-ecological theory addresses the high percentage of Black males being referred to special education services because it highlights the rebellious attitude that many Black males adopt (due to the fact that they were forced to go to school, much like their ancestors were forced to come to America) and also explains the lack of interest in school and disengagement from school due to the fact that they cannot relate to the curriculum.
The cultural-ecological theory is further strengthened by a lack of people of color in textbooks. When children are not able to identify their ancestors or their contributions in textbooks, the likelihood for academic disengagement and intellectual detachment are significantly increased. According to Clark (1965), the lack of presence by people of color in textbooks “deprives many children of their share in the pride that comes from being an integral part of America” (p. 93).

Some Black males engage in a behavior called “cool pose.” “Cool pose” is a façade that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, and impression management designed with the sole purpose of being “cool,” as identified by one’s peer group (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003). “Cool pose” behaviors reject any and all “traditional” societal norms and create an insulating armor for a student that protects him/her from being embarrassed or humiliated academically. Ultimately, “cool pose” assists a student in “saving face” in the presence of peers. Moreover, “engaging in cool pose” represents a way to reject behaviors characteristic of the dominant culture (Cross, 1997-1998). Because academics are not highly prized by individuals who succumb to the “cool pose” demeanor, teachers may become frustrated by this nonchalant attitude. Due to this perceived “I don’t care machismo,” Monroe (2006) suggests that a cultural misunderstanding is created and typically, a disciplinary action ensues.

Majors and Billson’s “cool pose” theory proposes that Black males adopt a “cool pose” - a ritualized approach to masculinity that allows them to cope and survive in an environment of social oppression and racism, including that often found within the U.S. schools (Osborne, 1999). According to Majors and Billson, Black males learn early to
project a façade of emotionless, fearlessness, and aloofness to counter the inner pain caused by the damaged pride, poor self-confidence, and fragile social competence resulting from their existence as a member of a subjugated group. Pursuant to the argument stated by Majors and Billson, is articulated by hooks who states that “cool pose” teaches Black males to believe that a real man is insensitive, egocentric, and invulnerable (hooks, 2004).

The “cool pose” façade, when interjected in an educational setting, often leads to a flamboyant and nonconformist behavior that frequently elicits punishment in school settings (Osborne, 1999). According to this theory, some young Black men adopt a strategy for coping with their membership in a stigmatized group that is oppositional to identification with academics. An example of the “cool pose” behavior is presented in a case study conducted by Fordham and Ogbu (1986). They tell the story of a young, bright teen named “Sidney” who spends the majority of his time and effort developing a persona that nullifies any claims that he is a brainiac (a slang term used to describe a smart student). Due to a fear of how he will be viewed by his peers, Sidney “dumbs down” his intelligence in an attempt to remain in the “good graces” of his classmates. Further supporting the findings of Fordham and Ogbu, are the writings of hooks (2004) who states that if society continues to perpetuate the notion that Black boys are freakish if they are cerebral and enjoy reading, then Black boys will shun education (hooks, 2004). A classic example of this is the character Steven Urkel on the sitcom *Family Matters*. Due to his extraordinary intellect, Urkel was portrayed as a klutz and viewed as a social pariah by his peers.
Despite bountiful opportunities and the promise that academic prowess offers students, some Black males place a greater value on peer acceptance than on academic performance and are more likely to respect their low-achieving counterparts (McMillian, 2003). This decision has racial implications because some people believe that being smart is equivalent to “acting white” (Witherspoon, Speight, & Thomas, 1997) and that “being Black” equates to being dumb. Examples of “acting white” include speaking standard/proper English, getting good grades, spending time in the library, being on time, and reading and writing poetry (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). In the minds of some, to “act white” is akin to being an “Uncle Tom” or a “sell out,” which means that a person is ashamed of their “Blackness.”

By adopting a “cool pose” demeanor, Black males become complicit in their own failure (Noguera, 2003). Moreover, many of the destructive habits of black men are enacted in the name of “manhood.” In an effort to be “cool” and “tough,” many black men take unnecessary and perilous risks with their lives and the lives of others (hooks, 1992). The “cool pose” theory factors into the question of why Black males are referred to special education services more than other races or gender groups because it emphasizes the social pressures that many young men succumb to in an effort to survive. It is not cool or acceptable to be identified as a “nerd” or a “square” by one’s peers and to be classified as such means that students are potentially subjected to taunts, ridicule, alienation, and possibly physical violence suffered at the hands of their peers. Because students fear this sort of persecution, they conform to the behaviors condoned by their peer group. As such, they wind up getting into trouble at school and teachers perceive this
behavior as an indication or symbol of their academic ineptitude, sending up a “red flag” and often triggering a referral for special education. Based upon these theories, in addition to the factors identified earlier, it can be concluded that Black students, particularly males, fail to achieve their full academic potential because of social, psychological, and cultural hurdles (Osborne, 1999).

Examples of behaviors exhibited by students who engage in the “cool pose” façade include acting tough, failing to retreat from violence, avoiding self-disclosure, and disassociating themselves from school (Tatum, 2006). As a result of these differences in communication styles, Black males may be referred to special education more frequently than other students because teachers are ill-equipped and ill-prepared to work with these behavioral nuances. In fact, a student who exhibits a unique style of communication that is perceived as aggressive could be misidentified as BD/ED by service providers who lack an understanding of the distinct communication styles of the ethnic minority student (Sherwin & Schmidt, 2003). Additional research by Franklin (1992) indicates that:

many African American children are exposed to high-energy, fast-paced home environments, where there is simultaneous variable stimulation (e.g., televisions and music playing simultaneously and people talking and moving in and about the home freely). Hence, low-energy, monolithic environments (as seen in many traditional school environments) are less stimulating. (p. 118)

As a result of the aforementioned communication differences, educators should consider integrating kinesthetic movement into lesson plans and increasing their tolerance for
elevated noise levels when working with males, in general, but more specifically for Black males (Monroe, 2006).

Teacher’s Knowledge of Cultural Awareness and Use of Cultural Literature

An often times overlooked, yet significant, tool that increases the effectiveness of teachers when working with children of color is their knowledge and awareness of non-dominant cultures and their consistent use of cultural literature. According to Wilson and Banks (1994), the current education system is not working because the curriculum does not reflect cultures of Black students. At some point, students must believe they can succeed, but more importantly, they must see examples of successful individuals from their culture.

It is the researcher’s belief and professional observation that as a teacher works to incorporate these examples into lesson plans, students become more responsive and interested in learning. Possessing cultural awareness and utilizing cultural literature are critical skills and behaviors for a teacher to have because without them, a “lack of understanding is created, that frequently leads teachers to employ disciplinary responses that would not be necessary if they understood the meaning of the students’ behavior” (Harry & Anderson, 1994).

Irvine attributes much of a students’ failure to a lack of cultural synchronization between students and their teachers (Irvine, 1990). Villegas (1991) posits than an effective teacher is “defined by the ability to create meaningful classroom activities that take into account students’ background experiences” (p. 18). Given the ample research regarding this topic, it is imperative that cultural variations be acknowledged by teachers
and various instructional strategies be employed by teachers when working with students of color. To take this concept one step further, all school professionals should be able to deliver culturally sensitive services (Kearns, Ford, & Linney, 2005). To interact with a group of minority students based on the assumptions, practices, and values of the majority culture, devalues and depreciates the unique thoughts, learning styles, talents, and experiences possessed by minority students, especially Black males. Consequently, “administrators should offer in-services to employees that heighten employees’ awareness” (Sherwin & Schmidt, 2003). Contrary to a common belief in education, one size does not fit all. Teachers must begin to empower students who hail from cultural backgrounds different than their own by educating themselves and further developing and evolving professionally so as to enhance their instructional ability and compatibility with all students.

Harry, Klingner, and Hart (2005), measured the effects of both negative attitudes and perceptions held by school personnel and their impact on African American children who live in poverty. They discovered these preconceived notions taint the impressions of school personnel members and ultimately influence how they interact with both students and parents. Based upon this in-depth analysis, spanning a total of four years, the authors concluded that the cultural capital held by African American families living in poverty is not valued by schools and furthermore contributes to the plight experienced by African American students. The findings of the Harry, Klingner, and Hart study are critical to this study because in order for Black males to be educated in the traditional public school
system, they must feel they are respected, understood, and valued by the teachers who instruct them (Wilson & Banks, 1994).

Family Issues

With the aforementioned evidence for the basis of some teachers’ special education referrals, one can only speculate that many of these reasons are subjective and have little, if anything, to do with a student’s academic ability. For example, what does a student’s transience rate or family mobility have to do with his/her academic ability? While it is true that the continuity of a student’s education is disrupted when he or she is consistently absent, it is unacceptable and unethical to refer a student for special education services for reasons beyond his/her control.

To punish students by placing them in special education classes because of choices and/or decisions made by their parent(s)/guardian(s) or matters beyond their control (i.e., lack of a teacher’s cultural awareness) is unjust and highly ethnocentric. The message this conveys is that “we (the schools) know what is best for your child and our way is the best way.” Moreover, it says that “you should adopt our philosophy and practices because we know more than you.” Such arrogance and insensitivity is detrimental to both parents and schools because it creates a hierarchy premised on superiority. As a result, parents feel discouraged from communicating and collaborating with teachers and become resigned to feelings of being disengaged and disconnected from schools, which ultimately breeds deep-seated animosity.
Attendance Rates

Other common reasons teachers use when referring students for special education services are attendance rates and tardiness (Gottlieb & Weinberg, 1999). While these problems do affect a student’s ability to learn, they should not be the sole determinant used in the referral process because most habitually truant students are dependent, in one way or another, on an adult. Whether this means that the students rely on adults for resolving transportation issues, waking them up in the morning, supplying clean clothes, ensuring that students receive adequate rest, or providing proper nutrition, students cannot control these circumstances, and therefore should not be penalized for the dynamics of their family life. Instead of referring truant students to special education services, schools should first seek to intervene through various social service agencies (i.e., school social workers, family counseling, and Children’s Services). By implementing these approaches, it is very possible that attendance and tardy issues can be resolved once resources become available and when suggestions come from an objective and non-judgmental source.

Unqualified Teachers

Another possible factor contributing to minority students, specifically Black males being referred to special education services is the fact that many are being taught by teachers with less experience and fewer qualifications (Stover, 1999). Often times, minority and at-risk students are taught in disproportionate numbers by teachers with less experience and fewer qualifications. In fact, the National Center for Education Statistics reports that most disadvantaged high school students are 50% to 100% more likely to be taught core academic subjects by a teacher without certification or proper training in a
subject (Mills, 2003; Stover, 1999). These statistics are alarming because “the kids who need the most solid, the best teachers, often don’t get them” (Stover, 1999). How does this affect special education referrals among Black males? Typically, students who are taught by uncertified or undertrained teachers do not receive the degree of instruction or the type of quality instruction that is necessary for them to be considered “at grade-level.” At grade-level means that students are academically capable of meeting and performing at grade-appropriate benchmarks and standards as indicated by a school’s curriculum.

Moreover, a student’s performance is measured and compared to the performance of his or her peers. If the comparisons fall outside of a designated range, that student is considered to be performing “below grade-level.” As a result, “red flags” are raised and teachers interpret these flags as areas where the student needs to improve and where they need to more closely monitor the student’s progress. More specifically, these problem areas are identified as deficits and highlight the discrepancies between a student’s academic ability and his/her achievement, leading to a referral for special education services. Research suggests a strong link between teacher quality and student performance (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Stover, 1999; Suh & Fore, 2002). In fact, it is believed that students who are exposed to less qualified teachers seem less likely to succeed academically, as compared to their peers who are fortunate enough to be instructed by more qualified teachers (Suh & Fore, 2002).

The fact that schools do not address teacher qualifications in a proactive manner further exacerbates the problems faced by Blacks, in relationship to special education referrals. As opposed to providing less experienced and less qualified teachers with
highly trained and skilled veteran mentors and plentiful opportunities for professional
development, schools choose to pursue one of two options. Either they ignore the
problem, inhibiting the professional development of inexperienced teachers; or, schools
elect to transfer these teachers to other buildings, consequently shifting their problems
onto other schools, further perpetuating the cycle of inexperienced and poorly qualified
teachers.

Teacher Efficacy

Also related to teacher qualifications is the issue of teacher efficacy. According to
Ashton & Webb (1986) and Miller (1991), teacher efficacy can be described as the beliefs
teachers hold about their effectiveness of teaching particular types of students and about
their own competence to teach those students. Moreover, Acker (2006) asserts that
teacher efficacy influences the thoughts teachers have about students, their choices of
classroom management strategies, and their choices of instructional strategies. Possessing
high or strong teacher efficacy is important when working with all students, but in
particular minority students, and especially Black males, because efficacy impacts a
teacher’s expectations and beliefs regarding their abilities to influence student motivation
school failure of Black or Afro-American children can be understood as reflecting
problems in motivation” (p. 40).

Furthermore, teachers’ beliefs regarding low achieving students’ abilities to learn
influence the self-beliefs of students, their willingness to take risks, and their achievement
(Ashton & Webb, 1986; Miller, 1991). In other words, teachers’ beliefs and expectations
about a student manifests in a self-fulfilling prophecy the student eventually adopts. This is no more apparent than the conclusion reached by Harry & Anderson (1994) that “many African American boys are taught early that they are failures” (p. 611). Consequently, this self-fulfilling prophecy could play itself out in the special education referral process specifically for Black males because students may give up on themselves (display lack of effort), stop taking risks due to a fear of being ridiculed and humiliated by peers and teachers alike, and personalize academic failure and internalize it as overall failure as a person.

Moreover, a teacher’s sense of efficacy influences students’ feelings, impacting their self-esteem, self-concept, and self-confidence, and the choice of activities in which students participate. It determines the amount of effort a teacher will expend on students and also the extent of persistence students employ in the face of challenging circumstances (Miller, 1991). High teacher efficacy may also resonate loudly with Black males because many of them may feel as if they must have the support and encouragement of their teachers in order to be successful. In fact, this belief is supported by Noguera (2003) in his article “The Trouble with Black Boys.”

Comer, Haynes, and Hamilton-Lee (1987) assert that for Black children, the school climate impacts their ability to perform well and make adjustments. In addition to receiving support and encouragement from teachers, students must also receive teacher attention, nurturance, and acceptance (Franklin, 1992). In a previously referenced study conducted by Clark (1965), it was surmised that teacher expectations was one of the variables responsible for low achievement of Black children. Consequently, it can be
determined that low teacher expectations may have detrimental consequences for the achievement of Black males (McIntyre & Pernell, 1985).

Teachers’ low expectations represent trouble for Black males educated in urban settings. Without the encouragement and support of their teachers, many Black males experience a lack of hope and drive, which significantly contributes to the decline of their academic application and achievement. As peculiar as it sounds, most Black males are only willing to invest in their education if they see that the teacher is willing to invest in it as well (Noguera, 2003). Additionally, many Black children, especially Black males, believe they are not positively received by their teachers and begin to dislike school and think badly of themselves. As a result, students feel isolated, discouraged, and eventually fail academically (Wilson & Banks, 1994). Charlotte Hatcher popularized the phrase “children don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care” and for some Black males, this is not far from the truth.

Poverty

Poor children generally receive inferior services from schools and social support agencies (Noguera, 2003) and many schools that serve a large population of minority students, particularly Black students, lack many essential resources required to provide students with a quality education (Shokrai, 1998). In fact, “poverty, at least in extreme forms, can place a child at greater risk of poor school performance…” (Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999, p. 196). Essential resources that schools who serve a large population of minority students lack, range from financial wealth (appropriate allocation of money to schools and money for professional development) to adequate staffing
numbers (providing enough teachers and paraprofessionals to schools to effectively handle student enrollment and maintain manageable class sizes). Additional contributing factors are community support/involvement (input from community members, involvement from local businesses, and creating alliances with social service programs), and instructional materials (up-to-date text books, access to working technology, textbooks for every student, and advanced level classes).

Research reveals gross inequalities in teacher quality and the level of resources among schools that serve the poor and Black children, as compared to schools that serve predominantly White students (Mills, 2003; Wilson & Banks, 1994). Without these “basic” necessities, schools are forced to operate from a handicapped position and are compelled to prioritize the importance and value of the finite resources to which they do have access. Due to the unequal distribution of resources, schools are either categorized as being “haves” or a “have nots.” As one can imagine, the “have nots” are schools that lack: 1) strong institutional leadership and school autonomy; 2) shared values among the staff about school goals; 3) a safe and orderly environment; and 4) core curriculum requirements and high expectations for all students regardless of background (Shokrai, 1998). Moreover, one could surmise that “have nots” would have deficiencies in the areas of recruiting and retaining experienced and qualified staff members (teachers and administrators). Equipped with insufficient tools, minority students, in particular Black males are left improperly serviced by the schools, especially in the regular education track, and are consequently referred to special education services.
Many minorities educated in urban schools face additional challenges. For these students, many of whom are living in poverty, overrepresentation in special education is a common phenomenon. In fact, according to Oswald, Coutinho, Best, and Singh (1999), “minority children with disabilities who live in urban and high-poverty environments are believed to be at particularly high risk for educational failure and poor outcomes because of inappropriate identification, placement, and services” (p. 194). According to Gottlieb, Alter, Gottlieb, and Wishner (1994), districts are currently using outdated definitions for special education qualifications and these definitions would have identified students as Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR) twenty-five years ago. As a result, a misidentification occurs and students are labeled as having a learning disability, when in fact, most are not (Gottlieb et al., 1994).

Factored into this equation are students who are low achieving. Teachers view large class sizes as one major reason for their inability to accommodate low achieving students and as such, refer them to special education (Gottlieb et al., 1994). Teachers feel they cannot adequately accommodate low performing students in regular education classrooms because their needs are so severe and the amount of necessary support is not available (Gottlieb et al). These findings add validity and credibility to the argument that inadequate resources and socioeconomic status significantly contribute to the reasons why Black males are referred to special education services. In fact, Oswald, Coutinho, Best, and Singh (1999), concluded that as poverty increased, more African American students were identified as having mild to moderate retardation.
Disproportionate Representation

Given the various factors influencing teachers in the special education referral process, many of which are non-academic, and the differences in communication styles that exist between teachers and minority students, specifically Black males, many educators and researchers are slowly beginning to realize problems with the special education referral system and recognize the continued overrepresentation of Black males in special education programs. This overrepresentation is apparent in the fact that while Black children compose 17% of all public school attendees, they comprise 41% of children placed in special education (Kunjufu, 2004). Moreover, 85% of those children are Black males (Kunjufu). Additionally, of the Black students recommended for special education, 92% are assessed and 73% are placed in special education programs (Kunjufu, 2005). According to Knotek, who cites both a 1992 report from the Office of Compliance and a 2000 report from the U.S. Department of Education, minority students continue to be represented in larger numbers in special education than in the general population (Knotek, 2003). This fact is damaging considering the fact that most non-English students are given assessments in languages other than their native tongue (Thrasher, 1997).

In a study conducted by Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Shinn, and McGue (2001), it was revealed that many professionals serving children with learning disabilities (LD) believe that too many students who are simply underachievers are being identified by schools as having learning disabilities. This misidentification is a huge problem because identifying a student as LD depends on which criteria are used. According to a separate study conducted by Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Gladen, Wesson, Algozzine, and Deno (1983), there
are over 42 definitional criteria for identifying a student as LD. This same study revealed that of all the students used in their research, “80% of normal students could be classified LD by one or more definitions” (p. 79). More eye-opening is the conclusion that LD and low achieving students cannot be accurately differentiated (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Shinn, & McGue, 1982). As a result, these erroneous identifications result in both limitations and stigmas being placed on students’ life opportunities. Based upon data from the 1982 Ysseldyke study, it was concluded that approximately 40% of the students in the study were misclassified or misidentified as being LD (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Shinn, & McGue, 1982).

These alarming results highlight the fact that many teachers who interact with ethnic minorities, in particular Black males, operate using a “deficit model” (Rogoff & Morelli, 1989; Sherwin & Schmidt, 2003). This deficit model assumes the normality of the mainstream dominant culture and views minority group variations as aberrations (Schmidt & Sherwin, 2003). Based on this theory, many teachers believe that Black males do not have the necessary skill sets needed to function at grade-level and teachers assume this deficiency is academic-related and begin to view the student in a negative light. This deficiency now becomes the impetus for referring students to special education programs and is the “unofficial” rule used in the identification process. Any student who does not fit this mold is viewed as an exception to the rule. This belief manifests itself in such comments as, “he’s so bright” or “his parents really work hard with him at home.”

The overrepresentation of Black males in special education programs has been occurring since the inception of special education (Harry & Anderson, 1994). According
to Prasse and Reschly (1986) and Harry and Anderson (1994), districts have been using special education classes as a cover for segregation dating as far back as 1965. While students learn about the historical impact of “Separate but Equal,” this discriminatory practice remains “in vivo” and is unfortunately a present day reality. As a result of being placed in special education classes, students personalize this placement as an indication of their inferiority.

Smith (2002) cites a Boston Globe national analysis which reveals that while 1.9 million girls are enrolled in special education, it is largely a boys’ club with 3.8 million boys enrolled. Furthermore, when compared with white children, Black children are reportedly almost three times more likely to be designated “mentally retarded” (Smith, 2002). In fact, research confirms that Black males are overrepresented in classes for the educable mentally retarded and are underrepresented in classes for the talented and gifted (Grant, 1992; Harry & Anderson, 1994). Further support comes from Ford and Webb (1994) in stating that “African American children are severely underrepresented in gifted programs” (p. 358).

The National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students reported that Black students were twice as likely to be placed in special education and were overrepresented to some extent in every disability category. This conclusion was derived from enrollment statistics gathered during the 1985-1986 school year and was based upon a nationally representative sample of over 8,000 secondary students (Harry & Anderson, 1994). Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students also indicated four patterns derived from various data sources that
consistently repeat themselves in analysis of special education statistics. First, African American males were overrepresented in all disability categories. More specifically, students identified as culturally or linguistically diverse are overrepresented in the high incidence disability categories (e.g., Emotional Disorders, Behavior Disorders, Learning Disabilities, Mild to Moderate Retardation, and Speech and Language Impairments) (Waitoller, Artiles, & Cheney, 2009). Secondly, African American students between the ages of six and 21 were overrepresented in the Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR), Trainable Mentally Retarded (TMR), and Severely Emotionally Disturbed (SED) categories. Thirdly, among all U.S. students aged 14 to 21, African American students and males were overrepresented in all disability categories. Lastly, students labeled EMR and SED were most likely to be served in separate classrooms or buildings (Harry & Anderson, 1994).

Accompanying the discussion of special education qualification is the concept of inclusion. Inclusion is an educational practice where students with disabilities are served primarily in the general education classroom alongside their typically developing peers (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2007). While there are several different inclusion models, two of the more popular ones are the pullout and in-class models (King & Sommer, 1990). In the pullout model, students leave the regular education classroom to receive supplemental services in a separate classroom with a specially trained instructor. Conversely, the in-class model leaves students with identified disabilities in the regular classroom, but provides a special education teacher/aide to assist the classroom teacher with their education.
While there are advantages and disadvantages to both of these models, one common factor is the stigma attached to special education services. For example, in the pullout model, students and their peers question why certain students are removed from class on a daily basis and comments are often inevitable. This daily process may result in lowered expectations held by students and thoughts of inferiority by their peers. Additionally, students who are pulled out of class may get further behind in subject areas as a result of their chronic removal (King & Sommer, 1990). The in-class model can prove to be detrimental to students’ egos because receiving help in class from the teacher or another instructor may invite unwanted attention from one’s peers. This unwanted attention could be more embarrassing to the students than leaving the classroom (King & Sommer, 1990).

The aforementioned data provided by Harry and Anderson (1994) underscores the danger that Black males face in being misidentified and overrepresented in special education programs. While no research was found demonstrating the long-term effect of misidentification on students consequently labeled as “special needs,” it is likely these students endure life-long psychological issues as a result of that negative experience. Some examples of life-long psychological issues facing students with special needs include the fact that: a) roughly 25% of these students graduate from high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2005); b) only 3% of youth with disabilities earn a high school diploma within 3 to 5 years after they drop out; c) there is a 46% unemployment rate for all youth with disabilities who have been out of school for less than two years; d) income levels of individuals with disabilities are near the poverty line as defined by the Federal
government; and, e) few special education students pursue post secondary education (Heward, 2003).

Previously, it was mentioned that due to the different communication styles used by some Black males, many have been incorrectly labeled as having BD. Because many general classroom teachers lack the proper training and skills necessary to effectively instruct students with behavioral issues, most students labeled as ED/BD are educated outside the traditional classroom environment. According to the Twenty-fifth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of Individuals with Disabilities Act, 26.8% of students with ED/BD are educated outside of the classroom less than 21% of the day, 23.4% are educated outside the classroom between 21-60% of the day, and 31.8% of students are educated outside the classroom more than 60% of the day (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

In the past, once a teacher initiated a referral to special education, their academic fate was sealed. Based on research conducted by Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Gladen, Wesson, Algozzine, and Deno (1983), “once a student is referred, there is a high probability that the student will be assessed and placed in special education” (p. 80).

Further complicating the dilemma is the fact that once students are removed from the general education classroom, they lose the opportunity to catch up and are less likely to return to regular education classrooms (Harry & Anderson, 1994; Kearns, Ford, & Linney, 2005). These lifers, students who are identified with special needs, may not be given the chance to reintegrate into general education classes and are placed on a one-way track that limits their academic and social opportunities to lead a “normal or regular” life.
Legally, the progress of students receiving special education services are to be reevaluated on a yearly basis by the IEP team and parents, however, this practice does not always occur. Consequently, some students remain in special needs programs for years without full consideration of their current needs and the appropriateness of the placement (Waitoller, Artiles, & Cheney, 2009).

When students are placed long-term, it can begin to impact the type and quality of life a student will lead, irrespective of whether he/she graduates or drops out of school. It is commonly held that “special education is not a destination but should be considered as a resource to insure that students receive the proper academic support necessary for progressing and succeeding in school” (Mills, 2003, p. 82).

In an attempt to prevent long-term placements, many districts have begun to adopt a new philosophy governing the special education referral and assessment process. This philosophy is called Response to Intervention (RtI) and it is designed to help all children learn by modifying instruction so that it meets students’ individual learning needs (http://www.wrightslaw.com/idea/art/rti.hale.pdf). Depending on the particular model used, RtI is usually a three-tiered approach to special education identification and integrates intervention strategies with documented assessments (http://www.rti4success.org/).

In tier one focus is placed on instruction. In this tier, learning goals are established and regular monitoring occurs in order to document the student’s performance over the course of a specified time period. As each intervention is used, it is documented and the student’s progress, or lack thereof is noted. If progress is made, that particular
intervention is consistently employed and the referral process is stopped. If, however, adequate progress is not made, the teacher and support team proceeds with tier 2.

In tier two, teaching objectives become more refined and specific intervention strategies are applied. As the individual attention given to a student increases in this stage, the desired effect is that the student’s learning also improves. If, the student does not respond in an appropriate fashion, as identified by the teaching team, then the team proceeds to tier three. In tier three, the support team’s services intensify and the process for administering formal assessments to determine a need for special education services is initiated. By using this three-tiered approach, educators and related school personnel are able to exhaust all possibilities in an attempt to reach a student and only use formal assessments and referral for special education services as a last resort.

If RtI is not being utilized, or incorrectly applied, there is still the possibility for misidentification and long term placement. In these cases, students who are labeled are forced to grapple with the harmful stigma of having a disability. This stigma adversely impacts a student’s psyche and creates the perception in others that there is something wrong with the student. The implications of these two beliefs not only impact a student’s identity in the K-12 system, but also set the tone for the type of adult life a student will be able to lead. Smith (2002) posits “it is common knowledge that once children are placed in special education classes, their chances of graduating on time and pursuing education beyond high school are greatly reduced” (p. 40). Harry and Anderson (1994) summarize their findings by stating “it is highly unlikely that the diplomas received by special education students would be reflective of college preparatory curricula” (p. 614).
Students who persevere amid this educational adversity are considered lucky. However, many students are not so fortunate. The fate of so many students receiving special education services lies within the penal system. According to Morrison and Epps (2002), many of the incarcerated youth read on average at the fourth grade level. Moreover, about one-third of these youth read below the fourth grade level. Additionally, Morrison and Epps have said,

most of these same youth are poor, minority, disproportionately male and identified as having significant learning and or behavior problems that entitle them to special education services. Youth in juvenile correctional facilities are among the most educationally disadvantaged in our society. (p. 218)

The next section discusses the incarceration rates of students receiving special education services and the adverse impact on their adult lives.

Incarcerated Youth

The special education referral process has a crippling effect on Black youth. Racial bias in response to crime, disparate enforcement of laws such as drug laws, the creation of criminal histories through racial profiling, racial bias in prosecution and sentencing, all help exacerbate other factors-such as inadequate education-to criminalize black youths (Smith, 2002).

According to the Justice Policy Institute, young Black men are more likely to be in jail or otherwise involved with the courts than to go to college. In fact, based on the 2000 Report on Incarcerated Youth, 60% of incarcerated youth ages 18 and under are Black
(Smith, 2002). Other research speculates that special education classes often prepare
Black males for youth detention centers and jails (Porter, 1997).

According to Stickrath (2007), Director of Ohio Department of Youth Services,
minority youth constituted 20% of the state’s population in 2006. However, this 20%
accounted for 61% of the youth detained by the Department of Youth Services (Stickrath).
Additionally, nearly 50% of all youth in the Ohio Department of Youth Services system
are in need of special education services and statistics indicated that on average, those
youth read four grade levels below their age group (Stickrath). Stickrath also indicates
that for students who perform below grade level in basic skills and drop out of school,
they are 3.5 times more likely to be arrested than high school graduates. Lastly, Stickrath
reports that 82% of the adult inmates in the State of Ohio prison system are high school
dropouts (Stickrath).

Kunjufu (2005) indicates that 25% of Black men are involved with penal
institutions and 47% of all inmates are Black; findings that corroborate the Ohio state
statistics presented by Stickrath. According to Jaschik (2005), 32% of all Black men will
spend at least one year in jail. Losen and Orfield (2002) report the arrest rate for Blacks
with disabilities is 40% as compared to 27% for Whites with disabilities. These statistics
highlight the challenges that Blacks face, particularly males, and especially those
identified with special needs. According to Morrison and Epps (2002), youth in juvenile
correctional facilities are among the most educationally disadvantaged in our society. In
fact, many are functionally illiterate when they enter the correctional institution and cease
attending school upon release (Morrison & Epps, 2002). Due to a lack of education, the propensity for these youth to engage in criminal activity is significantly increased.

This assertion is not only true for juvenile offenders, but also for other Black males who grow up in impoverished neighborhoods. While it is an unfortunate reality, engagement in criminal activity is a lucrative industry, an axiom supported by Ellis Cose who said, “The lure of drug money for young inner-city boys is so strong because it offers such huge rewards to those who otherwise would have very little” (hooks, 2004, p. 26). Black males are taught that in order to have a good life one has to have an education. But when that education is lacking, then one pursues the next best avenue that will provide for the good life. Unfortunately, some Black males view that avenue as criminal involvement. For many Black males, money, and not education, is the marker of success (hooks, 2004).

Participating in special education programs prophesy the type and quality of life that students will lead upon the conclusion of their school career irrespective of whether they graduate or drop out of school. Matriculation into the ranks of higher education is largely improbable due in part to the fact that “it is highly unlikely that the diplomas received by Special Education students would be reflective of college preparatory curricula” (Harry & Anderson, 1994, p. 614). With odds being stacked against those identified with special needs, in particularly Black males, students are sentenced to a life filled with bleak and dismal outcomes.

Prevailing Messages

Based on current research available in the literature, in relationship to the overrepresentation of Black males in special education programs, there are two main
messages being conveyed both to Black males and to society at large. First, is the non-verbal or unspoken message implying that, taken as a whole, Black males are genetically handicapped, are products of poor child rearing, and are behaviorally challenged and lack discipline. In contrast to the unspoken message, a second message conveyed to Black males and society is the verbal or spoken message. When a teacher refers a student for special education services, the literal message expressed is that there is something wrong with this student. This being the case, Black males become overwhelmed, bombarded, and intimidated by the amount of attention suddenly being given to them by their teachers and other adults within the school system (i.e., the school psychologist, the district speech pathologist, and the special education teacher).

Students may equate all of this newly found attention with something being wrong, but they do not quite know what is wrong. As more and more information is provided to the student, he/she synthesizes the recent developments and arrives at one of two conclusions. Either he/she believes that *I’m stupid*; or, that *there is something wrong with me*. Once a student internalizes these messages, the opportunity to achieve and perform academically is innately dismissed.

Consequently, both the spoken and unspoken messages lead to a greater dilemma facing Black males—the disproportionate rate that teachers subject them to disciplinary actions. The next section discusses the high rate at which Black males receive corporal punishment as compared to other students.
Corporal Punishment

“African American students receive corporal punishment at approximately twice the rate of their enrollment in the nation’s school systems and at a greater rate than all other groups” (Harry & Anderson, 1994, p. 608). In fact, when disciplining Black students, teachers are likely to demonstrate reactions that appear to be more severe than required (Monroe, 2005). According to Monroe (2006), research reveals “teachers are most likely to discipline Black boys even when students of other races participate in identical behaviors” (p. 103). Excommunication tactics (sending students out of the classroom or ignoring them altogether) is also a technique used by teachers to punish students (Acker, 2006). Noguera (2003) concludes that, “Black males are more likely than any other group to be suspended and/or expelled from school” (p. 432).

Unfortunately, suspension affects a student’s ability to learn and has an injurious impact on a students’ self-esteem (Thrasher, 1997). It is the researcher’s belief that students’ abilities to learn are irreparably damaged as a result of suspension due to the fact that students are excluded from lessons and ultimately begin to internalize suspension as a condemning personal indictment.

Mamlin and Harris (1998) report one primary reason why junior high teachers referred students to special education services was due to poor behavior. In a supporting study, it was concluded that, “many children are referred because teachers cannot control them. Teachers want these children out of their classes” (Gottlieb, Gottlieb, & Wishner, 1994, p. 464). Given that the teaching profession is composed primarily of White teachers, and given that many of these teachers have a limited understanding of Black
culture, there exists a strong disposition to reprimand Black children recurrently and inappropriately (Monroe, 2005). Consequently, due to the inequity of disciplinary practices applied to Black males, many researchers believe that Black males are being unjustly pushed out of school (Smith, 2002; Wilson & Banks, 1994).

Graduation/Drop-out Rates

Related to the imbalance in application of disciplinary actions are the issues of drop-out and graduation rates of Black males in both high school and college. According to Livingston & Nahimana (2006), while 72% of Black students in America graduate from high school, over 45% of Black males drop out of high school. In a separate study conducted in 1986, of all the Georgia state prison inmates, “only 5% of Black prisoners had attended college, 27% of those same inmates were high school graduates, while 49% had gone no higher than the 11th grade” (Conciatore, 1989). According to this same study, the median education level of inmates was 5th grade. Consequently, the recidivism rate for Black males without a college degree was 80% (Conciatore).

The college graduation rates of Black males are just as disappointing as high school graduation rates. In a study conducted by City University of New York (CUNY), findings revealed that of the 188,000 undergraduate students enrolled, 58,280, or 31%, of them were Black. Of those 58,280 students, Black women outnumbered Black men by a 2:1 ratio, meaning that about 19,426 Black men were enrolled at CUNY (Jaschik, 2005). In this same study, it was reported that only 27% of Black men who start at a four-year institution and 15% of Black men who start at a community college earned a bachelor’s degree six years after enrolling (Jaschik).
When this evidence is interpreted by Black males, the implication may be that Black males are disorderly, unintelligent, and uncontrollable. Additionally, Black males begin to view the special education referral process as a way for society to interact with and treat them as second class citizens. According to Wilson & Banks (1994), this perspective can be deduced from the fact that public schools provide insufficient resources, utilize racially-biased management practices, and employ unconsciously prejudiced teachers. All of these factors reinforce and even intensify the disadvantages of Black males. As a result, some Black males use a “disidentification” practice to numb the pain they experience in the school setting. Disidentification is a self-protective strategy in which students disassociate their self-esteem from academic domains and instead focus on another domain like sports or peer relations (McMillian, 2004). By disconnecting themselves from school, Black males are no longer susceptible to the mental and emotional anguish that they believe accompanies attending school.

Self-Concept

In a study by Justice, Lindsey, and Morrow (1999), focusing on the relation of self-perception and achievement among Black preschoolers, self-concept and self-esteem correlated significantly with achievement. Moreover, the findings revealed this relationship emerges early in a child’s academic career. In support of this research, Witherspoon, Speight, and Thomas (1997) found a linear relationship between self-esteem and academic self-concept. “As self-esteem increased, so did academic self-concept; likewise, as self-esteem decreased, so did academic self-concept” (p. 353).
With self-concept being such an important variable in the academic success of Blacks, many Black boys are taught early that they are failures (Harry & Anderson, 1994) and that society wants to ensure their demise (hooks, 2004). Consequently, the longer a child believes that “something is wrong with me,” the more likely a child’s self-concept and self-esteem will be damaged. “Soul murder,” a psychological term used by hooks to describe the crushing of the male spirit in boyhood, occurs once a male endures a sense of “deflation” as a result of a non supportive environment and attacks on one’s self-esteem. Further complicit in the destruction of a Black male’s self-perception are the negative stereotypes surrounding their culture. Negative perceptions compromise one’s self-esteem and belief in self (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006). Additionally, “the way that one perceives himself is vital to the learning process” (Parson & Kritsonis, 2006). Monroe (2005) proposes that “when students perceive that their lives and experiences are valued, they are less likely to engage in behaviors that express resistance against alienating school forces” (p. 49). Over the course of time, a self-fulfilling prophecy emerges and the student relinquishes all sense of hope. Additionally, because of the stigma associated with special education, students believe the work assigned in these classes is too easy, reinforcing the message about their academic ineptitude.

In conclusion, research inarguably indicates there is an overrepresentation of minorities, particularly Black males, in special education programs. To address and reverse this detrimental practice, more care and attention must be paid to the needs and development of these misidentified students. Specifically, educators need to deemphasize the non-academic factors (i.e., poor peer relationships, fighting, refusal to work, poor
attendance rates, and students’ home situations) used in the referral process and begin to focus on factors that address academic reasons for referring students.

Strategies for Engaging Black Males

Villegas (1990) has outlined a series of actions teachers can take. Chief among this list is that teachers should adopt an attitude of respect for cultural differences. This respectful attitude should be accompanied by a belief that all students are capable of learning and that teachers should possess a sense of high efficacy. Additionally, teachers should be knowledgeable of the cultural resources students bring to class. Teachers should implement an enriched curriculum, and engage in building bridges between instructional content, materials, and methods, and the cultural backgrounds of students. Lastly, Villegas (1991) suggests that it is imperative for teachers to vary their instructional styles in order to meet the unique learning styles of their students.

In contributing suggestions to address the conundrum Black males face, Livingston and Nahimana (2006) recommend that teachers undergo professional development emphasizing understanding cultural differences, schools work more diligently to identify and recruit more male teachers, and create community collaborations with representatives from schools, local businesses, government offices, religious institutions, and various community stakeholders.

In addition to these suggestions, students should be required to complete inventories (i.e., teachers should deliberately gather information about their students’ personal, cultural, familial, and neighborhood backgrounds), teachers should adopt a proactive stance toward discipline (i.e., providing students with explicit standards of
acceptable behavior), everyone should be held equally accountable, and finally, teachers should incorporate physical movement (i.e., integrating kinesthetic movement into lesson plans, increasing teachers’ tolerance of noise levels, reducing “teacher talk,” and incorporating multisensory experiences) in the classroom (Monroe, 2006).

Another possible solution calls for early intervention when identifying problems in students (Watkins & Kurtz, 2001). Other solutions in addressing the overrepresentation of Black males in special education programs include encouraging parental involvement and support and helping teachers and administrators identify their personal feelings toward children who come from a background different from their own (McIntyre & Pernell, 1985).

Spurgeon and Myers (2003) offer solutions in the form of creating a male mentoring program, providing tutorial assistance, and involving the family in the educational process of Black males to address the issue of overrepresentation. Further solutions include providing culturally responsive literacy instruction that links classroom content to student experiences and providing comprehensive literacy programs and academically-oriented remedial programs for Black males (Tatum, 2006). Harry and Anderson (1994) suggest teachers conduct assessments for the purpose of guiding instruction as opposed to determining program eligibility and suggest that practitioners should label services rather than labeling students.

Additionally, when addressing the overrepresentation of Black males in special education services, school systems need to provide schools with adequate and effective resources. While school resources appear in a variety of forms, the most important
resource relevant to this study is that of qualified teachers who possess a high degree of teacher efficacy. Again, based upon previously presented research, the neediest students often receive the least experienced and least prepared teachers (Stover, 1999). This practice of “handicapping” students must immediately cease, as it further debilitates students’ learning, leaving them academically ill-prepared and ill-equipped. Schools and school districts need to adamantly and vigorously invest in providing meaningful and useful professional development opportunities for inexperienced teachers. Mentorship programs should also be implemented as an additional resource used to strengthen the skills of inexperienced teachers and broaden their knowledge base.

In closing, with a concerted and conscientious effort in the aforementioned areas, both teachers and school districts will begin to address the issue of overrepresentation of minorities, especially Black males, in special education programs and will therefore be committed to permanently eradicating this problem.

Summary

In summary, a review of the literature indicates that many factors contribute to the overrepresentation of Black males in special education programs. Issues such as teacher bias, communication differences between teachers and their students, a lack of cultural awareness and use of cultural literature by the teacher, inappropriate use of corporal punishment, and a surplus of unqualified teachers exacerbate the educational problems faced by minority males, in particular Black males. Until all the aforementioned issues are addressed in an objective and proactive manner, a disconnect between minority males
and the education system is likely to continue and the chances for these students to succeed will be greatly inhibited.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the process and procedures used in conducting this study. A discussion of the research design, population, sampling plan, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis procedures are described in this chapter. The two research questions addressed by this study were: Are teachers biased in making referrals to special education services based upon student race and/or gender? Are teachers biased in making referrals to special education services, specifically for Black males? Additionally, there were three hypotheses for this study. H1: Teachers demonstrate a gender bias when referring male students for special education services. H2: Teachers demonstrate a racial bias when referring Black students to special education services. H3: Teachers demonstrate a bias when referring Black males to special education services. An ANOVA procedure was used to analyze the relationship between teachers’ ratings of how likely they were to refer a student for special education services and how certain they were of their ratings of a student’s need for referral.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to determine if gender and racial bias influence teachers’ decisions when referring students, specifically Black males, for special education services. This task was accomplished by analyzing responses from a researcher-designed questionnaire. The study utilized a true experimental design with randomized assignment and two ANOVAs were used to analyze the data. The independent variables in this study were race and gender of the student. The dependent variables were how likely a teacher
would be to refer a student to receive special education services and how certain they were of their decision to refer.

Identification of Population

The target population of this study was teachers in urban areas. More specifically, the researcher wanted to examine the referral practices of teachers employed within public elementary schools (K-5) in the State of Ohio. This group was selected for observation due to the overrepresentation of Black males in special education programs nationally. Ideally, the researcher would have conducted a national study evaluating teachers’ referral practices; however, due to the finite resources available to the researcher, it was more economical and conducive to time constraints to conduct this study on a smaller scale.

Sampling Plan

Invited participants were selected via random sampling, using a computer-generated random number application in SPSS 11.0. Thirty schools were identified and subsequently, questionnaires inventorying teachers’ referral practices were disseminated to teachers in those geographically representative urban districts within the state of Ohio. The districts identified for participation in this study were: Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, Toledo, and Mansfield. The rationale behind the selection of these districts was that urban areas tend to have greater concentrations of Black males than do suburban or rural areas.

In order to determine which teachers were selected for the sample, the researcher placed the name of each elementary school within the aforementioned districts into a random number generator computer application program. Using a table of random
numbers, five schools from each district were randomly selected to participate in the study. Once the five schools from each district were identified, the researcher contacted the principal of each school, seeking his/her permission to conduct the study. If permission was not granted from the principal, the researcher continued with the random selection process until the goal of obtaining five schools per district was reached.

In practice, the aforementioned plan did not operate as smoothly as planned. The original thirty schools identified by the SPSS random assignment program were contacted on December 1, 2008, via a formal letter (See Appendix B). Follow-up telephone calls were made to each school during the week of December 8 – December 12. One school in the Mansfield City Schools District responded and invited the researcher to collect data on December 15, 2008. During the round of initial follow-up calls, several schools were scheduled for data collection (an elementary school in Toledo, Ohio and an elementary school in Cleveland, Ohio) prior to the holiday break beginning December 19, 2008. At this time, that the researcher was informed that the Cincinnati School District required a formal application as well as a non refundable $35.00 application fee in order to process his request to collect data.

A second round of telephone calls was placed the week of January 5 – January 9, 2009 to the remaining schools in an attempt to solidify appointments for the month of January. Multiple telephone messages were left with school secretaries or on principals’ voicemail, prompting a third round of telephone calls to be made the week of January 12 – January 16, 2009. Once the researcher gained knowledge from a representative of the Columbus City Schools that he needed to submit a formal research application to gain
entry, the researcher complied and submitted the application on January 25, 2009. Having to wait the required four weeks, as the Research Compliance Committee deliberated their decision, the researcher continued to contact principals in the Mansfield City School District, Cleveland Public School District, and the Dayton Public School District. It was during this time the researcher was informed that the Dayton Public Schools would not be able to accommodate his request.

A few schools from Mansfield and Cleveland responded to the researcher’s repeated requests and granted permission to conduct the research. After collecting data from a school in Mansfield and one school in Cleveland (the researcher was unable to collect data from two other schools in Cleveland due to inclement weather), the researcher finally received approval from the Columbus City School District on February 26, 2009 and immediately identified another ten principals to contact. Letters were distributed on March 2, 2009 and follow-up telephone calls were made on Wednesday, March 11, 2009. It was at this time, and several days following, the researcher was informed by multiple principals in the Columbus City School District that they would be unable to accommodate his request. In total, there were sixty-two respondents out of a potential pool of over 400 teachers who participated in this study and completed the survey.

Another obstacle was securing financial support to visit the different sites. The researcher applied for and obtained a grant through the College of Education and was eventually awarded the grant, but due to a misrepresentation and misinterpretation of how the award would be disbursed, the researcher experienced a delay in data collection as he was forced to seek other funding sources.
There were two proposed methods for data collection and eventually both methods were used. The first method was contingent upon the financial resources available and also by weather conditions, as traveling was a central component to data collection for the first method. This method involved the researcher physically visiting each participating school and collecting data on a designated “professional development” day. The professional development day was selected as the primary day to gather data due to the fact that teaching responsibilities, supervising responsibilities, and all other school-related duties were suspended given the fact that school was not in session. This method yielded a total of fifty completed surveys.

The second method of data collection involved the researcher mailing surveys to the different schools participating in the study. Each mailed survey was accompanied by a postage-paid return envelope (or a designated pick-up date was specified when the researcher would be in the area). In total, twelve completed surveys were returned to the researcher as a result of this method.

Both methods of data collection yielded interesting comments, both written and verbal, from teachers. These comments addressed a variety of concerns from both ends of the spectrum. Comments such as “the student needs to be exposed to multiple intervention services” dominated one perspective. Aligned with this perspective were the concepts of inclusion, providing before-and-after school tutoring, and related interventions. On the other end of the continuum were comments such as, “this student needs to be tested for ADHD”; “there are some issues with the student’s home life”; or “these behavior patterns are typical of that culture”. This perspective indicates impatience
with students and a desire to have them removed from their class. Ironically, there was no major difference between the data collected via mail and in-person. Both methods yielded comments on each end of the spectrum. This indicates that the presence of the researcher did not influence teachers written or verbal comments. It can be concluded that teachers’ responses were a true reflection of their actual opinions.

In order to ensure reliability in the results of the data analysis, an alpha level of $p \leq 0.05$ was set for all analyses in this study. The Sample Power 2.0 program in SPSS (2000) was used to determine the necessary power for this study. Power was set at .80 to obtain a Cohen’s medium effect size of $f= .25$, requiring 162 survey respondents.

**Instrumentation**

**Selection and Development of Instruments**

The researcher-developed questionnaire utilized in this study contained a vignette providing a student’s name, standardized test score, academic performance, classroom conduct, and anecdotal observations from the classroom teacher. There were six different versions of the vignette. In each version, only the name (indicating potential race) and gender was changed. All other characteristics in the vignette remained constant. The six names of the students described in the vignettes are Justin and Karen (African American); Gabriel and Maria (Latino American); and, Michael and Hannah (Caucasian American). Vignettes with each of the different names were randomly distributed to the teachers with each teacher receiving one vignette. As stated earlier, the race and gender of each student were alternated via different vignettes in order to measure teachers’ objectivity with respect to referrals. This was done to create treatment implementation fidelity. The
researcher wanted to examine the effect, if any, that a student’s race and/or gender had on a teachers’ decision to refer a student to receive special education services.

Each vignette was followed by a short series of five questions asking teachers to rate the likelihood that he/she would refer that student based on the standardized score, academic performance, classroom conduct, anecdotal observations by the classroom teacher, or all the information (overall). Teachers were also asked to rate how certain they were about each of their ratings, and allowed an opportunity to comment on their ratings. This was followed by an opportunity to provide any additional comments, as well as nine demographic questions. Demographic data included number of years teaching, number of special education referrals made, gender, and experience teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds different from one’s own. See Appendix C for sample vignettes.

Pilot Study

Due to the untested status of this instrument, the questionnaire was pilot tested using a sample of convenience. Respondents in the pilot test were undergraduate pre-service teachers at Ohio University. Thirty-three students completed the survey (ten male and twenty female), while three students failed to indicate their gender. All six vignettes were used. Eleven of the respondents indicated that they previously had or were currently receiving teaching experience and twenty students indicated that they did not have any teaching experience. While all the core information remained constant in each of the vignettes, comments provided by the respondents varied from one end of the spectrum to the other. Some examples of the rationales provided by the respondents that attempted to
explain their ratings included: there is nothing wrong with the student; the student did not speak English well, and therefore, language was a barrier; due to inappropriate behavior, the student would benefit from receiving individual counseling; the student needs to receive more individual attention from the teacher; the student has ADHD; the student needs to receive special education services because his grades are low; the student’s struggles can be traced to his/her inability to recognize words; the student is deprived of participating in leadership opportunities; and, the student is BD [behavior disordered] or is LD [learning disabled]. Based upon these comments, which were of a diagnostic nature, the researcher concluded that many of the would-be referrals were non-academic related.

The test pilot yielded some valuable information. Originally, the researcher provided the student’s IQ score instead of a standardized test score. However, since IQ scores are typically obtained once a Multi-Factored Evaluation (MFE) is conducted, teachers would not have access to this information prior to testing. After seeking consultation on this issue, the researcher decided to omit the IQ score and use a standardized test score because this information is more readily accessible to teachers. Additionally, in the original vignette, respondents only provided their overall rating of whether or not the student would be referred to receive special education services. However, in an attempt to produce more meaningful and relevant data, the researcher revised the vignette so that each respondent would have an opportunity to rate each of the four domains (academic performance, classroom conduct, standardized test score, anecdotal information) as well as provide an overall rating of whether or not the student
would be referred to receive special education services. By doing this, the researcher
intended to strengthen the reliability of the study.

Reliability Issues

Reliability of the dependent measures was estimated using Cronbach’s coefficient
alpha. The first dependent measure consisted of the mean score for five summed items in
the vignette including teachers ratings (likely to refer for special education services) based
on the student’s academic performance, classroom conduct, standardized test score,
anecdotal information, and overall. Consequently, the dependent variable measuring the
likelihood of a teacher referring a student to receive special education services had a
Cronbach’s alpha of .928. The second dependent measure consisted of the mean score for
five summed items measuring the teacher’s certainty in his/her rating of whether or not to
refer a student to receive special education services. This measure had a Cronbach’s alpha
of .899. These scores indicate the instrument was very reliable and great confidence can
be placed in teachers ratings of how likely they would be to refer the student described in
the vignette, and how certain they were of their ratings.

Validity Issues

The validity of the dependent measures was determined by content validity. The
five areas comprising content validity were academic performance, classroom conduct,
standardized test score, anecdotal information, and an overall rating. Based upon the
teacher’s response to the survey questions, his/her responses indicated the likelihood that
he/she would refer a student to receive special education services. Research supporting
the investigation of academic performance, as it pertains to special education referrals
include studies conducted by Osborne (1999), Fordham and Ogbu (1986), and McMillian (2003). Matuszek and Oakland (1979), Hutton (1985), and Sherwin and Schmidt (2003) offer studies that address classroom conduct and how it impacts a teacher’s decision to refer students to special education services. Research conducted by Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Shinn, and McGue (1982) discuss intelligence-related items (i.e., standardized test scores) and how they influence a decision to refer or not refer students to special education services. Addressing the topic of anecdotal information, are studies conducted by Knotek (2003), Villegas (1991), and McIntyre and Pernell (1985).

Procedures for Collecting Data

In the case of the first proposed data collection method, because the surveys were administered to teachers on a professional development day, the researcher anticipated a high response rate because he was physically present to collect the surveys. In fact, the researcher anticipated an 80 - 85 % response rate. Incidentally, all of the teachers present during the professional development day/staff meeting completed the survey. Survey completion was preceded by a concise introduction and a brief description of the purpose of this study. Following this description, participants were asked to provide written informed consent, followed by completion of the survey. While participants completed the survey, the researcher left the room to ensure anonymity and participants were asked to place their signed consent form and their questionnaires in the envelopes clearly marked “consent forms” and “completed questionnaires.” The researcher was able to obtain fifty completed surveys as a result of being physically present to collect data.
In situations where the researcher was unable to collect the data in person, the surveys were packaged and sent to the participating schools in each district. Once completed, the surveys were either returned via mail or remained on site until the researcher arrived to retrieve them. In total, there were twelve completed surveys obtained via U.S. mail service.

Data Analysis Procedures

Survey data was analyzed using SPSS version 16.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated. The researcher summed all five likely to refer scores and all five certainty scores to create two dependent measures. Two 2 x 3 Analysis of Variance (ANOVAs) were used to analyze the relationships between the independent variables (gender and race) and the dependent variables (the summed likely to refer scores and the summed certainty scores). Because the independent variables (gender and race) had more than two groups (G1E1; G2E1; G1E2; G2E2; G1E3; G2E3) and given that ratings were compared across the dependent variables (likely to refer a student to receive special education services and certainty of the referral rating), the ANOVA procedure best fit this study.

Summary

In total, there were sixty-two respondents who participated in this study. Of the sixty-two, fifty completed the survey while the researcher was on site and twelve completed the survey via U.S. mail. Additionally, two separate ANOVA procedures were conducted to analyze the data. One ANOVA compared the mean of the summed likely to refer scores from questions 1-5 with gender and race, and the second ANOVA compared the mean of the summed certainty scores for questions 1-5 with gender and race. These
analyses were used to determine if teachers were more or less likely to refer a student for special education services based on race or gender, and if teachers’ certainty in their ratings differed depending on students’ race or gender. While there were a total of six vignettes used in this study, they were randomly distributed as equally as possible based on the number of participants at each site. Reliability for both measures (likelihood to refer and certainty in ratings) were remarkably consistent, yielding Cronbach’s alpha ratings of .928 and .899 respectively.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

As stated in chapter one, the purpose of this study was to determine if a student’s race and/or gender influenced how likely teachers are to refer a student for special education evaluation and services and how confident they are in their decision to refer. More specifically, the researcher wanted to ascertain if the factors taken into consideration of this decision were academic related. There were two research questions addressed in this study: Question 1: Are teachers biased in making referrals to special education services based upon student race and/or gender?; Question 2: Are teachers biased in making referrals to special education services, specifically for Black males? This study addressed the following hypotheses: Hypothesis 1: Teachers demonstrate a gender bias when referring male students for special education services; Hypothesis 2: Teachers demonstrate a racial bias when referring Black students to special education services; and, Hypothesis 3: Teachers demonstrate a bias when referring Black males to special education services.

The independent variables were race and gender of the student. The dependent variables were the likelihood that a teacher would refer a student to receive special education services and his/her certainty in the decision to refer. Although the two dependent measures were very reliable (See Appendix D & E), they were uncorrelated (See Appendix F), so two 2 x 3 ANOVAs were utilized to determine the relationship between the dependent and independent measures.
Demographic Data of Respondents

An analysis of the data revealed that fifty-two of the respondents were White (83.9%), five respondents were Black (8.1%), one respondent self-identified as Other (1.3%). Four respondents either did not indicate their race or left this question blank. There were a total of fifty-six women respondents (90.3%), three male respondents (4.8%), and three respondents who did not indicate their gender (4.8%). The respondents averaged 18.1 years of general teaching experience (ranging from two to thirty-eight years) and 15.08 years of experience teaching students different than their own background (ranging from one half of a year to thirty-two years).

The racial and socioeconomic breakdown of the schools at the time of the data collection were as follows: For school one in Mansfield, 33.4% of the students were Black, 48.9% were White, 17.2% were Multi-racial, 8.7% had a disability, and 77.6% were identified as economically disadvantaged. For school two, 28.4% of the students were Black, 65.3% were White, 5.4% were identified as Multi-racial, 22.8% of students had a disability, and 84.7% were identified as economically disadvantaged.

For the Toledo schools, 29.6% of its student population was Black for school one, 7.6% of students were Hispanic/Latino, 6.3% were Multi-racial, and 55.3% of students were White. For the first school, 18.9% of the students had disabilities and 64.8% were economically disadvantaged. School two had a population of 15.2% Black students, 8.4% Hispanic students, 68.5% White students, and 6.7% Multi-racial students. Additionally, 14.4% of school two’s population had identified disabilities and 20.1% of the students were economically disadvantaged.
Finally, the racial breakdown for school one in Cleveland was 99.4% Black, 90.2% of its student body was economically disadvantaged, and 6.3% of its students had a disability. This information was obtained from the Ohio Department of Education’s School Report Card website and is representative of the 2007-08 academic year (http://ilrc.ode.state.oh.us/Schools/default.asp).

Data Analyses

Descriptive statistics and correlations were calculated, and after checking assumptions, two 2 x 3 Analysis of Variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to analyze the dependent measure summed likely to refer score and the dependent measure summed certainty score. All open-ended responses were aggregated and analyzed to determine common patterns or themes.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables in the study. See Tables 1 and 2 for means and standard deviations.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variable: Likely to Refer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of student in vignette</th>
<th>Race of student in vignette</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>4.2000</td>
<td>2.61109</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>black</td>
<td>5.0462</td>
<td>2.65224</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>latino</td>
<td>5.8786</td>
<td>1.74161</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.9583</td>
<td>2.46178</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>4.9375</td>
<td>2.72389</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>black</td>
<td>5.0667</td>
<td>2.87476</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of student in vignette</td>
<td>Race of student in vignette</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>7.9400</td>
<td>1.32682</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>black</td>
<td>7.5333</td>
<td>1.45810</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>latino</td>
<td>7.6786</td>
<td>1.50440</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7.7086</td>
<td>1.38513</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>7.9875</td>
<td>2.32615</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>black</td>
<td>7.5542</td>
<td>1.70660</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>latino</td>
<td>7.5500</td>
<td>2.08327</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7.7156</td>
<td>1.99481</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>7.9659</td>
<td>1.89457</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>black</td>
<td>7.5437</td>
<td>1.55237</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>latino</td>
<td>7.6100</td>
<td>1.77323</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7.7123</td>
<td>1.71794</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlations**

A Pearson correlation addressed the relationship between the dependent variables of *likely to refer* and *certainty* and the independent variables in the study. Failure to find
statistically significant correlations (set at a level of $p < .05$) between any of the variables indicates that none of the variables were significantly related. See Table 3 for correlations.

Table 3

*Correlations Between Dependent and Independent Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Likely to Refer</th>
<th>Certainty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of years teaching</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of referrals made this year</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of student</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students in class</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race of teacher</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>-.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of teacher</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years teaching students from diff. backgrounds</td>
<td>-.059</td>
<td>.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely to refer</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certainty</td>
<td>-.078</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The total number of participants ($n = 62$)

*ANOVA*

Typically, ANOVAs are used when several assumptions are satisfied. First, when it is reasonable that the values in each of the groups will follow the normal curve; Second,
when there are different population averages; Third, when there are equal population standard deviations

(http://math.colgate.edu/math102/dlantz/examples/ANOVA/anovahyp.html). As these assumptions were sufficiently met, it was appropriate to proceed with conducting the ANOVAs.

On the summed *likely to refer* measure, the ANOVA was not significant, $F (2, 5) = 686, p = .508$. See Table 4 for the results of the first ANOVA

### Table 4

**2 x 3 ANOVA for Likely to Refer Score, Gender and Race**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$\eta$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.370</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>196.977</td>
<td>.779</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stu_gen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stu_race</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.291</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stu_gen * Stu_race</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.686</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the summed *certainty* score measure, the ANOVA (Table 5) was not significant, $F (2, 5) = .012, p = .988$. 
Table 5

2 x 3 ANOVA for Certainty Score, Gender and Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>η</th>
<th>ρ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1089.345</td>
<td>.952</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stu_gen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stu_race</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.347</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stu_gen * stu_race</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data provided no conclusive evidence to refute the hypotheses tested in this study, therefore, the hypotheses could not be rejected. As no significant differences were found, the null hypotheses were retained. One potential reason for these findings is that the researcher was unable to obtain a sample size large enough to warrant making such declarative statements. In other words, the level of power selected for this study, .80, was not fulfilled because the researcher did not receive the 162 surveys required for this study. In fact, despite an attempt to oversample, the researcher was only able to obtain 40% of this goal, amounting to a total of 62 surveys. Based upon the data collected, the findings from this study are inconclusive. Additionally, there was a large disparity between the number of surveys completed in-person, (n = 50), versus the number of surveys completed via mail, (n = 12). This disparity between the two methods of data collection may indicate
that teachers respond better to the physical presence of a researcher on site as opposed to an abstract request via mail.

Summary

In summary, in response to the first research question: Are teachers biased in making referrals to special education services based upon student race and/or gender, the null hypothesis was retained. Since no significant differences were obtained, it cannot be stated that teachers are biased by student race or gender when making referrals for special education services. In response to the second research question: Are teachers biased in making referrals to special education services, specifically for Black males, again, the null hypothesis was retained.
CHAPTER FIVE: LIMITATIONS, DISCUSSION, SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations of this study. The first limitation was that the survey yielded a low survey response rate. Given that a significant number of teachers decided to not participate in the study, the study did not reach adequate power to yield significant results. A second limitation of this study was the lack of knowledge exhibited by principals regarding research procedures. In other words, if a principal was unfamiliar with or was unaware of the district protocol for the conduct of research by external sources, then the wait time experienced as a result of “fact finding” infringed upon the researcher’s finite time schedule and altered the opportunity to collect the necessary data.

A third limitation of this study was the bureaucracy associated with data collection. Given that the researcher had to submit applications to the board of education and/or the human resources departments to conduct research in some school districts, in addition to submitting an application fee and a research prospectus, the time available to conduct the actual research was greatly reduced. In fact, the waiting period to hear a response from one district was an entire month, costing the researcher an invaluable amount of time.

A fourth limitation of this study is the accuracy of self-report by teachers. In other words, results supporting the research heavily relied upon the honesty exhibited by teachers during completion of the survey. What teachers indicated in their responses to the vignette questions may have been different from their actual behaviors, as the
vignettes measure intention and not actual behavior. If teachers were not forthcoming in their reasons for generating special education referrals, then the data obtained from the surveys would not be reliable and therefore not generalizable. Social desirability may also have adversely impacted the results of the study in situations where the researcher was actually present in the schools to collect the data.

Another limitation of this study was inclement weather. During visits to schools in Northern Ohio, inclement weather forced schools to be cancelled and dismissed early as a result of the weather. Consequently, several teachers were absent from school in one district, significantly reducing the pool of available participants. Additionally, the researcher was unable to collect data from two schools because of an emergency evacuation mandated by the district during the data collection visit as a result of the weather.

A sixth limitation of this study was that the vignette represented an imperfect substitute for a “real” student. Therefore, it typified a fictional student and not a real case a teacher might be dealing with. As a follow up to the vignette, another limitation of the study was that many respondents believed that most students in their classrooms resembled the student represented in the vignette. Numerous teachers indicated that their actual students displayed behaviors/academic progress on par with the fictional student. So, reading the vignette was like reflecting on multiple students in their class. Because teachers were able to place a “real” face to the vignette, this may have impacted how teachers responded to the survey questions. Also in relation to the vignette, is that the scale used in the vignette was imperfect. While the questions addressed objective factors
used in the referral process, there may have still been some undetected teacher subjectivity factored into the decision-making process.

Another limitation of the study was discovered when several teachers informed the researcher that the criteria for classifying a student as having special needs differs from school to school, but more importantly, from district to district. In other words, a student may qualify to receive special education services from one district, but if that student transfers to another district, he/she may no longer qualify to receive those services. Several teachers shared with the researcher they had students who fell into this category. Ironically, the student who qualified for services in one district functioned in the upper echelon of students in his/her new district, leaving the researcher to conclude that in actual practice, there are no uniform standards regarding special education qualification.

Further highlighting the discrepancy of the special education qualification criteria was that not all the schools in one district housed special education units. Therefore, some teachers may not have been well versed in knowing what qualities or characteristics to look for. This fact is important because only certain schools provide pull-out services for students with special needs. If a teacher was to encounter a struggling student, there is a strong possibility that a referral may not be made because the teacher does not participate in any Intervention Assessment Team (IAT) meetings. This issue could potentially be alleviated through the use of RtI because multiple intervention services would be used. By using RtI, when teachers observe that a student is not performing at grade-level, then he/she can begin to employ various interventions in an effort to help the student learn. As a student experiences success with a particular intervention strategy, the teacher no longer
needs to pursue the option of generating a referral to special education services. In fact, teachers’ familiarity with the RtI process could have influenced their decision not to refer the student in the vignette for services, instead assuming the student would be receiving tier one or two interventions before making a formal referral for level 3 interventions (i.e., special education services).

Yet another limitation of this study was the finite time schedule the researcher had to collect data. Given the fact that the researcher contacted schools in December 2008, and was unable to gain entry to some schools until mid-January 2009, a month of data collection was lost in the process. Moreover, because school districts in the state of Ohio administer the Ohio Achievement Tests beginning mid-March, the researcher’s time period to collect data was approximately one month. Ohio Achievement Tests commence mid-March and testing season does not conclude until mid-April. Generally speaking, principals were unwilling, and understandably so, to permit the researcher entry from mid-February through mid-April.

Another limitation of this study was the policies of some teachers’ unions. While teachers’ unions differ from district to district, some teachers’ unions only require their members complete one survey from an external source per year. Unfortunately, after receiving permission, a trip to one school was wasted when upon arrival, the researcher was informed by the principal that the teachers in the school had already completed their one external survey. In the communication with the principal prior to this trip, in no way was the researcher informed that the staff would be unable to participate in the study.
A final limitation of the study was that over ninety percent of the respondents were female. Based upon national statistics, the proportion of male teachers reflective in society was not represented in the study, therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the general population of public school K-5 urban teachers in Ohio as the proportion of teachers by gender in the sample was not representative of the general population.

Discussion

In reviewing the data obtained from the survey, a student’s gender and/or race do not influence teachers’ decisions to recommend students be referred for receiving special education services. However, based upon some of the individual responses to specific survey items, extended responses written by some teachers, and verbal comments made during conversations immediately following data collection, one can conclude that for some teachers, a student’s gender and/or race does indeed factor into the decision as to whether or not a student should be referred for special education services.

While there was not a sufficient sample size to definitively conclude one way or another, based upon several of the survey responses, the researcher believes that social desirability adversely impacted how some teachers responded to the questions. For example, some teachers responded they would recommend additional tutoring, increase one-on-one instruction, and provide other academic intervention services to a struggling student. However, some of these same teachers’ indicated an impatience and intolerance of the student’s inappropriate behavior. For example, one teacher strongly suggested that the possibility of the student having ADD be explored and that the parents provide input in the matter. Another example suggested that the referrals for special education services be
based on the frequency and severity of the student’s outburst. This sort of contradiction could be interpreted to mean that teachers are willing to work with a student, but only to a certain extent. Moreover, teachers may overlook the fact that students’ behavior may be a manifestation of their academic frustration. This example directly relates to the existing literature that indicates some teachers are unable to manage “trouble students” and consequently, seek to have them removed from their classrooms. According to Matuszek and Oakland (1979), “behavior problems are a common reason for referring a child for special consideration in the first place” (p. 123).

Another indication that social desirability may have impacted teachers’ responses was the statement, “I treat all kids the same.” For many teachers, the unwillingness to acknowledge differences between students (whether those differences are related to learning styles, communication styles, behavioral patterns, or cultural practices) is what has contributed to the current adversarial climate existing in schools today, but also what has prevented a multitude of students from being appropriately served. Each student is different and needs to be instructed accordingly. The one-size-fits-all that drives some current instruction is not only deleterious to students, but injurious to other stakeholders as well. Teachers are affected by this philosophy because it negates their opportunities to exercise ownership of the curriculum; it inhibits their ability to display ingenuity; it abates teacher motivation; and, it breeds cynicism. For parents, this philosophy promotes disenfranchisement from the education process and fosters disconnectedness between the home and school thereby thwarting collaboration. Finally, community members are affected by this philosophy because citizens are denied the opportunity to develop critical
thinking skills, students are academically less prepared for competition in a global market, and leadership skills are underdeveloped, and unfortunately stymied, in most instances.

Although the findings did not reach a level of significance, the trends were very strong. Contrary to what has been reported in the literature, although the teachers in this study were not likely to make referrals based on gender or race, the data do indicate that when teachers were very likely or very unlikely to refer, they were very confident in their decision to/not to refer. So, when teachers’ feelings to refer or not to refer were strong, they were also very confident in that decision. When they were less sure about referring, they were less confident in their decision.

Again, using the RtI procedure would further support the aforementioned findings. Teachers would no longer have to rely on the certainty of their feelings when rationalizing a decision. The documented intervention strategies would more than suffice, but more importantly, would justify (based upon scientifically-based research evidence) the teacher’s decision to refer a student to receive special education testing. Moreover, RtI removes any subjectivity held by a teacher and eliminates the guess work of referrals. As teachers become better trained and cognizant of RtI, they become more confident in their decision-making abilities and acquire additional strategies to employ when working with struggling learners.

In conducting this study, it was the researcher’s intent to illuminate reasons for the disproportionate representation of minority males, more specifically Black males, receiving special education services. Additionally, the researcher hypothesized that the data would underscore the hypothesis that non-academic factors are more heavily
weighted and given greater consideration than academic factors by teachers when deciding to recommend a student be referred to receive special education services. However, this hypothesis was not supported by the findings from this study.

There are many factors that influence a teacher’s decision of whether or not to recommend a student be referred to receive special education services. While many factors were examined in this study, teacher bias, lack of cultural awareness exhibited by the teacher, teacher qualifications, and disproportionate representation of minority students will be revisited during this section, as they are some of the more glaring factors, even though they were not supported by this study’s findings.

Teacher bias presents itself in many forms and one of the more prevalent avenues of expression is through racial preference. According to Thrasher (1997) and Tobias, Cole, Zibrin, and Bodlakova (1982), some teachers have a tendency to refer students to special education services who are not of their own ethnic group. This revelation is startling considering the fact that an overwhelmingly majority of teachers in U.S. schools are White females. While this finding was not conclusively supported by the data in this current research study, 83.9% of the respondents were White and 90.3% of them were female.

Another factor that influences a teacher’s decision relative to the special education referral process is the lack of cultural awareness exhibited by the teacher. Irvine (1990) attributes much of a students’ failure to a lack of cultural synchronization between students and their teachers. It is detrimental for teachers to interact with a group of minority students based on the assumptions, practices, and values of the majority culture.
To behave in such an egregious manner, devalues and depreciates the unique thoughts, learning styles, talents, and experiences possessed by minority students, especially Black males. According to Kearns, Ford, & Linney (2005) all school professionals should be able to deliver culturally sensitive services. And nothing better supports this position than some of open-ended responses where teachers explained their ratings on the survey such as, “Justin’s culture may have something to do with his behavior” or “Justin’s traits are typical of African American boys.”

Lastly, without a teacher being properly informed about the cultural background of his/her students, a “lack of understanding is created, that frequently leads teachers to employ disciplinary responses that would not be necessary if they understood the meaning of the students’ behavior” (Harry & Anderson, 1994). This position is supported by some of the comments in the open-ended responses made by teachers such as, “Her home is lacking in supervision or is not consistent,” “Justin may have ED,” and “Justin needs to be tested to see if he needs to be medicated.” Without having the proper knowledge of a student’s cultural background, behavioral infractions become a scapegoat and uninformed and insensitive comments are made that could be interpreted as being racist or based on stereotypes.

The last factor to be addressed in this section is the disproportionate representation of Blacks in special education services. According to Kunjufu (2004), while Black children compose 17% of all public school attendees, they comprise 41% of children placed in special education programs. Moreover, 85% of those children are Black males (Kunjufu). Additionally, of the Black students recommended for special education, 92%
are assessed and 73% are placed in special education programs (Kunjufu, 2005).

According to a separate study, minority students continue to be represented in larger numbers in special education than in the general population (Knotek, 2003).

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In considering replication of this study, there are several recommendations that would enhance the effectiveness of the study. First, the researcher suggests that more time be allocated to collecting data. Given the fact that Ohio schools typically begin in September and conclude in June, in addition to the testing periods of October, March, and April, there are only about four to four and one half months available to collect data. A study should be scheduled to extend the length of two school years, so that the researcher can maximize his/her opportunities to collect data. By doing this, the researcher provides himself/herself with viable options in terms of rescheduling site visits, if inclement weather prevents data collection, contacting additional schools if principals decline participation, or allowing for greater periods of “wait time” to address research requests. Additionally, extending the time period to collect data permits the researcher to maneuver around the bureaucratic red tape that exists with regard to district policies for external research.

A second suggestion is that future researchers should allow for travel time to collect data, as face-to-face interactions with teachers’ produce higher response rates. When teachers visualize a physical person, theoretically, the likelihood of receiving completed surveys is increased. A third suggestion is to contact and collaborate with professional teaching organizations such as the National Education Association (NEA),
and the Ohio Education Association (OEA). By obtaining email list serves and membership lists, researchers are better able to identify potential respondents and can contact them directly to seek their participation. Moreover, alignment with a professional organization gives credence to the researcher and validates the study.

Using the assistance of professional organizations, the researcher could obtain the home addresses of teachers and mail a copy of the survey to their homes. By mailing a survey to teachers’ home addresses, the researcher(s) has direct contact with teachers and is able to circumvent the process of contacting principals. This method also alleviates the concern of dealing with the bureaucracy of the school district.

A final suggestion offered is that future researchers should affiliate themselves with a funding source that would help offset the cost of conducting this research on a large scale. Over the course of time, mailings become expensive (i.e., purchasing envelopes, printing letters, buying stamps) and travel accommodation costs grow exponentially (i.e., hotel reservations, meal allowances, fuel costs).

When considering areas of further study, there are several potential areas for extension of the current study. First, the researcher would like to engage more schools in the study. By including more schools, the researcher would have greater access to teachers which is likely to increase the power of the study. Additionally, the researcher would also like to examine actual referrals submitted by teachers. The purpose would be to analyze the actual documented reasons for referral and review the types of intervention strategies teachers applied when assisting students during tier one and two of the RtI process. Moreover, by examining actual referrals, the researcher becomes better equipped
to chronicle actual teacher practice versus teacher’s speculation on whether or not they would refer a hypothetical student from a vignette.

Second, the researcher would like to incorporate a parent component into this study. By including parents, the researcher would gain additional insight into the nature of the communications between parents and schools, and explore the impact that parent disenfranchisement has on the special education referral process. The researcher defines parent disenfranchisement as the reason(s) that parents do not positively interact or communicate with school personnel. The researcher believes that both a parents’ previous school experiences as a student and the communication that has taken place between the parent and his/her child’s current school may influence the level of involvement a parent has with the school. Consequently, if a parent had a negative experience as a student or as a parent, they are less inclined to cooperate and work collaboratively with school officials.

A final area the researcher would like to address in future research is integrating a qualitative component to the study. This task could be accomplished via a longitudinal study. Ultimately, the researcher would like to interview adults who were once referred for special education services and discuss the perceived quality of education these adults received, and examine the impact of those services on their current quality of life. This would tie directly into an exploration of the extent to which special education placement impacts employment and wage earnings.

General Recommendations to Combat Overrepresentation

Based upon the literature and not necessarily on the findings of this study, a plethora of solutions will be recommended in this section for stakeholders to employ when
guarding against the overrepresentation of minority students being recommended for special education services. That being said, it is the researcher’s intent to separate these solutions into distinct categories. The categories for this section include: 1) Suggestions for Schools; 2) Suggestions for Teachers; 3) Suggestions for Parents/Families; and, 4) Suggestions for Community Members.

**Suggestions for Schools.** One of the most important ways a school can promote parental involvement is by identifying and addressing obstacles to parent participation. Below, are several suggestions proposed by Jane Burnette (1998) and supported by the researcher in an attempt to create an environment more conducive to parental involvement.

Because many school meetings, open houses, and conferences are scheduled during the work hours of 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., school administrators can offer different incentives to teachers that might encourage them to be more flexible in their availability and accessibility to parents. Administrators can offer teachers “comp-time” for meeting with parents beyond the traditional work hours. However, it is important to note, this suggestion would require the input and support of the teacher’s union, provided that a district has one.

A second suggestion is that schools should better publicize and inform parents of their involvement options in order to ensure a high level of parental participation. Third, schools can create a warm and welcoming environment for parents that are more inclusive of different child rearing practices and cultural traditions. Fourth, schools can include
extended family members in the decision-making process who are involved with a student on a daily basis (i.e., an uncle, cousin, older sibling, or grandparent).

The fifth suggestion is to make parents and family members better aware of the expectations and responsibilities inherent to students that lie outside the confines of home and/or cultural beliefs. In other words, embracing the notion that students may behave or use a particular vernacular at home, but that there are explicit behaviors and/or language patterns that are germane to school and must be adhered to while at school.

A sixth way schools can promote parental involvement is by providing accommodating services (i.e., translation of documents, etc.) to ESL parents (Burnette, 1998). Schools can promote parental involvement by providing parent liaisons for students and families where “administrative” meetings take place. Having an advocate present during these meetings helps to reduce any adversarial tension that might be present. Finally, schools can communicate with families in ways that convey respect and appreciation for cultural differences (Burnette).

In closing, the notion of shared governance becomes powerful because all parties have a stake in the matter. In fact, “involving parents and families is key to raising academic achievement for students from minority backgrounds” (Burnette, 1998).

Suggestions for Teachers. For students identified as “at risk” and for those students who live in impoverished areas, it is imperative that multiple resources, support mechanisms, and intervention strategies be implemented in addressing the academic challenges they face. According to Coffey & Obringer (2000), examples of intervention strategies include using peer tutoring programs; utilizing small group instruction;
coordinating and implementing before and after school tutoring programs; and involving community volunteers in the learning process.

Enlisting the services of retired educators, retirees in general, and senior citizens is a great way to increase individualized attention, not to mention that it shows students that community members are interested in their progress and overall development as well. Other intervention strategies include coaching and/or modeling, using case studies, viewing videos of expert teachers, and role playing with colleagues (Miller, 1991).

Teachers working with these groups of students should use mnemonic strategies, computer assisted instruction, learning manipulatives, cooperative learning, diagnostic-prescriptive teaching, and differentiated instruction strategies to maximize students’ full academic potential (Coffey & Obringer, 2000). Lastly, the researcher suggests that varying instructional strategies, incorporating different classroom management techniques, employing greater levels of patience, seeking professional development opportunities to hone one’s skills, and becoming more culturally aware of students’ backgrounds would also help alleviate the problem of disproportionate representation by minority males and Blacks in special education programs.

Suggestions for Parents/Families. As a parent, one of the most important decisions one can make is to become actively involved in the life of your child. The researcher suggests that parents and/or family members discuss the events of the school day on a daily basis, or at least a weekly basis, with their child in order to stay abreast of the latest developments. Possible topics for these discussions include reviewing homework assignments, discussing moments of confusion, sharing likes and dislikes of
the day, discussing moments of understanding, and expressing the frustrations experienced during the day to name a few. The intent here is not to provide an exhaustive list of conversation topics, but rather to impress upon families that the more they communicate with their student and show concern for his/her academic progress, the more he/she feels the family is seriously invested in his/her education. This discussion practice helps keep the family informed of school-related concerns and serves as an indicator that a meeting with a school official may be necessary.

A second suggestion is to communicate with school personnel members regularly. An informed parent is a teacher’s best advocate. Another suggestion offered is for the parent to withhold judgment and avoid engaging in making disparaging comments about a school administrator in the presence of his/her child. Nothing creates a more dysfunctional and combative environment than having one party, or both, bad mouth and disrespect the other. The student observes this dichotomy and a tone is set for all future interactions. If, however, a parent/guardian exhibits self-restraint, then this type of discipline illustrates to students that self-control is a behavior that should be practiced at all times.

Next, a parent/family member should challenge but also support his/her student. If the familial team observes that a student needs help, then help should be sought. However, this does not mean that parents/family members should discourage students from working on their own to resolve the issue. And the final suggestion, but certainly not the least, is that parents should also consider seeking professional support. Sometimes, adults are unskilled and incapable of detecting “trouble areas” with students and the
services of a trained professional are required. Contrary to the stigma associated with using a therapeutic model, participating in family counseling is actually a proactive measure and if the family’s emotional or psychological health is threatened or compromised in any fashion, then it is incumbent upon adults to seriously consider this model.

_Suggestions for Community Members._ Given the fact that students spend so much time outside of school, school interventions alone may not be sufficient in terms of impacting students’ lives. Therefore, it is essential that the school, parents, and community agencies collaborate with one another in order to best serve students (Gottlieb, Alter, Gottlieb, & Wishner, 1994). Community agencies and social support services are a great resource for schools, students, and families alike. The researcher also suggests that individual community members can and should volunteer at schools to demonstrate their commitment to the educational system. If students observe that others outside of their immediate support system are invested in them, theoretically, they will demonstrate a greater respect for education but also gain a deeper appreciation for mankind. Business owners, police officers, sanitation engineers, and others are encouraged to work with the youth via internship opportunities and/or mentorship programs. It is worth noting that churches, synagogues, mosques, and other religious organizations are also being encouraged to participate in this process as some of the principles from these particular faiths may be beneficial in helping students develop.
Conclusion

Based upon the current practices in place, the special education referral process needs to be continually monitored. Far too many students, whether they are low achievers or students who do not qualify for services as measured by an objective criteria, are receiving support to the detriment of their academic future. Parents, teachers, and school administrators must collaborate with one another and exercise due diligence when evaluating a student for special education services. Multiple intervention strategies must be attempted and well documented prior to a multi-factored evaluation (MFE) being initiated or identified as the first option. Workshops on cultural awareness, effective instructional strategies, alternative discipline methods, and professional development opportunities must be fervently sought and adamantly supported by all involved stakeholders to the greatest extent possible.

None of our children, whether they are male or female, Black, White, Latino, Asian, or other can afford to be ignored or disserviced any longer. As educators it is imperative for us to understand that as one particular group of students fail, we indirectly contribute to another group of students failing because students’ collective success is intertwined with one another. In closing, in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” The injustice of our current special education referral process must be addressed immediately if we are going to support all of our children. Not only do their academic lives depend on our actions, but their overall fates do as well.
References


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of African American males from urban households of poverty who successfully complete secondary education programs. *National Journal for Publishing and Mentoring Doctoral Student Research, 1*(1), 1-7.


APPENDIX A: OHIO UNIVERSITY CONSENT FORM

Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: An Examination of Teacher Bias in Special Education Referrals based upon Student Race and Gender?

Researcher: Adonis Bolden

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study
The focus of this research study is to examine the rates and patterns that students are referred to special education services. In particularly, this study will examine the referral rates of different races and gender groups. It should take you approximately 15-20 minutes to complete the survey.

Risks and Discomforts
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with the participation in this study.

Benefits
While you will not receive any benefits, it is my hope that the findings contained therein, will assist education practitioners by providing documentation and statistics indicating the overrepresentation of certain student groups in special education programs. Additionally, these findings will also identify suggestions and provide recommendations that will proactively contribute to the resolution of the overrepresentation crisis faced by those identified groups.

Confidentiality and Records
As a result of participating in this study, your identity is explicitly confidential. There will be no identifying marks or codes assigned to your returned survey. Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
• Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU.

Contact Information
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact my advisor, Dianne Gut, Ph.D. at: gut@ohio.edu; via telephone at (740) 593-0874 or myself, Adonis Bolden, at: adonisbolden@hotmail.com; via telephone at (216) 798-3588.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740) 593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:
• You have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions
• Known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction
• You understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol
• You are 18 years of age or older
• Your participation in this research is given voluntarily
• You may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled

Signature_________________________________________     Date_________________
Printed Name_____________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B: LETTER TO PRINCIPAL

December 2, 2008

Dear Participant,

My name is Adonis Bolden and I am an Education Doctoral student at Ohio University. As a fellow educator, I have taught for several years and have dedicated my career to serving students. The focus of my research is examining the rates and patterns that students are referred to Special Education Services. Serving as my advisor on this project is Dianne Gut, Ph.D. in Teacher Education.

Enclosed, you will find a vignette that describes an elementary student, followed by a series of short-answer questions. The purpose of this vignette is to provide you with background information on the student and create a context of which you will use to respond to the questions. Please take the next five to ten minutes of your time to read the vignette and respond to the questions. Once you have completed the questionnaire, please seal it and return it to me in the provided self-addressed envelope. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and by completing this questionnaire, you are consenting to participate in this study and give me permission to use your responses in my final analysis. Please note, that respondents must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study and that all responses are confidential.

If you have any additional questions or comments regarding this study, please feel free to contact me via email at: adonisbolden@hotmail.com; via telephone at: (216) 798-3588 or my advisor Dr. Dianne Gut at: gut@ohio.edu; via telephone at (740) 593-0874.

As a token of my appreciation, I have enclosed an Ohio University ink pen to assist you with the completion of this questionnaire. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Adonis Bolden

Dianne Gut, Ph.D
APPENDIX C: VIGNETTE 1

Directions:

Please read the following vignette carefully. After reading the vignette, please respond to the questions that follow.

Note: The following vignette is a hypothetical scenario and does not describe an actual student. Under normal circumstances, there would be additional information provided that would create a more holistic picture of the student. That being said, consider the information below as being representative of notes shared during a teacher’s conference.

VIGNETTE

Justin has scored 393 on the Reading portion of the Ohio Achievement Test. This score places him in the Basic category. His latest report card indicated that he received a “D” in Spelling, a “C” in Math, a “D” in Science, a “D” in Social Studies, an “A” in Physical Education, and a “D” in Reading. Based upon the anecdotal notes taken by his classroom teacher, Justin struggles with word recognition, reading comprehension, and reads at an extremely low rate. Additionally, Justin received multiple unsatisfactory marks (U’s) in the areas of: works well with others; comes prepared to class; and problem solves well on his own.

Justin is an average height, nine year old, fourth grade African American student at a local elementary school. Described by his third grade teacher as being boisterous, combative, yet charismatic, Justin has earned a reputation amongst the teachers at his school as being undisciplined, disrespectful, and at times, a “natural born leader.” Many school personnel members, chief among this group is Justin’s current teacher, believe that Justin’s inappropriate behavior can be traced back to his frustration in the classroom setting where he struggles academically. Justin is consistently reprimanded by the teacher for being inattentive during lessons, distracting other students, and for failing to complete homework assignments.

1. Based upon his academic performance, how likely would you be to recommend Justin be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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Not Recommend | Unsure | Definitely Recommend


With what level of **certainty** do you feel confident in your decision to recommend Justin be evaluated?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Certain Indifferent Extremely Certain

Regarding your response to the **academic performance** question, please share your rationale making your selection.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. Based upon his **classroom conduct**, how likely would you be to recommend Justin be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Recommend Unsure Definitely Recommend

With what level of **certainty** do you feel confident in your decision to recommend Justin be evaluated?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Certain Indifferent Extremely Certain

Regarding your response to **classroom conduct** question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

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3. Based upon his standardized test score, how likely would you be to recommend Justin be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Justin be evaluated?

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Regarding your response to the standardized test question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

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4. Based upon the anecdotal information, how likely would you be to recommend Justin be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Justin be evaluated?

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Regarding your response to the *anecdotal information* question, please share your rationale for making your decision.

5. Based upon all the provided information, **overall**, how likely would you be to recommend Justin be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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With what level of **certainty** do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Justin be evaluated?

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Regarding your response to the **overall** question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

6. **Would you like to provide any additional comments?:**

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Demographic Information

1. How many years have you been teaching? __________

2. How many Special Education referrals have you made this year? __________
   > Typically, which gender group do you refer more often for Special Education testing?

   [ ] Girls
   [ ] Boys

3. How many students are in your class? __________

4. What is your ethnicity? ________________

5. What grade level do you teach? ________________

6. What is your age? ________________

7. What is your gender? ________________

8. Do you have experience with teaching students from ethnic backgrounds different than your own?

   [ ] Yes
   [ ] No

9. If you answered yes to question #9, how many years of experience do you have?
   __________

Please return this form to:
Adonis Bolden
2 Monticello Dr. # 102
Athens, Ohio 45701


**VIGNETTE 2**

**Directions:**

Please read the following vignette carefully. After reading the vignette, please respond to the questions that follow.

Note: The following vignette is a hypothetical scenario and does not describe an actual student. Under normal circumstances, there would be additional information provided that would create a more holistic picture of the student. That being said, consider the information below as being representative of notes shared during a teacher's conference.

**VIGNETTE**

Karen has scored 393 on the Reading portion of the Ohio Achievement Test. This score places her in the Basic category. Her latest report card indicated that she received a “D” in Spelling, a “C” in Math, a “D” in Science, a “D” in Social Studies, an “A” in Physical Education, and a “D” in Reading. Based upon the anecdotal notes taken by her classroom teacher, Karen struggles with word recognition, reading comprehension, and reads at an extremely low rate. Additionally, Karen received multiple unsatisfactory marks (U’s) in the areas of: works well with others; comes prepared to class; and problem solves well on her own.

Karen is an average height, nine year old, fourth grade African American student at a local elementary school. Described by her third grade teacher as being boisterous, combative, yet charismatic, Karen has earned a reputation amongst the teachers at her school as being undisciplined, disrespectful, and at times, a “natural born leader.” Many school personnel members, chief among this group is Karen’s current teacher, believe that Karen’s inappropriate behavior can be traced back to her frustration in the classroom setting where she struggles academically. Karen is consistently reprimanded by the teacher for being inattentive during lessons, distracting other students, and for failing to complete homework assignments.

1. Based upon her **academic performance**, how likely would you be to recommend Karen be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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**Image:**

The image contains a page from a document with text describing a vignette about a student named Karen. Karen has scored 393 on the Reading portion of the Ohio Achievement Test and has received various marks on her report card. The vignette discusses Karen's struggles with reading, word recognition, and academic performance, as well as her behavior in the classroom. The text asks for a rating of how likely it is to recommend Karen receive Special Education services, with a scale ranging from 0 to 10. The options given are Not Recommend, Unsure, and Definitely Recommend.
With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend Karen be evaluated?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Certain Indifferent Extremely Certain

Regarding your response to the academic performance question, please share your rationale making your selection.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. Based upon her classroom conduct, how likely would you be to recommend Karen be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Recommend Unsure Definitely Recommend

With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend Karen be evaluated?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Certain Indifferent Extremely Certain

Regarding your response to classroom conduct question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

________________________________________________________________________
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3. Based upon her **standardized test score**, how likely would you be to recommend Karen be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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Not | Unsure | Definitely |
Recommend |

With what level of **certainty** do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Karen be evaluated?

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Certain |

Regarding your response to the **standardized test question**, please share your rationale for making your selection.

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4. Based upon the **anecdotal information**, how likely would you be to recommend Karen be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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Not | Unsure | Definitely |
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With what level of **certainty** do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Karen be evaluated?

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Not | Indifferent | Extremely |
Certain |
Regarding your response to the **anecdotal information** question, please share your rationale for making your decision.

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5. Based upon all the provided information, **overall**, how likely would you be to recommend Karen be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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With what level of **certainty** do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Karen be evaluated?

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Regarding your response to the **overall** question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

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6. **Would you like to provide any additional comments?:**

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**Demographic Information**

1. How many years have you been teaching? ________________

2. How many Special Education referrals have you made this year? ________________
   - Typically, which gender group do you refer more often for Special Education testing?
     - [ ] Girls
     - [ ] Boys

3. How many students are in your class? ________________

4. What is your ethnicity? ____________________________

5. What grade level do you teach? ____________________

6. What is your age? ____________________________

7. What is your gender? ____________________________

8. Do you have experience with teaching students from ethnic backgrounds different than your own?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

9. If you answered yes to question #8, how many years of experience do you have? __________

Please return this form to:
Adonis Bolden
2 Monticello Dr. # 102
Athens, Ohio 45701
VIGNETTE 3

Directions:

Please read the following vignette carefully. After reading the vignette, please respond to the questions that follow.

Note: The following vignette is a hypothetical scenario and does not describe an actual student. Under normal circumstances, there would be additional information provided that would create a more holistic picture of the student. That being said, consider the information below as being representative of notes shared during a teacher’s conference.

VIGNETTE

Gabriel has scored 393 on the Reading portion of the Ohio Achievement Test. This score places him in the Basic category. His latest report card indicated that he received a “D” in Spelling, a “C” in Math, a “D” in Science, a “D” in Social Studies, an “A” in Physical Education, and a “D” in Reading. Based upon the anecdotal notes taken by his classroom teacher, Gabriel struggles with word recognition, reading comprehension, and reads at an extremely low rate. Additionally, Gabriel received multiple unsatisfactory marks (U’s) in the areas of: works well with others; comes prepared to class; and problem solves well on his own.

Gabriel is an average height, nine year old, fourth grade Latino American student at a local elementary school. Described by his third grade teacher as being boisterous, combative, yet charismatic, Gabriel has earned a reputation amongst the teachers at his school as being undisciplined, disrespectful, and at times, a “natural born leader.” Many school personnel members, chief among this group is Gabriel’s current teacher, believe that Gabriel’s inappropriate behavior can be traced back to his frustration in the classroom setting where he struggles academically. Gabriel is consistently reprimanded by the teacher for being inattentive during lessons, distracting other students, and for failing to complete homework assignments.

1. Based upon his academic performance, how likely would you be to recommend Gabriel be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend Gabriel be evaluated?

0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

Not Certain  Indifferent  Extremely Certain

Regarding your response to the academic performance question, please share your rationale making your selection.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. Based upon his classroom conduct, how likely would you be to recommend Gabriel be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

Not Recommend  Unsure  Definitely Recommend

With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend Gabriel be evaluated?

0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

Not Certain  Indifferent  Extremely Certain

Regarding your response to classroom conduct question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

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3. Based upon his **standardized test score**, how likely would you be to recommend Gabriel be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Gabriel be evaluated?

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Regarding your response to the **standardized test question**, please share your rationale for making your selection.

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4. Based upon the **anecdotal information**, how likely would you be to recommend Gabriel be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Gabriel be evaluated?

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Regarding your response to the *anecdotal information* question, please share your rationale for making your decision.

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5. Based upon all the provided information, overall, how likely would you be to recommend Gabriel be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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With what level of *certainty* do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Gabriel be evaluated?

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Regarding your response to the overall question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

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__________________________________________________________________________

6. *Would you like to provide any additional comments?*

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
Demographic Information

1. How many years have you been teaching? ________________

2. How many Special Education referrals have you made this year? 
   ➢ Typically, which gender group do you refer more often for Special Education testing?

   □ Girls
   □ Boys

3. How many students are in your class? ____________

4. What is your ethnicity? ________________________

5. What grade level do you teach? _________________

6. What is your age? ________________

7. What is your gender? ________________

8. Do you have experience with teaching students from ethnic backgrounds different than your own?

   □ Yes
   □ No

9. If you answered yes to question #8, how many years of experience do you have?

   __________

Please return this form to:
Adonis Bolden
2 Monticello Dr. # 102
Athens, Ohio 45701
VIGNETTE 4

Directions:

Please read the following vignette carefully. After reading the vignette, please respond to the questions that follow.

Note: The following vignette is a hypothetical scenario and does not describe an actual student. Under normal circumstances, there would be additional information provided that would create a more holistic picture of the student. That being said, consider the information below as being representative of notes shared during a teacher’s conference.

VIGNETTE

Maria has scored 393 on the Reading portion of the Ohio Achievement Test. This score places her in the Basic category. Her latest report card indicated that she received a “D” in Spelling, a “C” in Math, a “D” in Science, a “D” in Social Studies, an “A” in Physical Education, and a “D” in Reading. Based upon the anecdotal notes taken by her classroom teacher, Maria struggles with word recognition, reading comprehension, and reads at an extremely low rate. Additionally, Maria received multiple unsatisfactory marks (U’s) in the areas of: works well with others; comes prepared to class; and problem solves well on her own.

Maria is an average height, nine year old, fourth grade Latina American student at a local elementary school. Described by her third grade teacher as being boisterous, combative, yet charismatic, Maria has earned a reputation amongst the teachers at her school as being undisciplined, disrespectful, and at times, a “natural born leader.” Many school personnel members, chief among this group is Maria’s current teacher, believe that Maria’s inappropriate behavior can be traced back to her frustration in the classroom setting where she struggles academically. Maria is consistently reprimanded by the teacher for being inattentive during lessons, distracting other students, and for failing to complete homework assignments.

1. Based upon her academic performance, how likely would you be to recommend Maria be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend Maria be evaluated?

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Regarding your response to the academic performance question, please share your rationale making your selection.

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2. Based upon her classroom conduct, how likely would you be to recommend Maria be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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Regarding your response to classroom conduct question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

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3. Based upon her standardized test score, how likely would you be to recommend Maria be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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Not Recommend      Unsure      Definitely Recommend

With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Maria be evaluated?

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Not Certain        Indifferent    Extremely Certain

Regarding your response to the standardized test question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

4. Based upon the anecdotal information, how likely would you be to recommend Maria be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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Not Recommend      Unsure      Definitely Recommend

With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Maria be evaluated?

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Not Certain        Indifferent    Extremely Certain
Regarding your response to the anecdotal information question, please share your rationale for making your decision.

5. Based upon all the provided information, overall, how likely would you be to recommend Maria be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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Regarding your response to the overall question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

6. Would you like to provide any additional comments?:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
**Demographic Information**

1. How many years have you been teaching? ________________

2. How many Special Education referrals have you made this year?
   ➢ Typically, which gender group do you refer more often for Special Education testing?
   - [ ] Girls
   - [ ] Boys

3. How many students are in your class? ________________

4. What is your ethnicity? ____________________________

5. What grade level do you teach? ____________________

6. What is your age? ____________________________

7. What is your gender? ____________________________

8. Do you have experience with teaching students from ethnic backgrounds different than your own?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

9. If you answered yes to question #8, how many years of experience do you have? ________________

---

Please return this form to:
Adonis Bolden
2 Monticello Dr. # 102
Athens, Ohio 45701
VIGNETTE 5

Directions:

Please read the following vignette carefully. After reading the vignette, please respond to the questions that follow.

Note: The following vignette is a hypothetical scenario and does not describe an actual student. Under normal circumstances, there would be additional information provided that would create a more holistic picture of the student. That being said, consider the information below as being representative of notes shared during a teacher's conference.

VIGNETTE

Michael has scored 393 on the Reading portion of the Ohio Achievement Test. This score places him in the Basic category. His latest report card indicates that he received a "D" in Spelling, a "C" in Math, a "D" in Science, a "D" in Social Studies, an "A" in Physical Education, and a "D" in Reading. Based upon the anecdotal notes taken by his classroom teacher, Michael struggles with word recognition, reading comprehension, and reads at an extremely low rate. Additionally, Michael received multiple unsatisfactory marks (U's) in the areas of: works well with others; comes prepared to class; and problem solves well on his own.

Michael is an average height, nine year old, fourth grade Caucasian American student at a local elementary school. Described by his third grade teacher as being boisterous, combative, yet charismatic, Michael has earned a reputation amongst the teachers at his school as being undisciplined, disrespectful, and at times, a "natural born leader." Many school personnel members, chief among this group is Michael's current teacher, believe that Michael's inappropriate behavior can be traced back to his frustration in the classroom setting where he struggles academically. Michael is consistently reprimanded by the teacher for being inattentive during lessons, distracting other students, and for failing to complete homework assignments.

1. Based upon his academic performance, how likely would you be to recommend Michael be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend Michael be evaluated?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Certain Indifferent Extremely Certain

Regarding your response to the academic performance question, please share your rationale making your selection.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. Based upon his classroom conduct, how likely would you be to recommend Michael be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Recommend Unsure Definitely Recommend

With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend Michael be evaluated?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Certain Indifferent Extremely Certain

Regarding your response to classroom conduct question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
3. Based upon his **standardized test score**, how likely would you be to recommend Michael be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Recommend                  Unsure                   Definitely Recommend

With what level of **certainty** do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Michael be evaluated?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Certain                   Indifferent             Extremely Certain

Regarding your response to the **standardized test question**, please share your rationale for making your selection.

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

4. Based upon the **anecdotal information**, how likely would you be to recommend Michael be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Recommend                  Unsure                   Definitely Recommend

With what level of **certainty** do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Michael be evaluated?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Certain                   Indifferent             Extremely Certain
Regarding your response to the **anecdotal information** question, please share your rationale for making your decision.


5. Based upon all the provided information, **overall**, how likely would you be to recommend Michael be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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With what level of **certainty** do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Michael be evaluated?

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Regarding your response to the **overall** question, please share your rationale for making your selection.


6. **Would you like to provide any additional comments?:**


**Demographic Information**

1. How many years have you been teaching? ________________

2. How many Special Education referrals have you made this year? ________________
   - Typically, which gender group do you refer more often for Special Education testing?
     - [ ] Girls
     - [ ] Boys

3. How many students are in your class? ________________

4. What is your ethnicity? _____________________________

5. What grade level do you teach? _____________________

6. What is your age? ________________________________

7. What is your gender? ______________________________

8. Do you have experience with teaching students from ethnic backgrounds different than your own?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

9. If you answered yes to question #8, how many years of experience do you have? ________________

Please return this form to:
Adonis Bolden
2 Monticello Dr. # 102
Athens, Ohio 45701
VIGNETTE 6

Directions:

Please read the following vignette carefully. After reading the vignette, please respond to the questions that follow.

Note: The following vignette is a hypothetical scenario and does not describe an actual student. Under normal circumstances, there would be additional information provided that would create a more holistic picture of the student. That being said, consider the information below as being representative of notes shared during a teacher’s conference.

VIGNETTE

Hannah has scored 393 on the Reading portion of the Ohio Achievement Test. This score places her in the Basic category. Her latest report card indicated that she received a “D” in Spelling, a “C” in Math, a “D” in Science, a “D” in Social Studies, an “A” in Physical Education, and a “D” in Reading. Based upon the anecdotal notes taken by her classroom teacher, Hannah struggles with word recognition, reading comprehension, and reads at an extremely low rate. Additionally, Hannah received multiple unsatisfactory marks (U’s) in the areas of: works well with others; comes prepared to class; and problem solves well on her own.

Hannah is an average height, nine year old, fourth grade Caucasian American student at a local elementary school. Described by her third grade teacher as being boisterous, combative, yet charismatic, Hannah has earned a reputation amongst the teachers at her school as being undisciplined, disrespectful, and at times, a “natural born leader.” Many school personnel members, chief among this group is Hannah’s current teacher, believe that Hannah’s inappropriate behavior can be traced back to her frustration in the classroom setting where she struggles academically. Hannah is consistently reprimanded by the teacher for being inattentive during lessons, distracting other students, and for failing to complete homework assignments.

1. Based upon her academic performance, how likely would you be to recommend Hannah be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend Hannah be evaluated?

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Regarding your response to the academic performance question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

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2. Based upon her classroom conduct, how likely would you be to recommend Hannah be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

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With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend Hannah be evaluated?

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Regarding your response to classroom conduct question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

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3. Based upon her standardized test score, how likely would you be to recommend Hannah be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Recommend Unsure Definitely Recommend

With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Hannah be evaluated?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Certain Indifferent Extremely Certain

Regarding your response to the standardized test question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. Based upon the anecdotal information, how likely would you be to recommend Hannah be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Recommend Unsure Definitely Recommend
With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Hannah be evaluated?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Certain Indifferent Extremely Certain

Regarding your response to the anecdotal information question, please share your rationale for making your decision.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. Based upon all the provided information, overall, how likely would you be to recommend Hannah be evaluated to receive Special Education services?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Recommend Unsure Definitely Recommend

With what level of certainty do you feel confident in your decision to recommend that Hannah be evaluated?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Certain Indifferent Extremely Certain

Regarding your response to the overall question, please share your rationale for making your selection.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
6. Would you like to provide any additional comments?:


Demographic Information

1. How many years have you been teaching? ________________

2. How many Special Education referrals have you made this year? ________________
   ➢ Typically, which gender group do you refer more often for Special Education testing?
   
   ☐ Girls ☐ Boys

3. How many students are in your class? ____________

4. What is your ethnicity? ___________________________

5. What grade level do you teach? ________________

6. What is your age? ________________

7. What is your gender? ________________

8. Do you have experience with teaching students from ethnic backgrounds different than your own?
   
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

9. If you answered yes to question #8, how many years of experience do you have? ____________

Please return this form to:
Adonis Bolden
2 Monticello Dr. # 102
Athens, Ohio 45701
APPENDIX D: TOTAL SCORE

Estimated Marginal Means of TotalScore

Race of student in vignette

Gender of student in vignette
- male
- female

Estimated Marginal Means

0.00 1.00 2.00 3.00 4.00 5.00 6.00 7.00 8.00 9.00 10.00
- white
- back
- latino
APPENDIX E: CERTAINTY SCORE

Estimated Marginal Means of Certainty Score

Race of student in vignette

Gender of student in vignette
- male
- female
APPENDIX F: MEANS PLOT FOR TOTAL SCORE BY CERTAINTY SCORE