WHEN BEING SPECIAL AIN'T SO SPECIAL: EDUCATOR RACE AND GENDER AS PREDICTORS OF BLACK AND LATINO MALE SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRALS

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When Being Special Ain't So Special: Educator Race and Gender as Predictors of Black and Latino Male Special Education Referrals

by

Courtney Revels-Turner

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WHEN BEING SPECIAL AIN'T SO SPECIAL: EDUCATOR RACE AND GENDER AS PREDICTORS OF BLACK AND LATINO MALE SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRALS

By

Courtney Revels-Turner

ASHLAND UNIVERSITY, 2022

Dr. Judy A. Alston, Committee Chair

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of implicit bias in the referral process for special education. The study explored the relationship between independent variables such as student and teacher race/ethnicity, gender of teacher, teachers' years of teaching experience, and how likely teachers would refer a male student for special education and if there are significant differences in teacher rating of severity based on a student's race/ethnicity in Ohio's eight large urban school districts. This qualitative, correlational study used a survey methodology that included pictures to examine if student and teacher demographic variables predicted how likely a teacher would refer Black and Latino male students for special education evaluation. Critical race theory and social exclusion theory guided this research. Results from a Pearson correlation, multiple linear regression, and ANOVA revealed that years of teaching experience was associated with a higher likelihood to refer, and an increase in level of severity was also associated with a higher likelihood to refer. The findings showed a direct correlation between years of experience, likelihood to refer, and severity of behavior rating. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the trends in the nominal-level variables. Means and standard deviations were used to summarize the continuous-level variables.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my husband, Rasheed, who has demonstrated endless patience, support, and acceptance over the last 20 years. I am grateful to journey through this life with you.

To my girls, Milan, Payton, and Chase, for the greatest gift—unconditional love. I hope this serves as an example of GOD's will in action and the pure strength of a woman; know that you can do all things through him. I love y'all beyond words and past infinity. You girls are my reason why and so much more!

This work is also dedicated to my mothers, Teresa, Cynthia, and Diane (Rest in Peace), for being a perfect demonstration of what it means to be a Strong Black Woman, in every essence of the word.

To the spirit of my father and uncle in heaven, thank you for walking with me every day and protecting me. To my sister, brother, and my best friends who have provided strength, courage, and motivation, thank you for always being there for me.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Being misidentified as needing special education (SE), placed in a restrictive setting, or disciplined more frequently can negatively affect student outcomes (Kearney, 2011; No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001). According to Freeman et al. (2019), youth identified as SE consistently fall behind their peers academically and behaviorally, are likely to be excluded from school, drop out more frequently, and face higher incarceration rates and a host of other negative outcomes as adults. Additionally, Morgan et al. (2018) claimed Special Education has been characterized as discriminatory, having "systemic bias," and constituting a "legalized form of structural segregation and racism" with disproportionality as a persistent mark of shame. Donovan and Cross' (2002) "systemic bias" hypothesis suggests that discriminatory identification procedures contribute to the overrepresentation of minority students in receiving services. Also, Woodson and Harris (2018) cited teachers routinely refer students they categorized as behaviorally challenging for evaluation when they disrupt the learning environment. The narrative associated with behaviorally challenging White students is most often less threatening and treated as an isolated incident and continued behaviors are attributed to other factors or disabilities. Connelly (2021) suggested White cultural norms are the premise behind many facets of society, but they especially influence education-normative communication patterns, the English language, and rationalization of expressions and emotions are normalized based on the White norm system. Teacher narratives in the eligibility process for minority students have the most profound effect and can be driven

by negative experiences or personal biases associated with the cultural group. Gender, race, and teaching experience have also been linked to referrals.

With the nation's current social and political unrest surrounding systemic racism and bias, it has become important to contribute to the research and education of systems to improve outcomes for minorities disproportionately represented. State education departments and local districts have continuously recognized disproportionality as demonstrated with the Ohio Department of Education initiative: Addressing Significant Disproportionality initiative (2020); however, these mandates seem to have little impact. Therefore, this research study explored the likelihood of referrals based on teacher and student ethnicity lending to the disproportionality of Black and Latino male students. The research findings contribute to the field and offer interventions to reduce the occurrence of implicit bias within the referral process for SE. The information presented outlines the areas of implicit bias in the process of student referrals contributing to the disproportionality of Black and Latino males receiving SE services.

Background of the Problem

Grindal et al. (2019) demonstrated a great deal of recent evidence points to the troubling existence of systemic racial biases in our schools and communities that lead to Black and Latino students being identified for SE services at higher rates. He further states:

> Some have attributed the high rates of special education placement among students of color to teachers implicit and explicit beliefs regarding the capacities of students from different backgrounds (interpersonal racism) and the systemic

> biases built into the structure of communities and schools (structural racism). (p. 529)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 2004), Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADA; 1990), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 for "free appropriate public education" (FAPE) all recognize the importance of providing protections for individuals with disabilities. The IDEA (2004), FAPE, and ADA policies mandate students receive a quality education comparable and in alignment to their general education (GE) peers, free of discrimination. IDEA (2004) defined a least restrictive environment (LRE) as follows,

> 1) Your child should be with kids in general education to the "maximum extent" that is appropriate and 2) Special classes, separate schools, or removal from the general education class should only happen when your child's learning or thinking difference—a "disability" under IDEA—is so severe that supplementary aids and services can't provide your child with an appropriate education; this was often not the case. (Morin, n.d.)

McIntosh et al. (2014) further noted the mandates serve as protections in theory, but these policies have been undermined by biases—both explicit and implicit—in subjective decision-making and labeling students prior to identification permeates the system designed to support students' access to additional educational services. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has been an active driver in the importance of accessibility to GE curriculum for all students; the decision to place students in the resource environment should be the last placement option driven by data collection. The mandates are the foundational policies created to diminish discrimination based on disability. Furthermore,

SE services provide protections for students with visible and nonvisible deficits and barriers to learning.

With the understanding of SE mandates and prior research conducted over a 40-year span, disproportionality continues to exist and contribute to negative outcomes of Black and Latino male students. Moreover, scholars have explored disproportionality, yet they have not looked at implicit bias being the driver behind this phenomenon.

Statement of the Problem

Students, specifically Black and Latino students, continue to be overidentified for SE due to potential bias in the referral/identification process. For example, Grindal et al. (2019) collected individual-level data on full populations of K–12 public school students across several states and found racial and ethnic inequalities in identification continue within income and minority categories. Research by The Office of Special Education Programs reported 15.5% of Black students nationwide were identified as having a disability, compared to 13.7% of White students (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, 2017). As well, Morgan et al. (2018) claimed, "despite the far-reaching implications for federal legislation and policy as well as educational research practice, explicit and replicable syntheses of the empirical evidence of systemic bias in special education are virtually non-existent" (p. 3). Although there is research on disproportionality, additional research exploring the relationship between student and teacher race/ethnicity, gender of teacher, teachers' years of teaching experience, and how likely teachers would refer a male student for SE and if there are significant differences in teacher rating of severity based on a student's race/ethnicity should be added to the field of research on bias and SE. Moreover, the imbalance of White teachers compared to

minority students continues; predictions indicate by the year 2050, the United States will become a country of minorities (Chideya, 1999; Marx, 2002). Currently, more than half of the students attending urban schools are non-White (Chen, 2014). Given these facts, school reform is necessary due to the changing demographics and distinctive challenges that arise when attempting to teach in highly multicultural contexts. Therefore, significant changes are needed in the way educators do business because most principals and teachers do not come from similar cultural backgrounds as their diverse constituencies (Gay, 2005; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of implicit bias in the referral process for SE. The study explored the relationship between independent variables such as student and teacher race/ethnicity, gender of teacher, teachers' years of teaching experience, and how likely teachers would refer a male student for SE and if there are significant differences in teacher rating of severity based on a student's race/ethnicity in Ohio's eight large urban school districts. Understanding how we view and provide narratives of students from minority cultures or groups and their behaviors lend to perspectives and stereotypes that may not always be representative of the whole group. Thus, it is important to acknowledge how the implicit beliefs of educational stakeholders impact the identification process (Connelly, 2021). The ability to reduce implicit bias relies on the structures of policy and practice to remove the opportunity for subjective influence. Implicit bias permeates all facets of society; the inherent nature and storage in our mental rolodex requires intentional actions and reduced opportunity for subjective application of experiences that may have been isolated or negative. Implicit

bias is likely to be activated and applied during moments when the cognitive load was working at higher capacities (Burgess et al., 2016), such as moments when a student is in crisis or exhibiting challenging behaviors over days or weeks.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: Is there a relationship between professional demographic factors of educators and their likelihood for referring youth of color for SE?

H0: There is no statistically significant correlation between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience, teacher attitude towards inclusion, and likelihood to refer a male student for an SE evaluation.

H1: There is a statistically significant correlation between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience, teacher attitude towards inclusion, and likelihood to refer a male student to for an SE evaluation.

H0: There is no statistically significant predictive relationship between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience, teacher attitude towards inclusion, and likelihood to refer a male student for an SE evaluation.

H1: There is a statistically significant predictive relationship between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience, teacher attitude towards inclusion, and likelihood to refer a male student for an SE evaluation.

RQ2: Are White teachers more likely to refer students of color or White students for an SE evaluation than non-White teachers?

H0: There are no statistically significant differences between White and non-White teachers' SE evaluation referral likelihood between White and non-white male students.

H1: There are statistically significant differences between White and non-White teachers' SE evaluation referral likelihood between White and non-White male students.

H0: There are no statistically significant differences between teacher race and likelihood to refer for an SE evaluation or their perceived level of severity of behavior.

H1: There are no statistically significant differences between teacher race and likelihood to refer for an SE evaluation or their perceived level of severity of behavior.

Significance of the Study

This study fills the gap in research regarding the relationship between teacher demographics and student narratives. I found many studies that explored disproportionality, but none specifically examined the possibility of bias in referral narratives that lead to over-identification. Education stakeholders should care about how implicit bias has impacted over-identification of minorities in SE, especially when they are twice as likely to be placed in more restrictive setting and three times more likely to identify Black students with an emotional disturbance (Ohio Department of Education

[ODE], n.d.). Research has not provided a specific process for preventing implicit bias; therefore, future contributions to the literature and research are important.

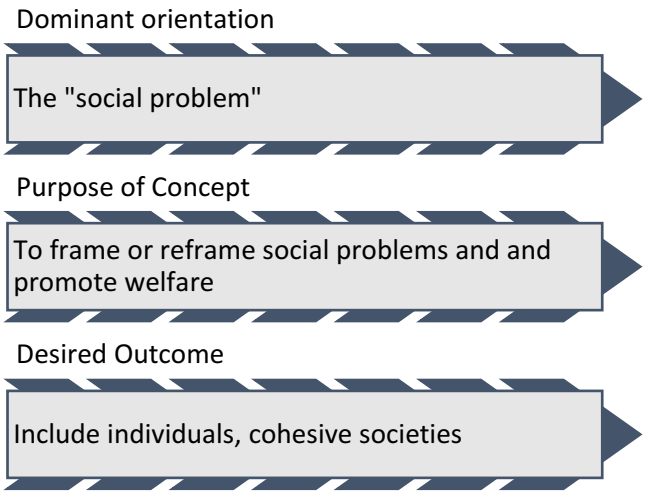
Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Social Exclusion

I used social exclusion as the conceptual framework lens to guide the study; the framework explains the persistent social challenges that social groups experience, such as synthetically enacted and enforced barriers within society. The adverse learning outcomes of students placed in SE settings have been well documented. Social exclusion theory is applicable to this study because of the connection between teacher referrals and minority students misidentified for SE services based on behaviors deemed normal by the predominant cultural group (Connelly, 2021; Woodson & Harris, 2018). The teacher connection is important to recognize because they make the initial referral, which can be driven by a lack of awareness of implicit bias and beliefs as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Social Exclusion Theory



Critical Race Theory

The assertion that race is a way to differentiate human beings is a social concept, a product of human thought, which is inherently hierarchical. CRT defines the set of antiracist tenets, modes of knowledge production, and strategies coordinated by a group of Black legal scholars in the 1980s and organized into a framework targeting the subtle and systemic ways racism currently operates above and beyond any overly racist expression (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2018). The argument is both a legal and academic study influencing many scholars and studies; CRT is often applied in the education, public health, and legal arenas.

Although CRT has been largely used in legal research, its influence has expanded into other disciplines including education. CRT is the recurrent theme of racial bias and systematic racism that impacts foundational operating systems in the United States, including educational institutions. CRT's argument that racial bias continued after the Civil Rights Era can be a catalyst for the disproportionate number of minorities in SE and those specifically being overidentified for certain exceptionalities. It can be argued that cultural norms can be misconstrued as characteristics of disabilities for some students (Connelly, 2021). The implications of CRT are prevalent in the recent over-aggression of policing of minorities, which resulted in loss of life for Michael Brown and George Floyd. Even before these events occurred, Martinez (2014) wrote, "the post-emancipation devaluing of black bodies is nothing short of an American tradition, but it is a tradition largely overlooked due to white supremacist bias in the media, and significantly, bias in the formation and telling's of US history" (p. 15). CRT has been the legal argument that

shifted from “blaming the victim” practices based on biological shortcomings to blaming practices that focus on the victim’s shortcomings rooted in culture or ethnicity.

Aja Martinez (2014) cited Bonilla-Silva in *Critical Race Theory: Its Origins, History, and Importance to the Discourses and Rhetoric of Race*:

> The ideology of color-blind racism relies on four frames that Bonilla–Silva terms: abstract liberalism, naturalization of race, cultural racism, and minimization of racism (26). These frames are central to this ideology and can be utilized toward interpreting and analyzing the discourse of color-blind racism that in turn influences and produces structural effects of a dominant racial ideology (p.15).

This explanation provides deeper understanding of the reasons disproportionality continues to impact minorities within SE and why cultural norms can be continuously mistaken, although research has been conducted. Think of Black males with predominantly White staff in urban settings, the cultural and community norms can be vastly different for students and staff. The unconscious bias of staff can place Black male students in the SE identification cycle because their behaviors may not fit the norm of the dominant culture (Connelly, 2021). Black males are often generalized as emotionally disturbed whereas White students exhibiting the same behaviors are coddled or driven towards additional supports prior to Special Education or autism diagnosis. Educational policies can also speak to the dominant racial group; for example, “use an inside voice” is very subjective to culture.

Furthermore, the way the civil rights curriculum is commonly presented within primary and secondary schools suggests the Civil Rights Movement ended racism in the United States, which is grossly inaccurate (Martinez, 2014). CRT argues racism and bias

policy is still prevalent throughout the foundations of U.S. systems and the biases are applied regularly in legal, educational, and public health decision-making.

Additionally, this roadmap increases the likelihood of passage through the school-to-prison pipeline.

Definition of Terms

Disproportionality: a situation whereby a group of individuals is represented in an environment at a percentage that is higher or lower than their representation within the total population (Alexander, 2010).

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): IDEA mandates that FAPE "must be available to any individual child with a disability who needs SE and related services, even though the child has not failed or been retained in a course and is advancing from grade to grade" (IDEA, 2004, p. 46541).

General Education (GE) Class: A GE class is an educational setting comprised of regular education with nondisabled students.

General Education (GE) Teacher: A GE teacher is one who holds either a provisional or standard certification issued by the ODE.

Inclusion: The term inclusion has been defined in a variety of ways. For the purpose of this study, inclusion is defined as students with disabilities receiving all or some of their instruction in a GE classroom with a GE teacher teaching in concert with an SE teacher (McCray & McHatton, 2011).

Implicit Bias: Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are stimulated involuntarily and

without an individual's knowledge or deliberate control. These biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to disguise for reasons of social and/or political correctness (The Kirwin Institute, 2020).

Individualized Education Program: An individualized education program is a key legal document developed by a multidisciplinary team, including parents, school staff, and other personnel, that details how the student receives a FAPE in the LRE (IDEA, 2004).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): IDEA mandates that students with disabilities be educated with their nondisabled peers to the greatest extent possible. IDEA states that students will be educated in inclusive settings and removed to separate classes or schools only if they are unable to receive an appropriate education in a GE classroom with supplemental services and accommodations (Katsiyannis et al., 2012).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): The NCLB Act of 2001 provided an overhaul of the education system and requires states to establish challenging academic standards for all schools, test students regularly to ensure they are meeting those standards, and employ teachers who are highly qualified (NCLB, 2001).

Special Education (SE): SE means specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. SE includes instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings, including an early childhood education setting, and instruction in physical education.

SE Teacher: An SE teacher in the state of New Jersey is one who holds either a provisional or standard certification issued by the State Board of Examiners, with an endorsement to teach SE students.

Student with a Disability: A student with a disability is one who has been found eligible for SE and related services

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

An assumption that can be made is stakeholders are objective while participating in educational research and studies.

Limitations

The study has the following limitations:

1. Based on the number of participants, the sample does not represent all teachers across the United States.
2. The narrative may be too stereotypical and alert respondents who will then hide their bias during the rating process.
3. Respondents may make the results of the findings nongeneralizable.
4. The sample size was only taken from the Midwest portion of the United States, so the results do not speak to all the educators nationally.
5. The results are also limited to the participants' academic levels (i.e., primary or secondary participants). The goal was to limit the students' racial identities within the narratives; however, stereotypes of student behaviors may have alerted respondents who then may not have answered authentically. For example, if the

narrative sounded too much like a Black male student they have had prior experience with, they may have consciously hidden their bias.

Possible Delimitations

The following delimitations exist in this study:

1. Only urban districts in the Midwest were included in the study.
2. Only educational stakeholders who work with SE students and are involved in the identification process were selected to participate in the study.

Summary

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature related to disproportionality of minority students in SE. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology I used to conduct the study and research design. Chapter 3 also describes the instrument used to gather data, teacher rating form (TRF) instructions, and study participants. Chapter 4 provides a qualitative analysis of the findings and Chapter 5 summarizes, concludes, and provides recommendations for further research. The study also includes references and appendixes following Chapter 5.

CHAPTER II

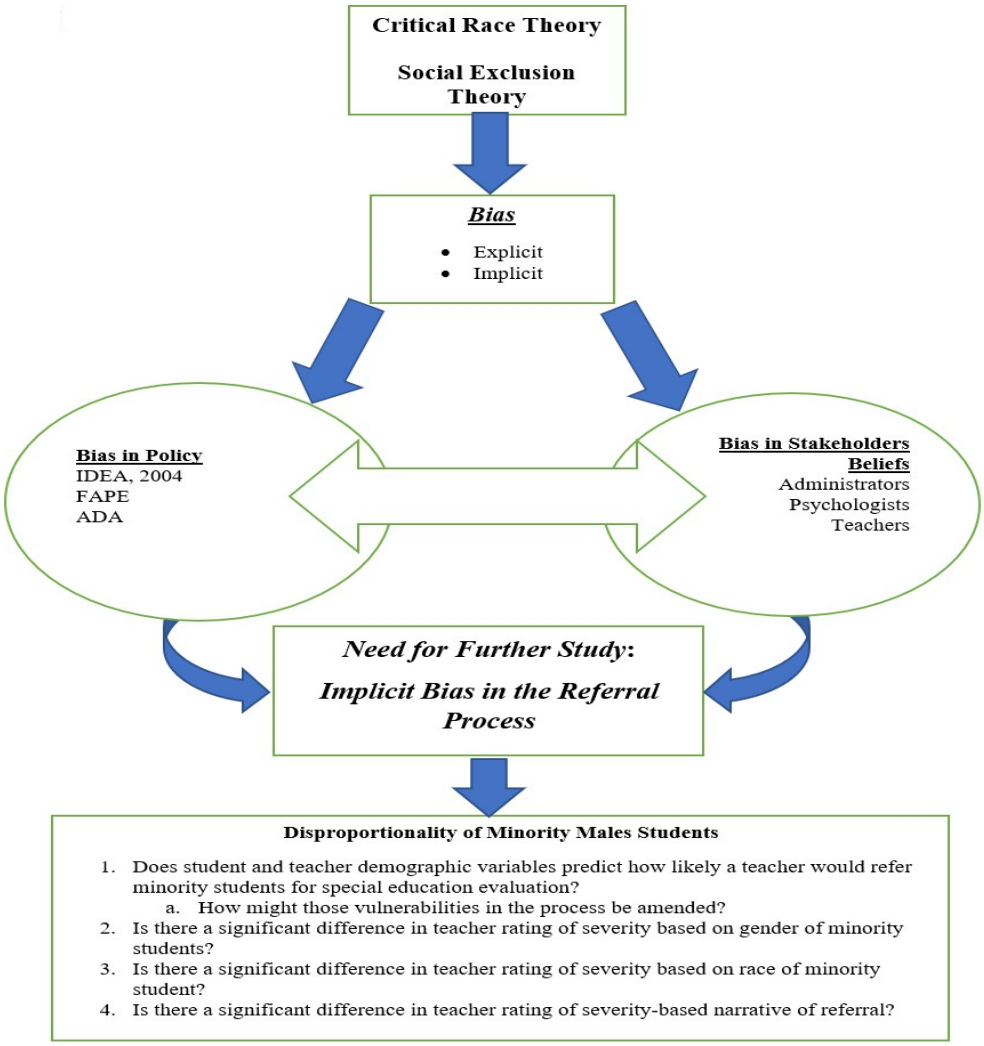
Review of the Literature

Overview

With the nation's current social and political unrest surrounding systemic racism and bias, it has become important to examine these systems to improve outcomes for minorities disproportionately represented in SE. Educators in Ohio are twice as likely to identify Black students with an intellectual disability and three times as likely to identify them with an emotional disturbance (ODE, n.d.). The identification process in the educational setting that identifies students as disabled, whether intellectually or behaviorally, is the initial action marking students as different from their typical peers and problematic in GE settings (Losen, 2011). Although state education departments and local districts recognize disproportionality, none speak to the implicit or explicit bias that can influence the referral process. However, the outcomes for Black males disproportionally being referred for SE are clear: poor academic performance, increased risk of contact with the juvenile justice system, and low employment rates after high school (Scardamalia et al., 2019). The present study was designed to examine implicit bias in the referral process for SE and contribute to the research to help reduce the occurrence of implicit bias within SE. The review of literature focuses on research on bias in policy and how it contributes to the disproportionality of minorities receiving SE services. Reviewing, synthesizing, and analyzing sources helped paint a clear picture of bias in the referral system driving disproportionality in SE. The following illustration depicts the process of synthesizing the subject matter.

Figure 2

Literature Review Thought Map



A comprehensive search for research on the disproportionality of minority students in SE and their experience and outcomes in schools was conducted using Ashland University's online library portal. Search terms included *special education*, *student achievement*, *school discipline*, *juvenile justice*, *disproportionality*, *minority*

students, *discipline*, *referral*, and *inclusion*. Search tools and databases such as Academic Search Complete, Academic Search Premier, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, ERIC, SAGE, and ResearchGate provided access to studies and yielded a considerable amount of peer-reviewed journal publications. Additionally, government databases were used to provide statistical information on the disproportionality of minority students in SE. The search was largely limited to peer-reviewed articles published from 2010 to the present; all journal articles were published in English.

Historical Context

Historically, legislative policies have attempted to ensure the benefits of SE programs are available to all who need them with protections from discrimination. Initially, both Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education for All-Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EHA) required the formal identification of children with handicapping conditions and the provision of appropriate educational services. At the same time, the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights-Act of 1964 prohibited (and still does) the classification of persons in a way that facilitates harm, including that of separateness, to members of a group identified by race, color, or national origin. The Office for Civil Rights, having enforcement responsibilities under Title VI and Section 504, previously examined disproportion in SE and other programs by means of a biannual survey of the nation's school and school district enrollments (Civil Rights Act, 1964).

Currently, the IDEA of 2004 (formerly EHA of 1975), the FAPE section of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the ADA continue to recognize and govern the importance of providing protections for individuals with disabilities. Past and present

legislative policies mandate students receive a quality education comparable and in alignment to their GE peers free of discrimination and in LREs. An LRE is explicitly defined in IDEA (2004) as follows:

> 1) Your child should be with kids in general education to the maximum extent that is appropriate, and 2) Special classes, separate schools, or removal from the general education class should only happen when your child's learning or thinking difference—a "disability" under IDEA—is so severe that supplementary aids and services can't provide your child with an appropriate education; this was often not the case.

The mandates are the foundational policies created to diminish discrimination based on disability. SE services provide protections for students with visible and nonvisible deficits and barriers to learning. The mandates serve as protections in theory, but in reality, these policies have been undermined by biases, both explicit and implicit in practice (McIntosh et al., 2014).

Theories Influencing Disproportionality of Minorities in SE

Theories such as CRT and social exclusion theory help researchers recognize how decisionmakers can hold implicit biases, influencing the policies and outcomes impacting the disproportionality of minority students referred to and represented in SE. Looking at the issue through the lens of CRT, the process for identification can mask the systemic beliefs of oppression. McIntosh et al. (2014) argued that "the multi-dimensional view of biases requires a more precise understanding of bias and decision making" (p. 5). Additionally, Beachum and Gallo (2019) suggested that the transformative view of social justice leadership be considered as another framework for understanding implicit bias.

This conceptual model suggests focusing on humanistic evidence-based strategies, such as relationships, flexibility, and morality to reduce implicit bias (Beachum & Gullo, 2019).

Research is needed on the continuous disproportionality of minorities in SE related to implicit bias. Implicit biases, unlike explicit biases, are hidden associations individuals hold relative to the culture, environment, and other factors related to members of another culture. Implicit bias is defined as the attitudes and stereotypes that direct individuals to act without conscious recognition of discrimination based on schemas, which are mental structures individuals use to inform their future interactions; however, schemas can have negative outcomes when rooted in discriminatory experiences or messaging (Rynders, 2019). The following assumptions have been made relative to disproportionality:

- Minority students who are thought of as poor are more likely to be exposed to sociodemographic stressors that are commonplace to poverty, (Connelly, 2021; Rynders, 2019)
- Students who come from poverty-stricken backgrounds are less developmentally ready for school, and (Connelly, 2021; Rynders, 2019)
- Students exhibiting antisocial behaviors, such maladjustment, aggression, and defiance, are likely to be referred and eligible for service under the behavior category (Connelly, 2021; Rynders, 2019)

Although the initial research on the topic was rooted in disproportionality of minorities exclusively, search results yielded two consistent themes related to the

disproportionality in SE: Implicit bias in policy and decision-making and implicit bias in educational stakeholders during the referral process.

Implicit Bias in Policy and Decision-Making

Research and state educational data have indicated an over-identification of minority students receiving SE services for emotional disturbances in schools. Policies for reducing implicit bias can help reduce teacher judgements that can be deemed subjective (Glock et al., 2018) and involve exaggerated narratives and nonquantifiable data (Connelly, 2021; Hanchon & Allen, 2017; McIntosh et al., 2014; Rynders, 2019). Hanchon and Allen (2017) found students can be found eligible for emotional disturbance (ED) through the application of vague, suspect criteria that lack sufficient clarity. Kauffman and Anastasiou (2019) also found that teachers make referrals based on stereotypes and narratives instead of observable and objective data. The outcomes of these instances often result in placing students in more restrictive settings. Harry and Anderson (1994) believed the use of the EHA of 1973 was flawed before it was enacted, thus the rationale for the requirement of assessing children by a nonbiased multidisciplinary team, which continues today. Policies to prevent discrimination are imperative; when people face discrimination based on one trait, the law has been violated regardless of whether the bias is explicit or implicit (Jolls & Sunstein, 2006). IDEA (2004) and FAPE both highlight that the foundation of the mandates was designed to ensure education was built for inclusion, requiring students to be in the GE system to the maximum extent with their typical peers based on objective decision-making. However, implicit bias, when allowed to go unchecked, continues to undermine the implementation of inclusive practices (Connelly, 2021; Kauffman & Anastasiou, 2019).

Hanchon and Allen (2018) examined the issues related to the identification of students with ED and offered suggestions based on the findings to promote responsible and objective assessment practices. Hanchon and Allen surveyed a sample of 214 practicing school psychologists about their assessment practices and found inconsistencies in the identification of students with ED; they also examined the frequency in which school psychologists reported using comprehensive, multifaceted assessments, which included teacher interviews, parent interviews, diagnostic interviews with the student, observations, and behavior-rating scales. Hanchon and Allen found that only 30% of school psychologists consistently included all five criteria in the identification process for ED, and 5% indicated they did not use any in more than 75% of their initial evaluations.

Hanchon and Allen (2017) observed that ED classifications have been subjective for decades and are seen through the lens of improper and disturbing behavior defined by White social norms without the application of cultural or contextual factors influencing externalizing behaviors. Hanchon and Allen suggested that school psychologists can engage in actions that are scientifically grounded and move away from the "I know it when I see it" methodology (p. 180). The researchers also recommended preventing clinical judgement errors that taint the identification process and promote a comprehensive assessment process that has a scientifically backed framework to accurately identify and provide services to students.

Implicit bias has lasting implications in communities with low socioeconomic conditions (Kirby, 2017; McIntosh et al., 2014; Skiba et al., 2005). Barriers in society can impede access to public spaces, employment, healthcare, participation in civic

opportunities, and education. The result of the exclusion is the perpetuation of stereotypes and inequality that define implicit bias. Collins et al. (2016) noted that 75% of students labeled with a high incidence category will have some engagement with the juvenile justice system. Students labeled with emotional disturbance are more likely to drop out and have encounters with the juvenile justice system than those who are not (Collins et al., 2016). For individuals with disabilities, the journey to equity in education has been influenced by the same factors, including increased engagement with the juvenile justice system and an increased likelihood to drop out. Connelly (2021) stated "deficit identities are socially constructed, as evidenced by the disproportionate representation of Black student" (p. 81) and that "white cultural norms shape practitioner belief, behavior, and policy within schools (p. 81).

Implicit bias in policy and discipline disproportionately impacts minority students. Over the past 30 years, social scientists have documented those African American students receive office referrals and harsh punishments at significantly higher rates than White students (Irvine, 1990; Monroe, 2005; Skiba et al., 2008). Minority students, especially those in high incidence categories such as emotional disturbance, are more likely to receive disproportionate discipline for low-level school offenses (Addressing Significant Disproportionality, 2020), leading to increased juvenile engagement and contributing to Black youth being five times more likely to be incarcerated than White youth (Rynders, 2019). Further, racial disparity in youth arrests and incarceration show Blacks are 269% more likely to be arrested for similar minor offenses (Rynders, 2019). Such patterns of disproportionality in discipline have been

documented in most major school districts throughout the United States (Gordon et al., 2000; Monroe, 2005)

Ferguson (2000), Rong (1996), and others have argued that discrepancies within institutions are magnified when students' gender and socioeconomic status are considered concurrently with their ethnicity and race. Discipline policies heavily influenced by implicit bias of students receiving SE services are often norms in schools and separate facilities. Although some decision makers believe they are objective, Black families are overreported for suspected ill-treatment. Researchers have found Black families are not more likely to mistreat their children than Whites; however, Blacks being significantly overrepresented in the welfare system shows the impact of implicit bias (Annamma et al., 2014; Rynders, 2019). Overrepresentation of minority students cannot be explained by socioeconomic status (Annamma et al., 2014; Losen, 2011). Black families are overreported for maltreatment, although research shows they are no more likely to abuse a child than a White family (Rynders, 2019).

Black youth are also thought to have a higher risk of reoffending than White youth, which feeds into implicit associations of minorities as needing SE services. African Americans are disproportionately represented in high incidence categories, such as having a specific learning disability or other health impairment (such as Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, etc.), which are only apparent in academic settings (Rynders, 2019), implying these outcomes are consequences of the overrepresentation of minorities in SE. McIntosh et al. (2014) argued that the most impactful failure is the legal system, which criminalizes adolescent behavior heavily toward minority students. Knowledge of implicit bias is the most valuable tool to reduce

the occurrence of implicit and explicit bias in schools and school policy and develop opportunities for impactful transformational change in education. Morgan et al. (2018) claimed the "systemic bias" hypothesis posits that school-related factors explain the overrepresentation in SE. Although Morgan et al. argued against disproportionality, they found implicit bias in stakeholders may be the reason for the overrepresentation of minorities.

Implicit associations based on cultural norms are often used to justify decisions regarding placement options; behaviors and appearances that fall outside of White cultural norms include talking loudly, perceptions of "unkept" hair, using nonstandard English dialect, and low socioeconomic status (Connelly, 2021). Current best practices and IDEA (2004) suggest students spend the maximum amount of time in the GE setting with maximum supports prior to changing the LRE (IDEA, 2004). Students' LREs should be the most protected principle in providing educational support services; however, SE students still struggle to find acceptance in the GE setting without stigma associated with receiving services. Powell and Wagner (2014) stated, "although in the last 2 decades, inclusion has increasingly become a national priority, disproportionalities of different ethnic groups in special schools have remained relatively stable over the last decade, despite educational reforms and changes in citizenship policies" (as cited in Markova et al., 2016, p. 4). Minority student representation in restrictive settings is disproportionate compared to White students, and some believe SE is a place to segregate and not a service to support academic success (Rynders, 2019).

Although federal policy was created to promote access to GE, the practices of our educational institutions perpetuate isolation. New assumptions must be created to

promote access and equality for students with learning disabilities. True inclusion, where students with learning disabilities are fully included in the GE classroom, can help reinforce new perceptions for students receiving SE services. Elliot et al. (2015) stated "that students with disabilities 'do not receive equal, let alone equitable' opportunity to learn in relation to 'three key dimensions—time, content covered, and cognitive process level'" (p. 6). After the desegregation of schools, it became a common practice to put minority students in restrictive environments to keep them segregated from White students (Rynders, 2019).

In a theoretical article, Freeman et al. (2019) discussed the progress and barriers related to updated federal policy for students with ED and gave recommendations for strengthening policy related to Functional Behavior Assessment. Freeman et al. traced the evolution of federal policy and supports for students with emotional and behavior disorders. Additionally, Freeman et al. discussed the history of SE policy, acknowledged developments over the last 30 years, and identified current challenges within the definition of EBD. The researchers also offered recommendations for improving practice and using Functional Behavior Assessments to build capacity within personnel to support students with EBD.

Students with ED are twice as likely to be excluded from school and placed in alternative/separate schools for level-III offenses, such as drugs, weapons, etc. than any other students with disabilities (Freeman et al., 2019). Freeman et al. (2019) discussed the subjectivity and ambiguity in the identification of students with EBD contributing to disproportionality in identifying students with ED. There are two new areas of focus for improving outcomes for students with EBD: clarifying and defining the FBA process and

investing in personnel capacity building through professional development (Freeman et al., 2019). Additionally, teacher shortages and declining enrollment in education degree programs hinder improving outcomes for SE students (Freeman et al., 2019). Interest in the teaching field has not grown and teacher demographics in education have not changed; however, student diversity has increased substantially (Freeman et al., 2019), leading many to believe that some teachers are unable to provide culturally aware environments or accept those who behave outside the dominant cultural expectation (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Connelly, 2021). Also, Freeman et al. called for increasing the fidelity of the Functional Behavior Assessment use and need for a concerted effort to address the teacher shortage to remedy and provide the proper supports for students with EBD.

Using post hoc analysis, Scardamalia et al. (2019) examined the reliability of federal criteria for SE services and the implicit social perceptions about eligibility decisions made by psychologists. Scardamalia et al. had 179 psychologists review a mock eligibility case and decide whether the student was eligible for services; the researchers found there was significant variability in the rationales of those who said yes. A Krippendorff analysis, an analysis preferred for content analysis, was used to measure criteria reliability; also, bootstrapping for resampling was used to provide a more robust measure due to the very small sample size (Scardamalia et al., 2019).

Scardamalia et al.'s (2019) study provided evidence of inconsistencies within the eligibility process that impact outcomes for many students, which include inconsistencies between the types of data rated and types included in identification evaluation. Scardamalia et al. further observed a lack of revisions to the definition of *emotional*

disturbance and a lack of guidance on the federal definition of ED, leaving questions about the subjectivity for entering the eligibility process. Reliability and consistency in the identification process is important to the work of disproportionality because it highlights the kind of unreliable and subjective decision-making that can impact students for life, including lower graduation rates, lower academic achievement, and more encounters with the juvenile justice system (Scardamalia et al., 2019). Scardamalia et al. noted that African American students continue to be identified at twice the rate of their White counterparts for ED. Williams et al. (2017) explained the approach taken by the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) to become a nationally recognized leader in education reform on disproportionality in SE and discipline referrals. In 2012, the DCPS recognized students had clinical needs preventing them from accessing the curriculum; the DCPS developed a screening protocol and expanded its use of the Response to Intervention educational framework involving a multitiered approach to identifying student interventions proactively, especially when students exhibit academic and behavior challenges (Williams et al., 2017). The DCPS system piloted the interventions for multiple years before adopting the most effective ones.

Researchers for the DCPS began addressing the clinical needs of students in schools because data showed it was more effective in schools than in the community. Williams et al. (2017) cited students were seven times more likely to follow through on clinical services in school than in the community. The development and adoption of a comprehensive plan that uses various screeners and questionnaires created a wraparound approach to supporting students, both academically and clinically, which also helped reduce disproportionality in behavior and SE (Williams et al., 2017). There is urgency to

ensuring all students of various subgroups have the same access to GE because disproportionality is directly linked to gaps in achievement (Williams et al., 2017). Furthermore, the reduction of disproportionality relies on the establishment of fair and unbiased school policies.

Implicit Bias Among Educational Stakeholders During the Referral Process

Although some data are objective in the multitiered systems of support process, observational and rating scales can be subject to implicit bias (Scardamalia et al., 2019). According to Connelly (2021), "when special education professional hold expert status, their data is privileged, and the expertise of black families is marginalized" (p. 83). Narratives provided by stakeholders can often drive the referral process; classroom teachers are often the initiators of SE referrals and assessments. If implicit bias is an underlying factor of stakeholder observation and rating of student ability, or lack thereof, then the student referral process is flawed, resulting in disproportionality of minority students, who are often the subject of the referrals.

Minority students are referred at higher rates because most teachers are White (Rynder, 2019). The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reported that, in the last 3 decades, the number of White teachers has risen from 13% in 1988 to 18% in 2017. In 2017–18, traditional public-school teachers were 80% white, whereas 7% were Black (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Diverse student demographics continued to increase, while teacher demographics have increased only 5% over 24 years (The Fordham Institute, 2020). According to Rynder (2019),

> Once the referral takes place, procedural safeguards mandated by the IDEA occur, but problems can still occur if a referral is based on implicit bias. Mistakes in the

> referral and evaluation process of students of color can be especially hazardous because of reification, which is a mental tendency for the label for a group to become the label for the individual and for that label to become fixed. Once a label has been placed upon a person it can cause her to think of herself as only as a member of that specific group. Any other characteristics or traits that she associates with herself will become overshadowed by the label affixed to her. When this concept is applied to special education, if the initial referral was based on implicit bias, it can be hard for the educator to think of a child with disabilities as an individual apart from her disability and label of special education. (p. 476)

Currently, the overrepresentation of students identified with an emotional disturbance is mostly seen during the psychological evaluation process (Sullivan et al., 2013). The current process for determining student eligibility presents opportunities for implicit bias, resulting in cultural norms or other health impairments/specific disabilities behaviors being identified as behaviors that represent emotional disturbance. Connelly (2021) suggested White normative communication patterns privilege the written word, the English language, and rational ideas over expressions of emotion, and when people are “raced and disabled by the system constructed as inferior, the converse is also true: White people are constructed as good and superior” (p. 80). Sullivan et al. (2019) examined bias in school psychologists' perceptions of African American and White students' eligibility for Special Education under intellectual disabilities, emotional disturbance, and specific learning disabilities and concluded that there was little evidence of racial discrepancy; however, the highly subjective and ambiguous disability criteria led school psychologists to make decisions uncorroborated by, and even contrary to,

assessment data. Some of the school psychologists qualified students for ID based on low IQ scores while disregarding adaptive and achievement data (Sullivan et al., 2013). The implicit bias that educators and staff members may hold may be revealed in the referral process for students of color and/or students with disabilities.

Sullivan (2013) discussed research and interpretations surrounding disproportionality in SE and the assumptions of acceptable behavior, social behavior, and academics expectations teachers make related to the disparities in SE and students' needs. Sullivan used a sampling of interpretations of disproportionality patterns based on assumptions about the accuracy of identification and benefits of services. Additionally, Sullivan noted there are few studies on bias in eligibility decisions regarding ED and the role of subjectivity in ED identification. Sullivan stated, "special education identification is generally considered to be unreliable given early and continued studies for indicating inappropriate referral and evaluation practices, arbitrariness of decisions, and limited adherence to legal criteria for eligibility" (p. 247).

It is unlikely educators involved in SE disability services are impervious to the biases found in other professions (Sullivan, 2017). Issues in the identification of ED, reliability of identification, and potential bias in educational processes and decisions highlight the need to study disproportionality. Researchers should examine deeper questionable practices and related disparities. The relevance of Sullivan's (2017) research to the present study is the flawed identification process for students with emotional disturbances leading to the overrepresentation of minority students in SPED.

Woodson et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative, correlational study to examine the teacher and student demographic variables that predict the likelihood of referral of

male students for SE evaluation. Cultural and social exclusion theory (Atis, 2021) was the conceptual framework for the study, which helps explain the social challenges for groups facing implicit and explicit bias. Study participants were from a large urban district in the northeastern region of Pennsylvania in the United States. Convenience sampling was used, and 110 surveys were accepted for analysis (Woodson et al., 2018). The TRF contained behavioral descriptions for three African American students, three Hispanic students, and three White students. Race was measured as a categorical variable. The dependent variable of how likely a teacher would make a referral was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, severity of classroom behavior was an interval-level variable, and covariates for teaching experience was measured using a ratio level (Woodson et al., 2018).

Woodson et al. (2018) found that the highest mean ratings for likelihood of referrals for SE were for White males, followed by African American males, then Hispanic males. The highest mean for ratings for behavior severity was for Hispanic males, then African American males, then White males (Woodson et al., 2018). Like the present study, Woodson examined disproportionality in referrals for SE. The connection between teacher and student demographic variables and the likelihood of referrals for minorities are the common themes. A key finding was that teacher race is a predictor for referrals of male students.

Rynder (2019) argued implicit bias, through schema development, may not be apparent to educators because of the nature of unconscious decision-making. Because of the way schema retrieves information from its neuro organization file and operates in the

unconscious, high stress environments and subjective decision-making, such as in SE and discipline referrals, are prone to be influenced by implicit bias. Rynder stated,

> For example, a white teacher may have two students–one white and one black–that rock in their chairs during class. If the teacher holds an implicit bias against students of color, the teacher may refer the black student to special education for behavioral issues, but only think that the white student is acting normally for his age. (p. 466)

Furthering the argument, 80% of students referred by White teachers were classified as emotionally disturbed (Rynder, 2019).

Without interventions, excessive referrals will continue to increase the disproportionality of minorities represented in SE services. Warikoo et al. (2016) supported the argument that negative implicit associations are significant contributors to disproportionality and inequality in education because the biases are so automatic and difficult to control. Greenwald et al. (1998) wrote, "people are unaware of their implicit associations or unwilling to endorse them as indicative of their beliefs about those groups" (p. 508). If educational stakeholders are like other adults with implicit associations, it can be expected that they have negative associations related to minority children and adults (Glock & Klapproth, 2017; Warikoo et al., 2016). Implicit bias related to race affects student outcomes as behaviors begin to correlate to negative feelings and behaviors during interracial interactions (Warikoo et al., 2016). When teachers are in high stress environments and have demanding workloads, they may initiate referrals subjective to implicit associations regarding behavior of minority students; this would include schools that lack funding and resources, large class sizes,

and unsupportive colleagues, some of which are prevalent in minority communities (Glock & Klapproth, 2017; Warikoo et al., 2016). As minority student populations grow and the teaching force remains predominantly White, research must be conducted to further investigate implicit bias in the hiring and retention of teachers of color. The inherent nature of implicit bias will permeate the referral process until systems are created and training provided to reduce the opportunities for occurrence.

The Context of Teacher Demographics

Although there is research on the disproportionality of referrals in SE, research is limited surrounding teacher and student demographic variables regarding the disproportionality of referrals in SE. The teaching profession is and has been disproportionately White (Will, 2020). According to Will (2020), 79.3% of public-school teachers are White and 9.3% are Hispanic. Will also reported in 2011–12, nearly 82% of public-school teachers were White and 7.8% were Hispanic. Although research suggests teacher diversity benefits all students, and most students across the United States are of color, only about 20% of teachers in the United States are of color (Education Trust, 2020). With slightly more than half of public-school students being non-White, teacher demographics remain unchanged from previous years (Will, 2020). Among Ohio teachers, for example, three in four teachers are female, and an overwhelming majority are White, whereas the share of students of color in public schools has roughly doubled over the past 25 years, from 27% in 1987–88 to about 44% in 2011–12 (Education Trust, 2020).

According to The Center for American Progress (2014):

> Over the past three years, the demographic divide between teachers and students of color has increased by 3 percentage points, and today, students of color make up almost half of the public-school population. But teachers of color are just 18 percent of the teaching profession. This is a 1 percentage point increase from three years ago. When we looked more closely at the state-level data, we found similar issues, with the diversity gap growing larger in most states. In New York, for instance, the demographic difference between teachers and students has jumped 5 percentage points since 2011. (p. 2)

The representation of teachers of color in the workforce, however, remains comparatively low, at around 20% in 2017–18, with this figure increasing only about 5 percentage points in the preceding 2.5 decades (Education Trust, 2020). A review conducted by the Center for American Progress (2014) of state-to-state, district-to-district data revealed in some school districts, the teacher workforce looked almost nothing like the student body. In short, teachers of color are underrepresented in the national teacher workforce, relative to the U.S. student population, and the gap is growing, which could be relative to the disproportionate number of minority students being referred to SE, making it important to examine the connection between teacher demographics and the referral of students of color for SE.

In early research, Bradshaw et al. (2010) sought to identify factors that contribute to the overrepresentation of Black male students receiving office disciplinary referrals (ODRs) among 6,988 students across 381 classrooms at 21 elementary schools using a quantitative multilevel modeling approach. Bradshaw et al. found teacher ethnicity had no influence on student referrals, which contradicted the findings of previous researchers

such as Skiba et al. (2008). Bradshaw et al. attributed their findings to the subjective assessment of students' behavioral infractions, which is solely based on teachers' subjective appraisal of the situation. Appraisals and assessments may be susceptible to contextual factors or potential bias (Irvin et al., 2004), which is particularly disconcerting given the negative effects for students.

Bradshaw et al.'s (2010) study is relevant to the present study because researchers have rarely examined potential factors at both the student and classroom levels, which may contribute to the disparities of students of color, especially Black students, who are overrepresented in suspensions and office referrals, as well as referrals to SE (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 2005). Bradshaw et al. noted that cultural incompatibility has also been shown to affect how teachers view students. The potential mismatch in values can increase the likelihood of a discrepancy between what minority students perceive as being appropriate behavior compared to what teachers hold as acceptable standards for student behavior, leading to increased referrals amongst minority students (Connelly, 2021). For example, teachers working in a school that subscribes to mainstream cultural values may interpret culturally normative behaviors of Black youth (e.g., freedom of expression) as being disrespectful, combative, or argumentative (Monroe, 2005; Weinstein et al., 2004).

In a quantitative study, Anyon et al. (2014) used administrative data from a large urban school district that included 20,166 discipline incidents, 9,170 students, and 185 schools to examine the relationship between student race and the locations where youth are disciplined. Anyon et al. used CRT as a lens to examine the relationship between school discipline disparities and structural or systemic racism in educational institutions

to examine sub contexts in which students of color are likely to receive ODRs. Racial disparities likely vary across school sub contexts, such as hallways and school grounds, where students and teachers do not have opportunities to build trust (Anyon et al., 2017).

CRT holds that institutional policies and resulting practices favor, support, and benefit one racial group over others, and educational institutions in the United States have been built and maintained on the values and cultural practices of the White majority racial group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Schools are centers of learning for academics but also include social rules and ideologies that reinforce inequality (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 2012; Leonardo, 2009; Watts & Erevelles, 2004). As a result, adults and young people of all racial identities are conditioned to recognize whiteness as desirable and deserving. For minority students, this conditioning and non-White racial conformity leads to alleged colorblind policies leading to disproportionate numbers of SE referrals for minority students. The relevance and connection to this study is that the subjective referral of minority students who fail to meet the desirable norms of whiteness is a form of systemic bias. The study findings suggest research is needed on the role of systemic bias and colorblind policies and practices in disproportionality.

Theoretical Framework: CRT

Origins and Definition

Several American legal scholars, including Bell, Freeman, Crenshaw, and Delgado (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2018) developed CRT as a framework to explain racist barriers that contribute to educational, legal, and health disparities. According to Ford and Airhihenbuwa (2018), the scholars also developed CRT to help counter prevalent racist and discriminatory practices and challenge the idea that the United States has

developed into a colorblind society where one's racial identity no longer influences one's social or economic status. Ford and Airhihenbuwa stated,

> Critical Race Theory (CRT) defines the set of anti-racist tenets, modes of knowledge production, and strategies a group of legal scholars of color in the 1980s organized into a framework targeting the subtle and systemic ways racism currently operates above and beyond any overly racist expressions. (p. 223)

Although civil rights arguments lean on arguments of the racially unjust legal system strategically, CRT seeks to eliminate racism from it, requiring a radical transformation of the American legal system; researchers have applied CRT to education, public health, and legal issues. CRT also helps highlight that

> while "race" as a notion is a social construction and not rooted in biology, it has had real, tangible effects on African Americans and other people of color in terms of economic resources, educational and professional opportunities, and experiences with the legal system. (Bodenheimer, 2020, p. 25)

The assertion that race is a way to differentiate human beings is a social concept, a product of human thought, which is inherently hierarchical. Martinez (2014) wrote in *Critical Race Theory: Its Origins, History, and Importance to the Discourses and Rhetorics of Race*, "the post-emancipation devaluing of black bodies is nothing short of an American tradition, but it is a tradition largely overlooked due to white supremacist bias in the media, and significantly, bias in the formation and telling of US history" (p. 15). The idea of the Civil Rights Movement ending racism in the United States, the way it is commonly presented in primary and secondary curriculums, is grossly inaccurate. CRT holds that racism and biased policies are still prevalent throughout the foundations of

U.S. systems and the biases are applied regularly in legal, educational, and public health decision-making.

CRT in Education

Although CRT has been largely used in legal research (e.g., Crenshaw, 1995), its influence has expanded into other disciplines including education. CRT holds that racial bias continued after the Civil Rights Era in education and contributes to the disproportionate number of minorities in SE and to being overidentified for specific exceptionalities. It can be argued that cultural norms can be misconstrued as characteristics of disabilities for some students. The implications of CRT are prevalent in the recent over-aggression of policing of minorities, which resulted in loss of life for Michael Brown and George Floyd. CRT has been the legal argument that racism has shifted from "blaming the victim" practices based on biological shortcomings to blaming practices that focus on the victim's shortcomings rooted in culture or ethnicity.

Think of Black males with predominantly White staff in urban settings: cultural and community norms can be vastly different for students and staff. The unconscious bias of staff can place Black male students in the SE identification cycle because their behaviors may not fit the linguistic, emotional, and physical norms of expression of the dominant culture (Connelly, 2021). Educational policies can also be influenced by the norms of dominant racial groups; for example, using an inside voice is subjective to culture. According to Connelly (2021), whiteness is (a) an unwillingness to name how racism operates within schools, (b) a separation of current policies and sociocultural conditions from their racist legacy, and (c) a naturalization of whiteness, so White superiority is considered common sense and then produced, enacted, and reproduced

through institutionalized school policies (p. 80). According to Applebaum (2017), when whiteness is common sense, it remains invisible, which is most comforting to Whites. Whiteness determines who has rights use, enjoys benefits, and who is excluded (Connelly, 2021; DeCuir et al., 2004).

Connelly (2021) conducted a reflective, qualitative study on whiteness and White cultural norms that ground bias in the SE referral process for Black, indigenous students of color. Connelly reflected on her 25 years of experience and used DisCrit theory (a combination of disabled studies and CRT) and whiteness theory (Connelly, 2021) to examine power and the codified structures of IDEA. The structures of IDEA include multidisciplinary team decision-making, special education-based assessments and data collection, and categorical identification of ED for the critical reflection on practice in elementary schools (Connelly, 2021). Connelly sought to interrogate the ideologies of stratification that undermine and impact Black, indigenous students of color in the identification process for SE.

Connelly (2021) interrogated the whiteness norms within each structure and discussed the characteristics of whiteness: Gramsci's notions of common sense, invulnerability and complicity, and separation of conditions from systemic racism. Additionally, whiteness supports social exclusion in that what is not acceptable in White norms is then not acceptable in general socially (i.e., students with disabilities). Connelly argued that, when left unchecked, implicit, and explicit bias will erode "good faith" as outlined in FAPE and IDEA. Connelly's reflection and acknowledgement of White collusion is of importance in the exploration of implicit bias in the referral process from teachers who may not recognize they hold negative assumptions. The recognition of

whiteness and goodness that permeate the identification process is an important step in rectifying disproportionality. Thirty years of discourse has avoided a deep reflection into the practical understanding of disproportionality (Connelly, 2021; Kozleski, 2015). Leaving the referral process unchallenged will allow inequitable outcomes and disproportionality to continue to undermine the efforts of equity policies and initiatives. Connelly's interrogation connects to my study examining implicit bias in the referral process for minority students, specifically Black males. Teacher demographics have remained consistent, whereas student diversity has increased tremendously, which make cultural differences more pronounced, leading to bias in the referral process based on behavioral expectations of the dominant culture.

DeCuir and Dixson (2004) identified five tenets of CRT analysis: counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) defined "Whiteness as property and argued the history of race and racism in the United States and the role that U.S. jurisprudence has played in reifying conceptions of race, the notion of Whiteness can be considered a property interest" (p. 28). Bell suggested civil rights should be interpreted with measured enthusiasm, suggesting that the gains since *Brown* are questionable and give false perceptions as to the state of racism in America. DeCuir and Dixson stated,

> Citing the limited and precarious gains of the Brown decision, Bell argues that losses in terms of human capital by way of the dismissal of scores of African American teachers and administrators, school closings in Black neighborhoods, and the limited access to high-quality curricula in the form of tracking, inflated

> admissions criteria, and other factors, have made the so-called "gains" from Brown questionable. (p. 28)

CRT has been used throughout education legislative arguments to explain or help understand the effects of systematic racism in education settings, and one of the most notable instances is *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Derrick Bell, like West, both agree "that halfway measures are doomed to failure when an economy takes a bad turn, or politicians use code words that illicit fear in middle-class and blue-collar White's minds and subsequently, label African Americans as worthless" (Anderson, 1997). Anderson (1997) argued the "paradox for African Americans, as it was in *Invisible man,* is that the African American cultural contribution has not provided them with any relief from the pains of racism in America from the 'ultimate betrayal,'" (p. 28) of slavery. The realities of students over-identified and mislabeled based on subjective policies and beliefs are prevalent and drive alarming numbers for males and minorities. As Judge Robert L. Carter stated, "*Brown* transformed blacks from beggars pleading for decent treatment to citizens demanding equal treatment under the law as their constitutionally recognized right" (Anderson, 1997, p. 518).

The introduction of *intersectionality*, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, went beyond CRT to explain the challenges faced by other demographic groups in relation to gender, race, sexuality, and class. Intersectionality is widely used (and more often misused) in contemporary social science exploring the intersecting roles of the demographic groups and how they are impacted by racist systems. Intersectionality addresses the question of how various forms of inequality and identity interrelate in different settings and over time; the most often used examples include the

interconnectedness of race, class, gender, disability, and so on (Gilborn, 2015). Gilborn (2015) suggested,

> "intersectionality is a vital aspect of understanding race inequity, but that racism retains a primacy for critical race scholars in three keyways: namely, empirical primacy (as a central axis of oppression in the everyday reality of schools), personal/autobiographical primacy (as a vital component in how critical race scholars view themselves and their experience in the world), and political primacy (as a point of group coherence and activism) (p. 279).

The understanding of "whiteness" and its influence on bias as a social construct referring to a set of assumptions, beliefs, and practices that put the interest of White people at the center of what is deemed normal in society is pivotal to understanding the concept of intersectionality and CRT.

Any efforts to put race or racism on the social agenda or center of debate is often unpopular in most arenas. Exploration of race and racism is seen as offensive or crude at best (Gilborn, 2015, p. 1). Of all the legal arguments and scholarly writing, no legislation or policies have ever made attempts to correct the influence of "whiteness" within systems. Although CRT is a powerful theoretical and analytical framework within educational research, researchers have yet to utilize CRT to its fullest.

Payne Hiraldo, author of *The Role of Critical Race Theory in Higher Education*, stated "Thinking about racism as a fundamental part of U.S. societal structure is unsettling when many people are trying to dismantle and work against it" (p. 57). The allusion of initiatives/programs of support such as affirmative action, study abroad programs, and diversity and inclusion, some would argue the government has improved

the lives of people of color. However, it can be argued those programs still provide great benefit to the dominant majority. There have been arguments made against CRT for exclusion of social class and gender.

The critics of CRT argue it is inherently racist and excludes the efforts of nonminority's, without making any measurable progress. It is also said that CRT ignores intersectionality, or the links between race, class, and gender, which can create overlapping systems of discrimination or disadvantage (Oxford Languages, n.d.). Hiraldo (2010) argued "acknowledging how these various identities are interrelated furthers the complexity of these social constructions, which, if ignored, leaves questions unanswered" (p. 57).

CRT scholars respond to criticism by addressing the intersectionality of race and other social identities within their analysis (Hiraldo, 2010). Intersectionality is not ignored; it simply places racism at the center of the paradigm. However, this does not necessarily mean that other identities are ignored. If focus on CRT can be accomplished, awareness about the role of race in producing racial inequities can be confronted head on.

Conceptual Framework: Social Exclusion Theory

Social exclusion theory served as the conceptual framework for this study because it laid the foundation for understanding how the persistent social challenges impact SE students based on unnaturally imposed and forced barriers of the majority (Woodson & Harris, 2018). Social exclusion is an important sociological concept and refers to the separation of individuals and groups from mainstream society (Atiş, 2021; Commins, 2004; Moffatt & Glasgow, 2009). Social exclusion theory helps researchers explain the

multiple ways individuals and groups are discouraged or prevented from fully participating in social relations and institutions, thereby leading to inequities in the excluded individuals and groups (Atiş, 2021; Commins, 2004; Moffatt & Glasgow, 2009). In general, the concept of social exclusion is used as the opposite of social integration, which means being a part of and adapting to society. Social exclusion limits participation in social life, and it also raises questions about why individuals are excluded from social norms. Preventing individuals from participating in social life and not taking part in existing social and cultural practices can undermine a culture of coexistence.

Researchers have used social exclusion theory to explain bias in affordable housing, underemployment, poverty, and education. Atiş (2021) explained when the concept of social exclusion is used as the opposite of social integration, it is used to express that the person lacks the necessities for integration in society. Social exclusion can narrowly refer to income poverty, referring specifically to people excluded from the labor market, who are impoverished, underprivileged, and low-income working people, yet broadly refer to the inability of citizens or groups to participate in decision-making processes related to the political, social, and economic functioning of the society in which they live (Atiş, 2021).

Jahnukainen (2001) stated,

> The process of social exclusion could be described as a hierarchical, developmental model. At the first stage, one has problems at school, at home or within the community. If these problems are not resolved this leads to the second stage failing at school and perhaps dropping out. This could be called the educational exclusion stage. Further, the lack of education might lead to the third

> stage of unemployed and thus excluded from working life. The fourth stage is the deprived subgroup of uneducated, unemployed poor people who might then lead to the final stage, which involves criminality, problems with drugs and alcohol, resulting in placement in prison, mental health institution or addiction clinic. This final stage is total social exclusion. (p. 2)

Over time, the processes of social exclusion can create populations and places of concentrated disadvantage, such as in SE. Woodson and Harris (2018) wrote that many students in the Unites States are categorized as needing SE and hence are socially excluded from mainstream education and contended that teachers customarily refer students for SE as a way of dealing with challenging student behavior. Meld et al. (2019) examined 401 Dutch adolescents (70.3% males) exhibiting conduct problems while attending schools for SE; the participants completed questionnaires on classroom climate, problems in social information processing, externalizing behavior, and perceived social exclusion, which revealed that positive classroom climate was associated with a reduction of students' externalizing behavior problems and a reduction of perceived social exclusion. A positive classroom climate in secondary SE may protect against perceived social exclusion.

Social exclusion theory connects to this study because the targets of social exclusion, students referred to SE and those receiving services, suffer a variety of negative effects and outcomes, such as poor academic performance, increased risk of contact with the juvenile justice system, and low employment rates after high school (Scardamalia et al., 2019). Woodson and Harris (2018) stated, “teachers are inextricably connected to social exclusion because they make the initial referrals for special

education" (p. 2). One goal of this study was to examine potential bias in the referral process to minimize the occurrence and negative outcomes of being deemed to need SE.

Conclusion

The research revealed that implicit bias in education can contribute to the disproportionality of minorities in SE. Reducing implicit bias relies on policies and practices to remove the opportunity for subjective influence. Implicit bias permeates all facets of society; in the research reviewed for this literature review, implicit bias was the common theme in all areas shown to impact disproportionality of minority students in SE. The inherent nature of implicit bias and its storage in our mental rolodexes require action and reduced opportunity for subjective application; additionally, implicit bias was likely to be activated and applied during moments when the cognitive load was working at higher capacities (Burgess et al., 2016).

The research provided alarming statistics on the discipline rates of minority students comparted to White students. Teacher demographics have remained constant, whereas student diversity has increased tremendously, possibly impacting the disproportionality of minorities referred to SE.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to further investigate the disproportionality of Black male students referred to SE programs in grades K–12. The study examined the variables in the referral process. The selected design applied purposive nonrandom sampling within a novel digital instrument to collect both numerical and scaled datapoints. The data points were then analyzed using applicable analyses to evaluate the validity of advance stated hypotheses, consistent with the methods used in the recent literature (Ames et al., 2019; Carlisle & Loadsman, 2017; Lehdonvirta et al., 2021; Woodson & Harris, 2018).

Chapter 3 outlines the following components of the research method:

1. Research design and strategy
2. Setting and the participant sample
3. Instrumentation process
4. Data collection and data analysis.
5. Ethical considerations
6. Summary of the main points of the chapter

The following research question(s) and hypotheses were used to guide the study:

RQ1: Is there a relationship between professional demographic factors of educators and their likelihood for referring youth of color for SE?

H_0: There is no statistically significant correlation between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years

of teaching experience, teacher attitude towards inclusion, and likelihood to refer a male student for an SE evaluation.

H_1: There is a statistically significant correlation between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience, teacher attitude towards inclusion, and likelihood to refer a male student to for an SE evaluation.

H_0: There is no statistically significant predictive relationship between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience, teacher attitude towards inclusion, and likelihood to refer a male student for an SE evaluation.

H_1: There is a statistically significant predictive relationship between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience, teacher attitude towards inclusion, and likelihood to refer a male student for an SE evaluation.

RQ2: Are White teachers more likely to refer students of color or White students for an SE evaluation than non-White teachers?

H_0: There are no statistically significant differences between White and non-White teacher SE evaluation referral likelihood between White and non-White male students.

H_1: There are statistically significant differences between White and non-White teacher SE evaluation referral likelihood between White and non-White male students.

H_0: There are no statistically significant differences between teacher race and likelihood to refer for an SE evaluation or their perceived level of severity of behavior.

H_1: There are statistically significant differences between teacher race and likelihood to refer for an SE evaluation or their perceived level of severity of behavior.

Research Design and Rationale

The lens of the study applied was the quantitative correlational research design approach. Quantitative, correlational research design determined the relationships of variables, theories, and hypotheses (Miot, 2018; Rezigalla, 2020). Quantitative studies are appropriate when testing the strength of the relationship between numerically measurable constructs (Hannigan, 2018). In addition, the quantitative correlational research design determined relationships between variables and tests' theories and hypotheses (Gasparyan et al., 2019). All the variables in the study were numerically measurable. The goal of the study was to reduce the number of SE referrals of minorities; the study also explored the subjective nature of referral instruments. The results of the study revealed the relationship between referrals based on narrative and the over-identification of minorities in SE. The quantitative research design was chosen for the study because of its objectivity and reliability. Although qualitative research designs use a subjective approach to gathering data, research question answers involve opinion and feelings and thus require subjective interpretation for assessing the data (Kauffman & Anastasiou, 2019). Due to the current research not posing open-ended responses or interviews, a qualitative design was not applicable to this study.

Correlational research design investigates the relationships between variables without the researcher controlling or manipulating any of them; this is important when exploring implicit bias of study participants (Lobo et al., 2017). Correlation reflects the strength and direction of the relationship between variables that were either positive or negative (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). In addition, correlational research is an umbrella concept that incorporates the use of correlational and predictive analyses (Howell, 2013). Advantages of correlational research methodology are that it allows researchers to explore questions that could not be examined with qualitative procedures and correlational research broadens the scope of phenomena that social scientists are able to study (Rezigalla, 2020). Some disadvantages are that researchers cannot control events to isolate cause and effect. Correlational studies will not show conclusively that two variables are causally related (Liang & Yang, 2021). Another component of correlational research design is that it provides the researcher with an organized, reliable means to collect measurable data using a variety of questions based off the research questions (Trochim, 2013). A quantitative, correlational research design was selected because it provided an objective method for determining the predictive relationships between the independent variables (race/ethnicity of teacher, gender of teacher, teaching experience, and teacher attitudes toward inclusion) on the dependent variables (teacher referral of male students for SE evaluation). Comparisons were not examined over a period; therefore, an experimental or causal-comparative design was not applicable to the current research.

Surveys are an effective research tool particularly when examining a broad range of current social issues in human services (Lau & Kuziemsky, 2017). Surveys provide

quantifiable data from which a researcher can scientifically analyze issues related to problems that challenge society (Gaur et al., 2020). The disadvantages of surveys include the fact that the data measured include very subjective opinions that require careful and disciplined interpretation and analysis (Lau & Kuziemsky, 2017). The survey design was useful when collecting descriptive data regarding the teacher's race/ethnicity, their teaching experience, teacher attitudes toward inclusion, and teacher referral of male students for SE evaluation. The survey respondents for this study included relevant groups from the larger teacher population in the correct proportions that could possibly be generalized to the larger population for which the study targeted (Lesko et al., 2017).

The survey instrument contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions that relate to factors that impede teacher bias; this design helps assure validity of the research. Utilizing images in quantitative research can be highly relevant and applicable because they make it possible for the respondents to elaborate on additional opinions, views, and emotions when completing the researcher's survey (Yue et al., 2014). Glaw et al. (2017) indicated that visual methods can enhance the richness of data through the discovery of additional layers of meaning and details while providing validity and depth. Photo and image extractions can improve validity and depth, provide a fresh perspective, and give readers the ability to view a different angle of the researcher's study.

Variables in Study

The two research questions and four sets of hypotheses established key relationships between the variables of interest. For Research Question 1, the independent variables corresponded to teachers' years of teaching experience and teacher attitudes toward inclusion. The dependent variable for Research Question 1 corresponded to

likelihood for referral. For Research Question 2, the independent variable corresponded to teacher race (White vs. non-White). The dependent variables for Research Question 2 corresponded to likelihood of referral and perceived level of severity.

Methodology

Population

The study population consisted of approximately 10,000 teachers located in the midwestern region of the United States in the state of Ohio. Participants were recruited from Ohio's eight urban school districts which included: Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Toledo, Dayton, Akron, Canton, and Youngstown. The targeted school districts are considered urban as reported by the ODE and The Fordham Institute Report, *Ohio by the Numbers* (The Fordham Institute, 2022; ODE, n.d.).

Sample

The sample for this study included currently certificated and licensed teachers within and by the State of Ohio's Department of Education, both GE and SE, across grades K–12 employed in Ohio's eight urban districts; teachers outside of the eight large urban districts were excluded from participation in the study. The study focused on educators throughout the district who directly drive the SE referral process in school districts across Ohio (Diversifying the Education Profession in Ohio, 2019). Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of teachers in Ohio. The student population by race and ethnicity of the targeted districts was 35.4% White students, 44.4% African American students, 10.5% Hispanic students, 84.8% economically disadvantaged, and 18.8% SE students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Additionally, the districts' student population was 51.3% male and 48.7% female.

Table 1

Demographic Distribution of Teachers

Characteristic	*n*	%
Teacher race		
White	98,505	92.5
African American	4,411	4.4
Hispanic	727	<1.0
Multiracial	164	<1.0
Asian or Pacific Islander	223	<1.0
American Indian or Alaskan Native	63	<1.0
Not specified	2,162	<1.0
Gender		
Female	79,988	75.1
Male	26,520	24.9
Highest level of educational attainment		
Doctorate	417	<1.0
Master's	66,111	62.1
Bachelor's	38,271	35.9
Other certificate	1,710	1.6

Note. Source: Ohio Department of Education, 2016-2017.

Sampling Procedure

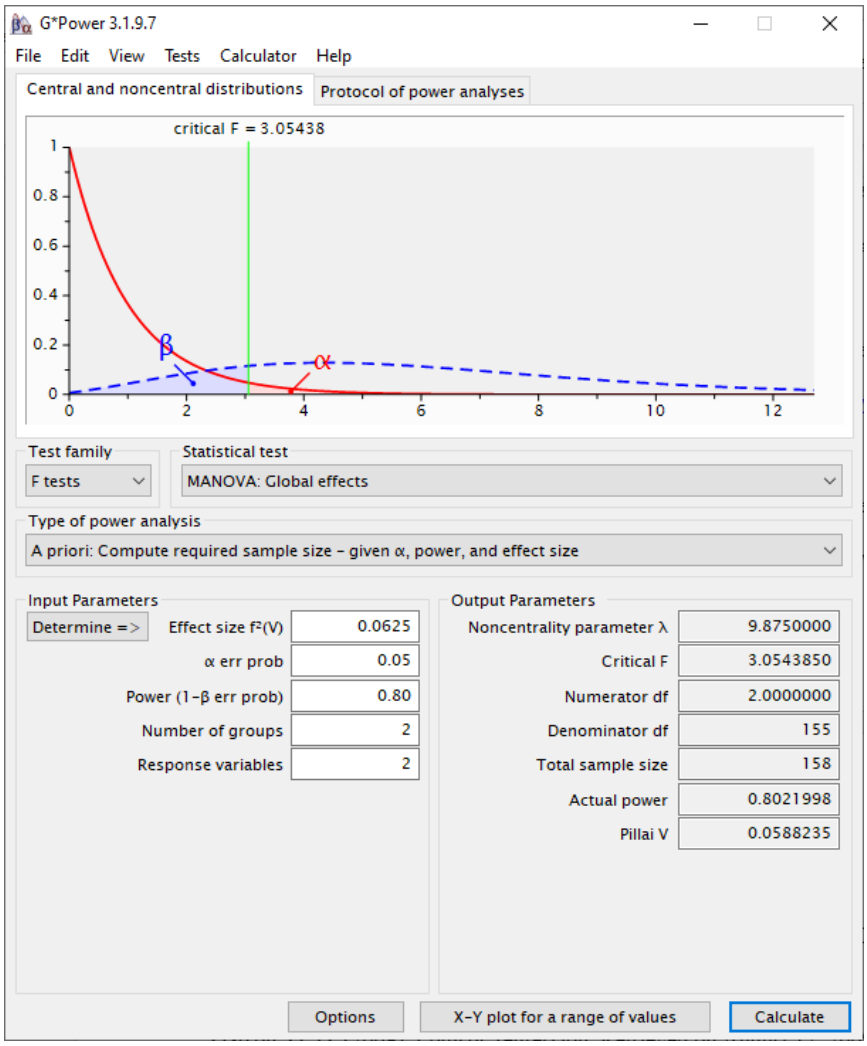
In this study, participants were recruited through a nonprobability, purposive sampling process. According to Andrade (2021), a purposive sample is a sample in which characteristics are defined for the relevance of the study. In addition, purposive sampling is utilized to identify and select respondents who most likely provide useful and appropriate data (Campbell et al., 2020). This type of sampling technique does not depend on a random process and employees' strategies to ensure specific participants who meet the criteria are included in the final sample (Campbell et al., 2020).

The targeted population for this study consisted of teachers across Ohio; the teacher population across the eight districts was around 10,000 in grades K–12. A power analysis was employed to determine the minimum sample size needed for the study. The

research utilized a Pearson correlation, multiple linear regression, chi-square test of independence, and MANOVA. The MANOVA required the largest sample size among these analyses and was used as the primary test for the power analysis in G*Power 3.1.9.7 (see Figure 3; Faul et al., 2014). The guidelines for estimating the sample size for a MANOVA with two groups, two dependent variables, a medium effect size of .0625, power set at .80, and alpha level of .05 yielded a minimum sample of 158 participants.

Figure 3

Power Analysis for MANOVA



Procedure for Recruitment

Permission was requested from Ashland University to conduct the research. A letter of introduction with a letter of informed consent (see Appendix B) was provided to participants to conduct the survey. An email from OP4 with the survey link was given to the participants as part of the survey packet that included the consent form and TRF, which included the narratives that described student behavior and general demographic information.

The consent form explained to the participants that they were not required to give any personal identifying demographic information. The survey instrument recorded the results in a Google sheet after survey completion. No formal contact between myself and the participants was required because this process was wholly electronic.

Data Collection

Many scholars believe quantitative data collection methods produce more objective and precise information using standardized collection methods that can be replicated and analyzed using sophisticated statistical techniques (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The quantitative data collection process for this study involved participation in an online survey to a population of teachers in grades K–12. It was important for the study to have an appropriate sample size for achieving adequate power to be statistically significant (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

The sample of participants answered each section of the survey, which consisted of a mixture of categorical, interval level, and Likert-type scales; the survey is easy to administer, useful for collecting descriptive data, and can be analyzed using a variety of existing software. The survey design was based on a small number of items and a few

"simple" questions that make the survey inexpensive to produce (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Woodson et al, 2018). Participants were able to complete the entire instrument in approximately 15 minutes or less because it does not require participants to answer open-ended questions, partake in personal interviews, nor observations (Woodson, 2018).

Operationalization of Variables

The four independent variables (race/ethnicity of the teacher, gender of the teacher, and teacher years of teaching experience) were a mixture of categorical and interval-level data. Students were described using pictures representing Black, White, and Latinx males with stereotypical cultural names. The race/ethnicity of teachers were categorical variables.

The dependent variable, teacher referral for SE, was measured using a Likert scale; the dependent variable measured how likely a teacher would refer a male student for SE evaluation based on descriptions of classroom behaviors. Students were described as fitting one of the following three categories: Black/African American, Latino, or White, and teachers' gender comprised the categorical variables.

Years of teaching experience were continuous as teaching experience can range from 0 to several years. Teachers typed in the number of years they have been teaching GE or SE in the demographic section of the survey. The teacher gender variable was categorical, choosing from male, female, or nonbinary as seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Levels of Measurement for Variables of Interest

Variable	Independent or Dependent Variable	Level of Measurement	Possible Values
Teacher's years of teaching experience	Independent variable	Continuous	Fill-in-the-blank
Ethnicity of teacher	Independent variable	Nominal	White, Black, Latinx, Asian, Multi-racial. Other, prefer not to answer
Gender of teacher	Independent variable	Nominal	Male, Female, Nonbinary
Likelihood of referral	Dependent variable	Continuous	1 to 5

Instrumentation

TRF participants answered the four questions about themselves at the beginning of the survey related to demographics, years of teaching experience, and attitudes about inclusion. The TRF then described the classroom behavior of 12 fictitious students (coded A through L). Students were in various grades, all male, and had a culturally associated image and name.

The participants were asked to read each scenario and then rate how likely (on a scale of 1 (would not refer) to 5 (likely to refer)) they would refer each student to the school's multidisciplinary team for SE evaluation for possible placement. Please see appendix C for the TRF. The 12 scenarios were based on fictitious students, included students of three ethnicities (White, Black, and Hispanic), and were associated with situations characteristic of disruptive behaviors. The teachers rated the behaviors as a mild, moderate, or severe level of behavior disturbance based on the behavioral checklist.

Validity and Reliability

The survey instrument (TRF) in this study contained fictitious narratives of classroom behavior of 12 students. An assessment tool should have measurement validity, meaning it must measure what it is designed to measure by providing sense to the tool (Dros, 2011; Trochim, 2013). Face validity in this study, which inferred that an instrument used in a real-world situation should, in addition to having logical validity, appear practical and measure what it is designed to measure (Woodson, 2018).

Content validity refers to the degree to which an instrument has an appropriate sample of items for the construct being measured (Polit & Beck, 2004). A greater examination of the facets was considered to determine whether the features are captured when measured and experts may be asked to assess whether the measures seem reasonable to them when assessing content validity. Content validity connects to whether items on the TRF tool effectively represent the domain of content addressed by the instrument (Waltz et al., 2005) and the extent to which an instrument adequately samples the research domain of interest when attempting to measure phenomena (Woodson, 2018; Wynd et al., 2003, p. 509).

The TRF survey instrument was assessed using interrater reliability. Reliability relates to the degree to which a survey precisely assesses a theoretical construct (Dros, 2011). One form of reliability pertains to interrater reliability; interrater reliability was used for this study because it is based on the level of agreement between two independent experts who rate whether items on a survey adequately reflect some domain, phenomena, or construct of interest (Woodson, 2018; Wynd et al., 2003). The criteria for item observations were customarily placed into mutually exclusive categories, followed by a

percent agreement score formula: (number of times the observers agree/total number of observations) x 100 (Polit et al., 2008; Woodson, 2018). The formula for content validity has a standard of error when all the experts agree on the content validity for their rating to be considered a reasonable representation of reality (Woodson et al., 2018; Wynd et al., 2003). To obtain a measure of interrater reliability, experts are given the same instrument/survey but record their responses independently without knowing what the other observer has recorded (Woodson, 2018; Wynd et al., 2003). Two experts were given the TRF and asked to read the narratives for the 12 fictitious students, then indicate the severity of the behavior as mild, moderate, or severe and the likeliness of referral of a child for SE evaluation. The reliability index was calculated using the formula, (number of times the observers agree/total number of observations) x 100 (Polit et al., 2007; Woodson et al., 2018). If the two experts did not agree on survey items less than 25% of the time, whether items on a survey adequately reflect some domain, phenomena, or construct of interest, the TRF was revisited for changes to meet a standard of reliability (Polit et al., 2007; Woodson et al., 2018).

Data Analysis Plan

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Statistical Solutions will provide an aggregated data set. Then the data output was analyzed using the SPSS 28.0 for Windows. Before conducting inferential statistics, the data were screened to account for missing responses and outliers. Participants who did not respond to most of the survey were removed from further descriptive and inferential analysis. Mean substitution (i.e., replacing the missing values with the item mean) was used to replace missing data (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2019). Descriptive statistics were

computed for some variables; for example, frequencies and percentages were computed for categorically coded variables (e.g., gender, race, and ethnicity). Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and range of scores were computed for continuously coded (i.e., ratio or interval such as teachers' years of experience) variables.

RQ1: Is there a relationship between professional demographic factors of educators and their likelihood for referring youth of color for SE?

H_0: There is no statistically significant correlation between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience and likelihood to refer a male student for an SE evaluation.

H_1: There is a statistically significant correlation between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience, teacher attitude towards inclusion, and likelihood to refer a male student to for an SE evaluation.

H_0: There is no statistically significant predictive relationship between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience, teacher attitude towards inclusion, and likelihood to refer a male student for an SE evaluation.

H_1: There is a statistically significant predictive relationship between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience, teacher attitude towards inclusion, and likelihood to refer a male student for an SE evaluation.

To address Research Question 1, a series of Pearson correlations and a multiple linear regression were employed to analyze the data. A Pearson correlation is appropriate when testing the strength of the association between continuous-level variables (Pallant, 2020). Multiple regressions allow for the assessment of the predictive relationships of the categorical and continuously coded predictor variables on a continuously coded criterion variable (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2019).

Prior to analysis, the assumptions of a Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression were verified. To run a Pearson correlation, the variables of interest followed a normal distribution and followed an approximate linear relationship. Normality was evaluated with a series of Shapiro-Wilk tests on teachers' years of experience and likelihood to refer students for SE evaluation. Non-significance on the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p > .05$) indicated the assumption of normality was met. A series of scatterplots were also generated to visually examine the two-way relationships between the variables. There were also several assumptions that were assessed using a regression analysis that included: (a) normality of scores, (b) linearity between the independent and dependent variables, (c) lack of multicollinearity between predictor variables, and (d) homoscedasticity or equivalent criterion residuals scores across the predictor variables (Pallant, 2020). Normality for the regression model was tested with a normal P-P scatterplot. Linearity was evaluated using the same scatterplots generated for the Pearson correlation assumptions. Absence of multicollinearity was verified through examination of variance inflation factors (VIFs). VIFs lower than 10 in the regression model indicated a low correlation among the variables of interest, and the assumption for absence of multicollinearity was supported (George & Mallery, 2020). Homoscedasticity was

evaluated with a residual scatterplot. The absence of a clear trend in the data provided evidence that the assumption for homoscedasticity was supported.

If any of the aforementioned assumptions were violated, such as the presence of nonlinear relationships between dependent and independent variables, or the errors revealed correlation, heteroscedasticity, or nonnormality, then anticipated outcomes, confidence intervals, and scientific insights gave way by a regression model may be inefficient, biased, or misleading (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). The sample size was sufficiently large and bypassed the violations of parametric assumptions. Howell (2013) indicated that violations of normality are not problematic when the sample size exceeds 50 cases.

After the verification of statistical assumptions, the correlations and regression analyses were conducted. For the correlations, Cohen's (1988) standard was used to evaluate the correlation coefficient to determine the strength of the relationship, where coefficients between .10 and .29 represent a small association; coefficients between .30 and .49 represent a medium association; and coefficients above .50 represent a large associate or relationship. For the regression model, the *F* test was used to make the overall determination on whether a significant predictive relationship exists between the variables of interest (George & Mallery, 2020). The coefficient of determination, R^2, indicated how much variance in the outcome would be explained by the predictor variables. Individual *t*-tests were used to evaluate the strength of each predictor variable (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2019). The unstandardized beta coefficient (*B*) explained how the outcome variable shifts by a one-unit increase in the predictor variables. Statistical significance was evaluated at the generally accepted level, $\alpha = .05$ (Pallant, 2020).

RQ2: Are White teachers more likely to refer students of color or White students for an SE evaluation than non-White teachers?

H_0: There are no statistically significant differences between White and non-White teacher SE evaluation referral likelihood between White and non-White male students.

H_1: There are statistically significant differences between White and non-White teacher SE evaluation referral likelihood between White and non-White male students.

H_0: There are no statistically significant differences between teacher race and likelihood to refer for an SE evaluation or their perceived level of severity of behavior.

H_1: There are statistically significant differences between teacher race and likelihood to refer for an SE evaluation or their perceived level of severity of behavior.

To address Research Question 2, a chi-square test and MANOVA was conducted. A chi-square test of independence is appropriate when assessing the strength of the relationship between two nominal-level variables (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2019). The two nominal variables correspond to teacher race and student race. A MANOVA is appropriate when testing for differences in a variable that is measured multiple times (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2019). The dependent variables correspond to likelihood of referral and perceived level of severity of behavior. The independent variable corresponds to teacher race.

Prior to conducting the chi-square test, the assumptions were verified. The assumption for the data expected frequencies below five should not comprise more than 20% of the cells, and none of the cells should have an expected frequency lower than one (Pallant, 2020). Prior to conducting the MANOVA, the assumption of normality was assessed using Shapiro-Wilk tests on likelihood of referral and perceived level of severity of behavior. Homogeneity of variance were evaluated with Levene's tests. The *F* test was used to make the overall determination on whether there are significant differences in likelihood of referral and perceived level of severity of behavior based on race/ethnicity of students. Statistical significance on the analyses were evaluated at the generally accepted level, $\alpha = .05$.

Ethical Procedures

Permission was requested from the Human Studies Review Board (HSRB) of Ashland University to execute this study. The HSRB issued an approval number for this study once it was approved. In addition, permission from Ashland University to use the TRF for the study was requested (see Appendix A).

After receipt of permission from Ashland University/the HSRB to conduct the study, the following steps were implemented. OP4 recruited participants based on the conditions for participation. An email from OP4 with the survey link was given to the participants recruited as part of the survey packet that included a letter of introduction with a letter of informed consent (see Appendix D) and the TRF, which included the narratives that described student behavior and general demographic information provided to participants who elected to participate in the survey. The participants received contact

information of the HSRB Chair, Dr. Malik, if they had any questions after they took the survey.

Ethical Considerations

It was important to follow ethical guidelines around human subjects. The participants were instructed to read the informed consent and understand their participation in the study was confidential. Additionally, the study did not require them to reveal any personal demographic information and the consent agreement was required as a voluntary decision that allowed them to terminate their participation at any time during the study. The online survey included the informed consent form. Additionally, if the participants had any concerns after completing the survey, they received the HSRB Chair's contact information. The study results were reported on the aggregate level, not on an individual level, and data have been secured in a password-protected file on a password-protected storage-drive and will be deleted after 36 months.

Summary

In summary, the research was based on a quantitative, correlational research design for the purpose of examining the likeliness of which student/teacher variables predict how likely a teacher would refer Black students for SE evaluation. The independent variables were grounded in one research question: In what ways do student and teacher demographic variables predict how likely a teacher would refer minority students for SE? The independent variables included race/ethnicity of the student, race/ethnicity of the teacher, gender of the teacher, teachers' years of teaching experience, and teacher referral of Black male students for SE evaluation. The dependent variable was the likelihood of the teachers referring the Black male students for SE

evaluation. The study employed the use of a survey, an effective data collection research tool particularly when examining a broad range of current social issues in human services (Trochim, 2013). The study was designed to collect descriptive data about teachers' predictive relationships between the independent and dependent variables in the study. A series of regression mode and repeated measures ANOVA were conducted to address the research questions.

CHAPTER IV

Research Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of implicit bias in the referral process for SE. The study explored the relationship between independent variables such as student and teacher race/ethnicity, gender of teacher, teachers' years of teaching experience, how likely teachers would refer a male student for SE, and if there are significant differences in teacher rating of severity based on the race/ethnicity of the student in Ohio's eight large urban school districts. In this chapter, the findings of the data analyses are presented. Frequencies and percentages are used to describe the trends in the nominal-level variables. Means and standard deviations are used to summarize the continuous-level variables. To address the research questions, Pearson correlations, linear regression, and ANOVAs are utilized. Statistical significance for all inferential results was evaluated at the generally accepted level, $\alpha = .05$.

Demographic Examination

A total of 168 teachers completed the survey questionnaire. There were no partial or incomplete responses. The sample consisted of 118 females (70.24%) and 50 males (n = 29.76%). The sample was predominantly White (n = 150, 89.29%). The age of participants widely varied between 18 and over 65 years. A large proportion of the sample was from Columbus (n = 60, 35.71%). The sample was split between K–12 GE teachers (n = 108, 64.29%) and K–12 SE teachers (n = 60, 37.71%). Years of experience widely ranged between 1–5 years and over 21 years of experience. Frequencies and percentages are presented in Table 3. This sample adequately represents the teaching

population of urban school districts in Ohio as 92.5% of teachers are White and less than 5% of teachers are minorities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). The *Cincinnati Enquirer* reported "About 1 in 3 Ohio public school districts have a 100% white teaching staff, according to the Ohio Department of Education" (Weir, 2021). Additionally, as of the 2019–20 school year, 16.8% of students on Ohio were Black in comparison to 4.3% of Black educators across grades K–12, and 6.4% of students in Ohio were Hispanic compared to .07% of Hispanic educators (Weir, 2021).

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of Demographics

Variable	*n*	*%*
Gender		
Female	118	70.24
Male	50	29.76
Race		
White	150	89.29
Other	18	10.71
Age		
18–24	10	5.95
25–34	37	22.02
45–54	30	17.86
35–44	63	37.50
55–64	22	13.10
65+	6	3.57

Variable	*n*	%
Residing City		
Columbus	60	35.71
Cincinnati	22	13.10
Canton	6	3.57
Dayton	16	9.52
Cleveland	36	21.43
Akron	12	7.14
Toledo	11	6.55
Youngtown	5	2.98
Professional Role		
K-12 General Education Teacher	108	64.29
K-12 Special Education Teacher	60	35.71
Years of Experience		
1–5 years	38	22.62
6–10 years	53	31.55
11–15 years	23	13.69
16–20 years	20	11.90
21+ years	34	20.24

Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion

Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion (inclusion defined as maintaining students in a GE environment, and not referring students for SE services) ranged from 1.00 to 5.00, with $M = 3.96$ and $SD = 0.99$. The mean score 3.96 indicates that most participants agreed with inclusion. Table 4 presents the summary statistics for attitudes toward inclusion.

Table 4

Summary Statistics for Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion

Variable	*n*	Min	Max	*M*	*SD*
Teacher attitudes toward inclusion*	2016	1.00	5.00	3.96	0.99

Note. *Responses on teacher attitudes toward inclusion ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Student Scenarios in Survey

Teachers were asked to read a total of 12 scenarios and then rate on a Likert-scale how likely they would refer each student to the school's multidisciplinary team for SE evaluation for possible placement. Twelve scenarios were based on fictitious students and included students of three ethnicities (White, Black, and Hispanic) and were associated with situations characteristic of disruptive behavior. The teachers also rated the behaviors as a mild, moderate, or severe level of behavioral disturbance based on the behavioral checklist. Table 5 presents the breakdown of the 12 scenarios provided to teachers.

Table 5

Breakdown of Student Scenarios Teachers Were Provided

Student #	Race	1 Category	1 Duration	2 Category	2 Duration	3 Category	3 Duration	4 Category	4 Duration
Student #1	Latinx	Property	1	Verbal	5	Physical	1	Academic	1
Student #2	White	Property	1	Verbal	5	Physical	1	Academic	1
Student #3	Black	Property	1	Verbal	5	Physical	1	Academic	1
Student #4	Latinx	Verbal	1	Physical	5	Academic	1	Property	1
Student #5	White	Verbal	1	Physical	5	Academic	1	Property	1
Student #6	Black	Verbal	1	Physical	5	Academic	1	Property	1
Student #7	Latinx	Physical	1	Academic	1	Property	5	Verbal	1
Student #8	White	Physical	1	Academic	1	Property	5	Verbal	1
Student #9	Black	Physical	1	Academic	1	Property	5	Verbal	1
Student #10	Latinx	Academic	5	Property	1	Verbal	1	Physical	1
Student #11	White	Academic	5	Property	1	Verbal	1	Physical	1
Student #12	Black	Academic	5	Property	1	Verbal	1	Physical	1

Note. *Behavior type duration was coded 1 = Never and 5 = Always

Likelihood to Refer Students

Based on the 12 scenarios provided in the survey, teachers were asked to rate their likelihood of referring students to the school's multidisciplinary team for SE evaluation for possible placement. Responses on these survey questions ranged from 1 = would not refer to 5 = very likely to refer. The likelihood to refer scores ranged from 1.00 to 5.00, with *M* = 3.53 and *SD* = 1.25. The summary statistics for likelihood to refer responses are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Summary Statistics for Likelihood to Refer Students

Variable	*n*	Min	Max	*M*	*SD*
Likelihood of referral*	2016	1.00	5.00	3.53	1.25

Note. *Likelihood to refer responses ranged from 1 = Would not refer to 5 = Very likely to refer.

Level of Severity

Based on the 12 scenarios provided in the survey, teachers were asked to rate their students' levels of severity of behavior. Survey responses on these items ranged from 1 = mild to 3 = severe. The level of severity scores for students ranged from 1.00 to 3.00, with *M* = 2.14 and *SD* = 0.72. The summary statistics for level of severity of behavior are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Summary Statistics for Level of Severity

Variable	*n*	Min	Max	*M*	*SD*
Level of severity*	2016	1.00	3.00	2.14	0.72

Note. *Level of severity responses ranged from 1 = mild to 3 = severe.

RQ1: Is there a relationship between professional demographic factors of educators and their likelihood for referring youth of color for SE?

H_0: There is no statistically significant correlation between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience and likelihood to refer a male student for an SE evaluation.

H_1: There is a statistically significant correlation between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience, teacher attitude towards inclusion, and likelihood to refer a male student to for an SE evaluation.

H_0: There is no statistically significant predictive relationship between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience, teacher attitude towards inclusion, and likelihood to refer a male student for an SE evaluation.

H_1: There is a statistically significant predictive relationship between continuous professional demographic factors of educators to include teachers' years of teaching experience, teacher attitude towards inclusion, and likelihood to refer a male student for an SE evaluation.

Research Question 1 Findings

Hypothesis 1 Results

To address Research Question 1 (Hypothesis 1), a series of Pearson correlations were first proposed to examine the relationship between teachers' years of teaching experience, attitudes toward inclusion, level of severity, and likelihood to refer a male

student. A multiple linear regression was then used to examine the predictive relationship between years of teaching experience, attitudes toward inclusion, level of severity, and likelihood to refer a male student. All the variables of interest are continuous measurements.

Prior to conducting the Pearson correlation analyses, the assumption of normality was tested on the variables of interest with a Shapiro-Wilk test. The finding of the Shapiro-Wilk tests was statistically significant ($p < .001$), indicating that the assumption of normality was not met (see Table 8). Howell (2013) indicated that violations of normality are not problematic when the sample size exceeds 50 cases. The sample size was sufficient for the analyses and the Pearson correlations were conducted as initially proposed.

Table 8

Shapiro-Wilk Tests for Variables of Interest

Variable	Shapiro-Wilk Tests	
	Test Statistic	*P*
Years of experience	0.87	<.001
Attitude toward inclusion	0.83	<.001
Level of severity	0.80	<.001
Likelihood to refer student	0.88	<.001

Because the p-value was less than .05, there is significant evidence to reject the null hypothesis and accept that years of experience is significantly correlated to attitude toward inclusion ($r = -.07$, $p < .001$), level of severity ($r = .38$, $p = <.001$), and likelihood to refer student ($r = .11$, $p < .001$). The other relationships were not statistically

significant at the .05 alpha level. Table 9 presents the findings of the Pearson correlations.

Table 9

Pearson Correlations Between Variables of Interest

		Years of experience	Attitude toward inclusion	Level of severity	Likelihood to refer
Years of experience	Pearson Correlation	1	-.072*	.057	.111*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.010	<.001
	N	2016	2016	2016	2016
Attitude toward inclusion	Pearson Correlation	-.072*	1	-.031	-.027
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.166	.231
	N	2016	2016	2016	2016
Level of severity	Pearson Correlation	.057*	-.031	1	.379*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.166		<.001
	N	2016	2016	2016	2016
Likelihood to refer	Pearson Correlation	.111*	-.027	.379*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.231	<.001	
	N	2016	2016	2016	2016

Note. *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis 2 Results

The findings of the regression model were examined. Prior to analysis, the assumption of normality of residuals was tested with a normal P-P scatterplot. Pallant (2020) indicated that if the data closely follow the diagonal trend line, the assumption of normality will be supported. The data approximately followed the diagonal trend line, providing evidence that the assumption of normality was supported (see Figure 3). Homoscedasticity was tested with a residual scatterplot. There was a lack of a pattern in

the residual scatterplot, indicating that the assumption of homoscedasticity was supported (see Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 4

Normal P-P Scatterplot for Likelihood to Refer Student

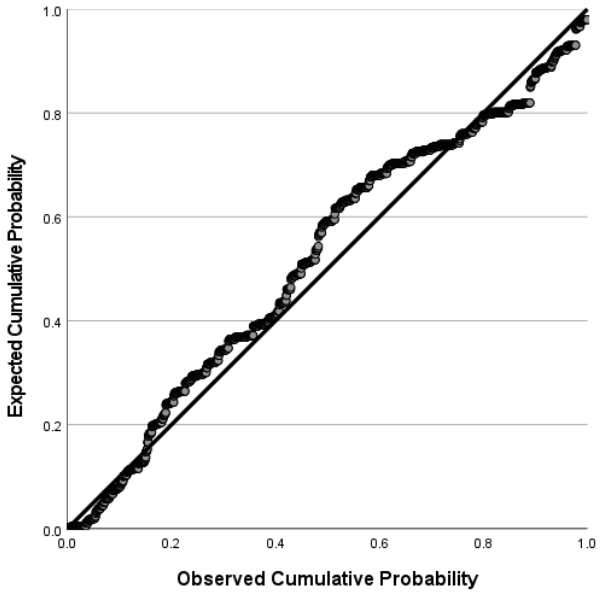
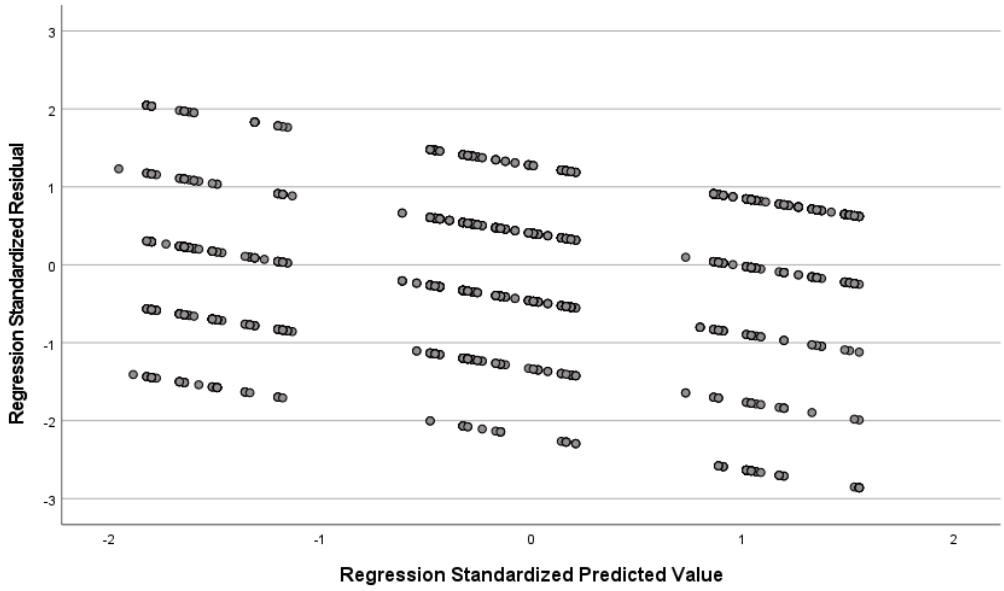


Figure 5

Residual Scatterplot for Likelihood to Refer Student



Absence of multicollinearity was verified with VIFs. Stevens (2010) indicated that VIFs below 10 indicate that the predictors are not highly correlated. All the predictors in the model had VIFs below 10, providing evidence that the assumption for absence of multicollinearity was supported. Table 10 presents the VIFs for the predictors.

Table 10

VIFs for Predictor Variables

Variable	VIF
Years of experience	1.01
Attitude toward inclusion	1.01
Level of severity	1.00

As the p-value from the regression model was less than .05, there was significant evidence to reject the null hypothesis and accept the model's results as significant, where $F(3, 2012) = 120.01$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .152$, indicating years of experience, attitude toward inclusion, and level of severity collectively had a significant predictive relationship on likelihood to refer students. Approximately 15.2% of the variance in likelihood to refer students could be explained by the predictor variables. Due to the finding of significance in the collective model found in Tables 11 and 12, further exploration of individual predictors was justified.

Table 11

Regression Model Summary

Model Summary[b]				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.390[a]	.152	.151	1.14907

Note. a. Predictors: (Constant), Level of Severity, Q9r1: Teachers Attitudes Toward Inclusion - What is your attitude towards inclusion? Q8: How many years of experience do you have working in education? b. Dependent Variable: Referral Likeliness

Table 12

Regression Model Fit

ANOVA[a]						
	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	475.351	3	158.450	120.006	<.001[b]
	Residual	2656.553	2012	1.320		
	Total	3131.904	2015			

Note. a. Dependent Variable: Referral Likeliness. b. Predictors: (Constant), Level of Severity, Q9r1: Teachers Attitudes Toward Inclusion - What is your attitude towards inclusion? Q8: How many years of experience do you have working in education?

As the p-value was less than .05, there is significant evidence to accept years of experience ($B = 0.08$, $t = 4.29$, $p < .001$) was a significant predictor, indicating that an increase in experience was associated with a higher likelihood to refer students. As the p-value was less than .05, there is significant evidence to accept level of severity ($B = 0.65$, $t = 18.17$, $p < .001$) was a significant predictor, indicating that an increase in level of severity was associated with a higher likelihood to refer students. Because the p-value was greater than .05, there was a failure to reject the significance of attitude toward inclusion as a significant predictor in the model. Overall, the regression model's p-value was less than .05 and there was sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis for Research Question 1 (Hypothesis 2). Table 13 summarizes the results of the regression model.

Table 13

Linear Regression with Years of Experience, Attitude Toward Inclusion, and Level of Severity Predicting Likelihood to Refer Students

Coefficients[a]						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.901	.149		12.772	<.001
	Years of experience	.075	.018	.089	4.294	<.001
	Attitudes toward inclusion	-.011	.026	-.009	-.429	.668
	Level of severity	.652	.036	.374	18.171	<.001

Note. a. Dependent Variable: Likelihood of referral

Research Question 2 Findings

RQ2: Are White teachers more likely to refer students of color or White students for an SE evaluation than non-White teachers?

H0: There are no statistically significant differences between White and non-White teacher SE evaluation referral likelihood between White and non-White male students.

H1: There are statistically significant differences between White and non-White teacher SE evaluation referral likelihood between White and non-White male students.

H0: There are no statistically significant differences between teacher race and likelihood to refer for an SE evaluation or their perceived level of severity of behavior.

H1: There are no statistically significant differences between teacher race and likelihood to refer for an SE evaluation or their perceived level of severity of behavior.

Hypothesis 1 Results

An ANOVA was conducted to assess for differences in likelihood of referral by race of teachers. The findings of the ANOVA were not statistically significant as the p-value was greater than 0.05, resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis, $F(1, 2014) = 0.17$, $p = .685$, $\eta^2_p = 0.000$, indicating that there were not significant differences in likelihood of referral by teacher race category. The ANOVA results are presented in Table 14. Means and standard deviations for likelihood of referral by teacher race are presented in Table 15.

Table 14

ANOVA for Likelihood of Referral by Teacher Race

Variable	$F(1, 2014)$	p	η_p^2
Teacher race	0.17	.685	.000

Table 15

Descriptive Statistics for Likelihood of Referral by Teacher Race

Variable	Teacher Race			
	White (n = 1800)		Non-White (n = 216)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Level of severity for student	3.53	1.25	3.56	1.20

Hypothesis 2 Results

An ANOVA was conducted to assess for differences in level of severity by race of teachers. As the p-value was less than .05, there is significant evidence to reject the null hypothesis and find the results of the ANOVA statistically significant, $F(1, 2014) = 6.65$, $p = .010$, $\eta^2_p = 0.003$. There were significant differences in overall level of severity when striated by teacher race. White teachers ($M = 2.15$) had a higher mean value for level of severity in comparison to teachers of other races ($M = 2.02$) and the finding was statistically significant as $p < .05$. The ANOVA results are presented in Table 16. Means and standard deviations for likelihood of referral by teacher race are presented in Table 17.

Table 16

ANOVA for Level of Severity by Teacher Race

Variable	$F(1, 2014)$	p	η_p^2
Teacher race	6.65	.010	.003

Table 17

Descriptive Statistics for Level of Severity by Teacher Race

Variable	Teacher Race			
	White (n = 1800)		Non-White (n = 216)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Level of severity for student	2.15	0.72	2.02	0.70

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of implicit bias in the referral process for SE. The study explored the relationship between independent variables such as student and teacher race/ethnicity, gender of teacher, teachers' years of teaching experience, how likely teachers would refer a male student for SE, and if there are significant differences in teacher rating of severity based on the race/ethnicity of the student in Ohio's eight large urban school districts. This chapter presented the findings of the data analyses. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the trends in the nominal-level variables. Means and standard deviations were used to summarize the continuous-level variables. To address the research questions, Pearson correlations, linear regression, and ANOVAs were utilized. Years of experience was positively related to likelihood of referral. There were not significant relationships identified between teacher gender, teacher race, attitude toward inclusion, and likelihood for student referral. The findings of the ANOVA indicated there were not significant differences in likelihood of referral between teacher races. There was a significant difference in level of severity between teacher races. White teachers (M = 2.15) had significantly higher levels of severity in comparison to teachers of other races (M = 2.02).

CHAPTER V

Discussion, Conclusions, and Suggestions for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of implicit bias in the referral process for SE. The study was designed to examine the relationship between professional demographic factors of educators and their likelihood for referring youth of color for SE. Research consistently revealed disproportional numbers of Black and Latino male students referred to SE (Sullivan & Bal, 2013; Zhang et al., 2012), leading to these students being overidentified for and overrepresented in SE (Grindal et al., 2019). Although there is research on disproportionality, additional research was needed on the relationship between teacher demographics and the likelihood of teachers referring male students for SE to contribute to research on teacher bias in SE referrals. Chapter 5 includes a summary and discussion of the findings, as well as implications for practice and leadership, recommendations for further research, and a conclusion.

Summary of Findings

This section includes a summary of findings for each research question and conclusions. It also includes a discussion of the findings in relation to previous research. Each research question is discussed individually.

Research Question 1

RQ1: Is there a relationship between professional demographic factors of educators and their likelihood for referring youth of color for SE?

For RQ1, the analysis revealed that years of experience ($B = 0.08$, $t = 4.29$, $p < .001$) was a significant predictor, indicating that an increase in experience was associated with a higher likelihood to refer students. Additionally, level of severity ($B =$

0.65, $t = 18.17$, $p < .001$) was also a significant predictor, indicating that an increase in level of severity was associated with a higher likelihood to refer students. Attitude toward inclusion was also a significant predictor in the model, indicating that as years of experience increased, attitude toward inclusion decreased. Ultimately, teachers with more years of experience are more likely to refer students for SE than teachers with fewer years of experience.

Teacher Experience and SE Referral

In my study, years of teacher experience predicted a higher likelihood to refer students for SE. For each year of experience, a teacher is .25 times more likely to refer a student. The finding of my study does not support the research of Alter et al. (2013), who found that teachers with fewer years of teaching experience were more likely to refer students with challenging behaviors than teachers with more years of teaching experience. Alter et al. explained that teachers with less experience may be more likely to refer students because they lack experience with challenging classroom behaviors and the ability to manage them. Dallas et al. (2014) found that years of teaching experience did not influence teachers' decisions to refer students to SE.

Findings from my study showed a direct correlation between years of experience, likelihood to refer, and severity of behavior rating, in addition to White (vs. non-White) teachers being more likely to refer. This could be attributed to teachers with more experience having less patience with challenging behaviors and being increasingly likely to refer students who exhibit challenging behavior for SE. Teachers may also develop biases against students with ongoing behavioral issues because the behavior does not align with the behavioral norms of the dominant culture or with behaviors deemed

socially acceptable by the dominant cultural group, or what is deemed norm behavior. Woodson and Harris (2018) argued teachers customarily refer students for SE as a way of dealing with challenging student behavior.

Teachers with more years of experience may exhibit lack of tolerance, resistance to implementing culturally relevant pedagogy, and negating the importance of relationship building. The theory behind social exclusion can help explain how lower tolerance can be attributed to the over-identification of Black and Latino male students. Therefore, Black and Latino males who do not demonstrate the dominant communication style and behavior in school lack the necessities for integration into society (Atiş, 2021). Teacher bias may demonstrate lower tolerance for specific cultural behaviors, social norms, and communications styles that lead to referrals for SE, and perpetuating a variety of negative effects and outcomes for students, such as poor academic performance, increased risk of contact with the juvenile justice system, and low employment rates after high school (Connelly, 2021; Scardamalia et al., 2019). Additionally, Woodson and Harris (2018) stated, "teachers are inextricably connected to social exclusion because they make the initial referrals for special education" (p. 2). When teachers decide what are and are not acceptable academic performance and social behaviors, they greatly influence who is accepted by the larger group, both behaviorally and academically.

Severity of Behavior and SE Referral

In the present study, increased level of severity predicted a higher likelihood that teachers would refer students for SE. Alter et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative survey of teachers to determine what challenging behaviors teachers perceive are most prevalent and problematic in the classroom. The findings of my study revealed White teachers had

higher ratings of severity, thus increasing their likelihood to refer than non-White teachers. As the years of experience increased, the rating of severity increased. As the years of experience increased, the likelihood of referral increased. The level of severity also increased with the likelihood to refer. Past research indicated that teachers with limited self-efficacy are more likely to make referrals to SE, and it is not uncommon for teachers to hold negative sentiments toward students who are difficult to discipline and teach (Kvande et al., 2019; Woodson & Harris, 2018).

Teacher Attitude Toward Inclusion and SE Referral

Attitude toward inclusion was a significant predictor of referral for SE as the years of experience increased for teachers. Dallas et al. (2014) examined teachers' views about inclusion and how their views affected the decision to refer students for SE evaluation. Dallas et al. found that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion were linked to teachers' referrals for SE evaluation. The findings of the present study indicate that as years of experience increased, teachers' attitudes toward inclusion decreased. Swain et al. (2015) found that training, direct exposure to special needs students, and coursework significantly influenced preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusion.

Research Question 2

RQ2: Are White teachers more likely to refer students of color or White students for an SE evaluation than non-White teachers?

For RQ2, the analysis revealed no differences in likelihood for referral by teacher race (White vs. other). However, there were differences in level of severity between White vs. other teachers, with White teachers having higher scores. So, although teacher race does not predict referral for SE, White teachers are more likely to report classroom

behaviors as more severe than are teachers of other races, thus increasing the likelihood to refer.

Alexander (2010) examined the likelihood of White teachers referring Black and Latino male students for SE and found that the race/ethnicity of the teacher was directly correlated to the teacher's decision to refer Black and Latino males for SE evaluation. Fish (2016) found 75% of referrals originate from teachers. Additionally, Fish found teachers see academic challenges as disabilities for White boys but see behavior challenges as disabilities for boys of color. When White boys exhibited the same behaviors as boys of color, teachers were more likely to refer boys of color with behavior problems than White boys (Fish, 2016). Teachers perceive the misbehavior of boys of color as more aggressive and problematic than misbehavior by White boys. Fish stated, "In case studies where teachers read about boys with academic strength and emotional sensitivity, clues for good candidates for gifted education, teachers were more likely to refer white students for gifted testing" (p. 98). Fish further stated, "When students are placed in special education programs differentially because of racial bias among teachers, then students are likely receiving inappropriate educational services" (p. 98). Such inequalities of referral based on race and ethnicity imply referrals are based to some degree on subjectivity and bias.

Connections of Research to the Theoretical Framework

CRT and social exclusion theory were used as the theoretical basis for the study. Findings from my research confirm past research on the over-identification of Black and Latino male students. Study findings revealed that teachers' years of experience, teacher attitude about inclusion, and level of severity were statistically significant predictors for

male students being referred to SE, which can lead to an increased number of adverse outcomes for these students.

Students are excluded from mainstream instruction, as well as associated educational opportunities and social interactions, once they are moved into SE (World Health Organization, 2015). When White cultural norms are the premise behind many facets of society, especially influencing education-normative communication patterns, the English language and rationalization of expressions and emotions are normalized based on the White norm system. As a result, social exclusion exposes groups of students to academic and social barriers within society (Fallon et al., 2012; Kastanakis & Voyer, 2014). Therefore, such social exclusion exposes groups of students to academic and social impediments based on individual teacher bias (Fallon et al., 2012; Kastanakis & Voyer, 2014). Results from previous literature showed that exclusion occurred at disproportionally higher rates for Black and Latino male students (Connelly, 2021). Connelly (2021) found that White teachers are more likely to refer minority students than non-White teachers, especially when the rating of severity is increased, which supports potential bias in referral and social exclusion theory. Social exclusion theory highlights the connection between social exclusion, teacher referrals, and minority students misidentified for SE services based on behaviors deemed norm by the predominant cultural group (Connelly, 2021; Woodson & Harris, 2018). The teacher connection is important to recognize because they make the initial referral, which can be driven by a lack of awareness of implicit bias and beliefs. Lastly, social exclusion supports "whiteness" in that what is not acceptable in White norms, is then not acceptable in socially (i.e., students with disabilities)(Connelly, 2021). This implies that White teachers

are more likely to refer students and rate the severity of behavior higher than non-White teachers, which has significant implications in schools and districts where teachers are predominantly White.

The premise of CRT is that individuals form perceptions from their experiences that are consistent with the broad systems of attitudes and beliefs that reflect their cultural way of life (Kahan, 2012). So, when the worldviews held by members of various groups frequently lead to cultural biases, it causes the group members to judge others based on the adopted norms established by the dominant culture (Connelly, 2021), who then decides what is acceptable and unacceptable within the organization. The dominant culture then deems what is and is not acceptable communication and emotional expressions in educational settings, which can lead to the over referral of Black and Latino male students because their behavior may not align to the dominant social norms. Therefore, the major premise of CRT and social exclusion is relevant for explaining beliefs systems that may influence teacher perceptions of student behavior in the classroom for the referral process.

Implications

Implications for Practice

The positive social change implications encouraged by this study were that the findings could be used to raise the awareness of teachers about the connections between teachers' characteristics, students' characteristics, and teacher referral of Black and Latino boys for SE evaluation. Results from the study could be used to advocate the need for cultural sensitivity awareness and training seminars during teacher residency years that inform educators about how the factors of student race/ethnicity, teacher gender,

teacher race/ethnicity, and teacher attitude toward inclusion are related to the referral of males of color for SE evaluation. The training could be designed to increase and promote more culturally sensitive awareness and practices among teachers. Consequently, by being more culturally sensitive and aware, teachers then may be less likely to refer non-White boys for SE.

Additionally, teachers could work to develop more culturally relative and sensitive classroom management procedures, which would also reduce the need to refer students for either SE or ODRs (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Such training could reduce the number of male students, particularly African American males, being referred for SE evaluation. Professionals within the educational system could use the results of this study to make specific suggestions about the development of cultural awareness programs and develop policies that would ultimately lead to change within the educational system. Educators could use findings from this study to become informed agents of change by recognizing that the race of a student should not predict how likely a teacher is to refer male students for SE evaluation. In addition, educators can use information from this study to advocate for the modification of existing programs or policy to positively effect teacher residency programs.

Implications for Leadership

Educational leaders should be aware that teachers with more years of experience are more likely to refer minority students for SE. They must understand this could be based on experienced teachers perceived cultural differences in communication and acceptable behavioral norms because what is not acceptable in White norms socially is then not acceptable in the classroom (Connelly, 2021). In SE referrals, there are multiple

points at which bias can be introduced (Ahram et al., 2021; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Smolkowski et al., 2016) of which educational leaders should be aware. Additionally, policies (Kramarczuk-Voulgarides, 2018) and structures (Elder et al., 2019; Fish, 2016; Ray, 2019) also affect teachers' decisions, which can unintentionally perpetuate inequities (Cruz & Firestone, 2021). This is evident as the results of the study revealed White teachers are more likely to refer minority students than non-White teachers. Experienced teachers also may need more professional development in writing referrals to ensure they are not over-identifying students based on cultural differences. The information can help educational leaders identify referral patterns of experienced teachers and look for biases in the process.

Cultural sensitivity awareness and training seminars during teacher residency years can proactively inform educators of how the factors of student race/ethnicity, teacher race/ethnicity, and teacher attitude toward inclusion are related to teacher referrals of Black and Latino males for SE. Understanding the predictors of referrals for Black and Latino males is important for all educational stakeholders, especially educational leaders. Consequently, by increasing stakeholders' cultural sensitivity and awareness, educational leaders can support systems and processes to reduce the likelihood of referring non-White boys for SE. Training could be designed to reduce the number of male students, particularly Black and Latino males, being referred for SE evaluation. Educational leaders have the opportunity to shape the development of diversity and equity training for cultural awareness policies that would ultimately lead to change within the educational system. In addition, educators can use information from

this study to advocate for the development of programs or policies to positively affect teacher residency programs.

Educational leaders must also understand cultural awareness and how years of experience impact the referral process. Educational leaders and policymakers should work to reduce bias in the referral process to ensure minority students are not over-identified for evaluation. Educational leaders in the building have a large impact on the social behaviors and expectations of the individuals within the building; it is vital that educational leaders understand the impact years of experience has on teachers' likelihood to refer students for SE evaluation, especially White teachers. From my experience, it becomes even more important to bring awareness to this issue because of the negative outcomes associated with being identified as an SE student. The findings for this study should ignite a flame in the minds of educational leaders as there was a correlation between years of experience, attitudes toward inclusion, likelihood to refer, and the rate of severity; the study confirms for educational leaders that there is an association between these variables and student referrals.

Lastly, educational leaders should incorporate cultural humility approaches and practices to reduce opportunities for bias. Yeager and Bauer-Wu (2013) suggested that cultural humility produces stronger relationships by understanding the cultures of others and being self-reflective of your own culture. Employment of cultural humility means recognizing the power imbalances and being humble in all interactions with others. To really impact change, educational stakeholders must be willing to learn and listen, more so when teacher demographics are imbalanced.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings suggest that future investigation must take a more focused approach to this well-defined phenomenon of disproportionate referral of African American male students to SE and the subsequent issues of social disruption that occur. The use of a mixed-methods approach involving quantitative and qualitative components would yield more comprehensive data on this important educational problem. The quantitative nature of the research would essentially remain the same and measure the same variables. The change would include a qualitative component where the researcher could examine possible underlying reasons through interviews and open-ended questions about teachers' decisions based on certain classroom behaviors to refer students to SE. In addition, the aim of the qualitative portion of the study would attempt to identify themes that provide a better understanding of teachers' perspectives on the causes for why boys are disproportionally referred for SE evaluation. It is also recommended that researchers replicate the study using a sample of teachers from different geographical areas and include elementary grades because those grades, according to Kvande et al. (2019), are where boy students are getting referred for SE earlier.

Conclusion

The study was designed to examine the connection between student and teacher characteristics and how likely a teacher would refer students for SE evaluation. Likewise, this study provided insight into teacher responses associated with male student behaviors. Years of experience was a significant predictor, indicating that an increase in experience was associated with a higher likelihood to refer students. Level of severity was a significant predictor, indicating that an increase in level of severity was associated with a

higher likelihood to refer students. Attitude toward inclusion was not a significant predictor in the model. Findings from my study showed a direct correlation between years of experience, likelihood to refer, and severity of behavior rating. This could be attributed to teachers with more experience having less patience with challenging behaviors and referring students who exhibit challenging behavior for SE. Additionally, there were no differences in likelihood for referral by teacher race; however, there were differences in level of severity between White vs non-White teachers, with White teachers having higher scores. It is recommended that educational leaders remain vigilant of and train for possible teacher subjectivity and unintended racial bias in the SE referral process.

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APPENDIX A

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 31-Jul-2020
Expiration Date 31-Jul-2023
Record ID 37701197

This is to certify that:

courtney revels-turner

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher (Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Ashland University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wac144d66-9ea6-4e43-870c-75d675e85895-37701197

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of Research Project: Likelihood to Refer for Special Education Services based on Student Behavior

Name of Principal Investigator: Courtney Revels-Turner

Phone Number of Principal Investigator: 470-295-6880

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Courtney Revels-Turner, a Doctoral student at Ashland University, is conducting research on the relationship of teacher demographics and special education referrals. The purpose of your participation in this research is to help the researcher understand the relationship between teacher demographics and special education referrals. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you meet the following conditions a) certificated teacher in the state of Ohio in general education or special education in grades K-12 and b) employed in one of the following school districts: Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Toledo, Dayton, Akron, Canton, and Youngtown public school systems.

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will e-sign the Consent Form and receive a Google link to the Teacher Rating Form, which is a 2-part survey. The first section requires non-identifying demographic information to be entered. Section 2 gives student narratives where you will be asked the likelihood of referral and rate the severity of the student behavior of the student referral. The TRF should not take more than 15 minutes to complete. Responses are automatically recorded and will not record

email addresses to maintain anonymity. Data records will be processed by Statistical Solutions, marketing research company.

C. RISKS

Loss of Confidentiality:

In all research involving human subjects, confidentiality of identifiable information is presumed and must be maintained unless the investigator obtains the express permission of the subject to do otherwise. Subjects have the rights to be protected against injury or illegal invasions of their privacy and to preservation of their personal dignity. The more sensitive the research material, the greater the care that must be exercised in obtaining, handling, and storing data.

To minimize the risk for loss of confidentiality, only personal information that is essential to the research activity will be collected. Identities of individual subjects must never be released because this information will not be collected on the survey instrument. In addition, if use of data for a purpose other than the one for which it was originally collected, the investigator will need to obtain consent from the subjects for the new use of the data.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

The records from this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. All Referral Rating Form responses will be given codes and stored separately. Research information will be always kept in the researchers iCloud. Only research personnel will

have access to the files and RRF responses. After the study is completed, after 36 months all collected data will be destroyed.

E. BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this research study. The anticipated benefit of your participation in this study is improved awareness of special education referrals in large, urban school districts.

F. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your decision whether to participate in this study is voluntary and will not affect your relationship with the researcher or Ashland University. If you choose to participate in this study, you can withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

G. QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Dr. Malik, Chair of HSRB at Ashland University.

CONSENT

You are deciding whether to participate in a research study. Your signature indicates that you have decided to participate in the study after reading all the information above and you understand the information in this form, have had any questions answered and have received a copy of this form for you to keep.

Email Address of Research Participant in lieu of

Signature _____ Date _____

Interviewer Signature_____Date _____

APPENDIX C

Teacher Referral Form Survey: https://forms.gle/5dD3q2Ha2unjYFPt8

Original- Teacher Referral Form Survey - Google Forms.pdf

Teacher Rating Form

Thank you for your participation in the quantitative research study exploring the likelihood to refer for student for special education services based on student narratives. Please enter your email below to begin.

* Required

Email *

Cannot pre-fill email

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of Research Project: Likelihood to Refer for Special Education Services based on Student Behavior

Name of Principal Investigator: Courtney Revels-Turner

Phone Number of Principal Investigator: 470-295-6880

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND
Courtney Revels-Turner, a Doctoral student at Ashland University, is conducting research on the likelihood to refer for student for special education services based on student narratives.

The purpose of your participation in this research is to help the researcher understand the likeliness to refer for special education services based on student behavior. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because
a) certificated teacher in the state of Ohio in general education or special education in grades K-12, and

The purpose of your participation in this research is to help the researcher understand the likeliness to refer for special education services based on student behavior. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because
a) certificated teacher in the state of Ohio in general education or special education in grades K-12, and b) employed in one of the following school districts: Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Toledo, Dayton, Akron, Canton, and Youngtown public school systems. The school districts were selected based on their typology code identified by the state, classifying the schools as “urban, very high student poverty and very large student population”.

B. PROCEDURES
If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur: you will receive a Google link to the Teacher Rating Form, which is a 2-part survey. The first section requires non-identifying demographic information to be entered. Section 2 gives student narratives where you will be asked the likelihood of referral and rate the severity of the student behavior of the student referral. The TRF should not take more than 15 minutes to complete. Responses are automatically recorded and will not record email addresses to maintain anonymity. Data records will be processed by a third-party processor.

C. RISKS
Loss of Confidentiality:

In all research involving human subjects, confidentiality of identifiable information is presumed and must be maintained unless the investigator obtains the express permission of the subject to do otherwise. Subjects have the rights to be protected against injury or illegal invasions of their privacy and to preservation of their personal dignity. The more sensitive the research material, the greater the care that must be exercised in obtaining, handling, and storing data.

To minimize the risk for loss of confidentiality, only personal information that is essential to the research activity will be collected. Identities of individual subjects must never be released because this information will not be collected on the survey instrument. In addition, if use of data for a purpose other than the one for which it was originally collected, the investigator will obtain consent from the subjects for the new use of the data.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY
The records from this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. All Referral Rating Form responses will be given codes and stored separately. Research information will be always kept in the researchers iCloud. Only research personnel will have access to the files and RRF responses. After the study is completed, after 36 months all collected data will be destroyed.

E. BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION
There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this research study. The anticipated benefit of your participation in this study is improved awareness of special education referrals in large, urban school districts.

F. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Your decision whether to participate in this study is voluntary and will not affect your relationship with the researcher or Ashland University. If you choose to participate in this study, you can withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

G. QUESTIONS
If you have any questions about the study, please contact Courtney Revels-Turner by calling 470-295-6880.

CONSENT
You are making a decision whether or not to participate in a research study. Your signature below indicates that you have decided to participate in the study after reading all of the information above and you understand the information in this form, have had any questions answered and have received a copy of this form for you to keep.

Do you agree with the above informed consent?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Participant Demographics

What is your race/ethnicity? *

Choose

What is your gender? *

- Male
- Female
- Nonbinary

What is your professional role? *

Choose

How many years of experience do you have working in education? *

Your answer

Teacher Referral Form

Read the behavioral descriptions for each student. Students are in various grades K-12, all male, and all doing poorly in school. Read the scenarios for each student, and then decide how likely you would refer that student for special education testing. Select the number which reflects the how likely you would refer the student. Next, select the level of severity that best represents your opinion regarding the severity of the behaviors outlined in the narrative.

Student #1

Diego is an elementary student who bullies his classmates frequently. The bullying is often verbal and rarely physical. In addition, he curses out or uses profanity at his teachers. He has been known to leave class often to hide from staff. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Would not refer	○	○	○	○	○	Very likely to refer

Level of Severity

	1	2	3	
Mild	○	○	○	Severe

Student #2

Jacob, an elementary student regularly hums loudly, and at other times makes odd noises with his mouth. He does not seem to be aware he is doing this. He often uses profanity directed at other students. He is also known to lie to his teachers without hesitation and leave class without permission. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Would not refer	○	○	○	○	○	Very likely to refer

Level of Severity

	1	2	3	
Mild	○	○	○	Severe

Student Student #3

Malcolm is in middle school and often leaves class without permission and uses profanity when confronted by adults in the hallway. He typically leaves class after teacher instruction when students are expected to work independently or explain their mastery of the content. Malcolm is often found in the gym playing basketball after sneaking into the PE class.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Would not refer	○	○	○	○	○	Very likely to refer

Level of Severity

	1	2	3	
Mild	○	○	○	Severe

Student #4

Manny is a middle school student who constantly seeks negative attention from staff and peers. He consistently interrupts the learning of others by talking, moving around the room, asking the teacher questions that do not pertain to the lesson, and teasing other students. He is often removed from class for insubordination and disruption.

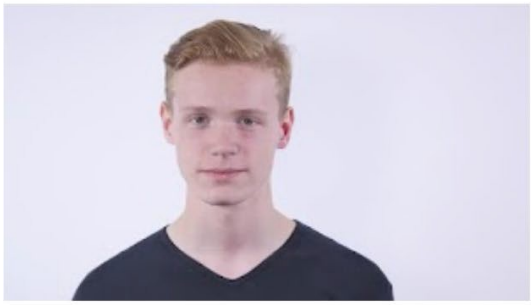
	1	2	3	4	5	
Would not refer	○	○	○	○	○	Very likely to refer

Level of Severity

	1	2	3	
Mild	○	○	○	Severe

Student #5

Scott is a high school student and is often seen or heard threatening other students with violence if they don't give in to his demands. He is often seen with large sums of money. When Scott is confronted by adults about threats to other students, he does not deny it or show any remorse or guilt for his behavior. He often engages in physical altercations with peers who don't give in.



	1	2	3	4	5	
Would not refer	○	○	○	○	○	Very likely to refer

Level of Severity

	1	2	3	
Mild	○	○	○	Severe

Student #6

Rodney is typically quiet during class and appears to be focused on learning. He will erupt out of nowhere with no obvious trigger. His eruptions include physically assaulting other students, knocking over tables, or leaving the room and slamming the door.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Would not refer	○	○	○	○	○	Likely to refer

Level of Severity

	1	2	3	
Mild	○	○	○	Severe

Student #7

Juan-Carlos always becomes distressed if his daily routine is altered. Juan-Carlos will refuse to participate in new activities and becomes loud with staff when they try to get him to do things he doesn't want to do.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Would not refer	○	○	○	○	○	Likely to refer

Level of Severity *

	1	2	3	
Mild	○	○	○	Severe

Student #8

John David constantly becomes angry over insignificant things and will scare students and staff with his passionate tantrums. He will leave room when angry and punch the lockers up and down the hallway. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Would not refer	○	○	○	○	○	Likely to refer

Level of Severity

	1	2	3	
Mild	○	○	○	Severe

Student #9

Jay'shaun always intimidates other students by using menacing language. If they don't do what he wants, he will scare them with violent, physical threats. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Would not refer	○	○	○	○	○	Likely to refer

Level of Severity

	1	2	3	
Mild	○	○	○	Severe

Student #10

Jose skips most classes throughout the day and hides around the building. He always appears to have no interest in academics. He consistently runs from staff and yells obscenities when they try to get him back to class.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Would not refer	○	○	○	○	○	Likely to refer

Level of Severity

	1	2	3	
Mild	○	○	○	Severe

Student #11

Lucas is in middle school and regularly harasses other students during class, trying to get them into trouble. During independent work time, he makes his presence known around the room by being loud and obnoxious. He does not turn in his assignments and is failing every class. The majority of class time is spent with teachers redirecting his behavior.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Would not refer	○	○	○	○	○	Likely to refer

Level of Severity

	1	2	3	
Mild	○	○	○	Severe

Student #12

Marquavious returned to his high school from a juvenile detention center. He displays aggressive behavior towards peers, and is always combative with staff when they try and get him to follow school rules. He has not earned any high school credits this school year.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Would not refer	○	○	○	○	○	Likely to refer

Level of Severity

	1	2	3	
Mild	○	○	○	Severe