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The purpose of this study was to examine general education teachers' perceptions of African American males to identify specific student characteristics and other variables that influence referral decision-making. The theoretical framework used to guide this study explored tenants of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to examine the practices and beliefs of 216 educators from a mid-sized school district in North Carolina in grades kindergarten-fifth. Twelve interviewees also were chosen, from the original pool of participants, to generate data relative to referral reasons. A mixed methods approach was used to describe the identification process. Measures for this study included an on-line survey and semi-structured interviews developed by the researcher. Areas surveyed included environmental factors, hereditary factors, certain biases, low socio-economic status, students' use of culturally different speech patterns and dress, lack of clarity in school guidelines for special education referrals, subjectivity in the county referral process, and African American males being raised by extended family. Two opened questions allowed participants to address other significant aspects considered relevant for referral.

The majority of the participants were Caucasian, females in their mid-thirties, who had more than 10 years of experience. Based on quantitative analysis, four factors emerged as key points for referrals. These included African American males "Raised by extended family"; "Cultural biases" among teachers; "Ineffective trainings" for teachers; and student "Environmental factors". Qualitative findings, however, both supported and

refuted these findings. The findings of this study are discussed, including the implications for future research.

GENERAL EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES PRIOR TO PRE-REFERRAL

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

African American students have been overrepresented in special education programs for over 40 years (Hosp & Reschly, 2004; McNally, 2003; Meyer & Patton, 2001). In spite of mandates to eliminate this despicable situation, this challenge has been extraordinarily resistant to change. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2007), the disproportionate representation of African American students exists nationwide. For instance, African American students are almost three times more likely to receive special education services in the disability categories for intellectual disability (ID), emotional disturbance (ED), and multiple disabilities (MD) than any other ethnic groups (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006; National Research Council, 2002). Compared to European American students, African American students are 2.88 times more likely than European American students to be labeled as ID and 1.92 times more likely to be identified as ED (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, et al., 2006).

The importance of the disproportionality issue is evident in the fact that numerous scholars have investigated the nature of the problem. For example, Skiba et al. (2008) provided a report of a number of factors that may contribute to the disproportionality of African American students, including test bias, poverty, special education processes, inequity in general education, issues of behavior management, cultural mismatch, and

cultural reproduction. Other influential factors include disparity among African American learning styles, classroom pedagogy, and errors in decision making (Kearns, Ford, & Linney, 2005).

A more recent theme in the literature addressing disproportionate representation lies with the group of professionals who have the most direct influence over the entrance of students into special education programs, that is, the general education teachers who typically initiate the referral process. Despite mandates for fairness and appropriate evaluations, researchers have found that the referral process may not be as objective as presented. Given the overrepresentation of African American students who receive special education services, questions of bias and misidentification have been raised. According to Mamlin and Harris (2000), once a referral has been made, the referred child will be less likely return to the general education classroom because a need for special education has been identified. Even with recent changes in educational assessment and programming (i.e., Response to Intervention [RTI] in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA]) the interaction of teachers' perspectives, classroom practices, curriculum expectations, and students' characteristics either to minimize or maximize a student's possible referral for special education (Dunn, Cole, & Estrada, 2009).

To extend this point, research has indicated that referral practices of general education teachers have gone beyond identifying the level of learning difficulties but also depend on student behaviors and gender. In a study conducted by Wehmeyer & Scwartz (2001), it appeared that certain student behaviors, particularly the behaviors of boys, led to special education referrals more often than other observed behaviors. In particular, the

identified behaviors were significantly greater for male students when compared to their female counterparts. Unlike girls with learning difficulties who are more likely to internalize behavioral problems, boys with learning difficulties generally displayed more task-commitment problems and disruptive behaviors than boys without learning difficulties (Wehmeyer & Scwartz, 2001). More recently, Dunn's (2006) qualitative study revealed that general education teachers used five main referral criteria relating to behavior: (a) inattentiveness, (b) need for assistance, (c) inability to apply the presented information, (d) inability to complete tasks, and (e) students' "look" (i.e., the student's demeanor/comportment projecting a disposition or attitude of not wanting to learn).

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory (CRT)

To understand teachers' perceptions of African American students and the reasons why they refer them for underachievement and behavior issues, it seems reasonable to analyze this phenomenon using Critical Race Theory (CRT). Initially begun in the discipline of legal studies by Derrick Bell and other minority scholars as a response to racial oppression in law and society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), CRT has been used by many educational scholars as a theoretical and/or interpretive framework to analyze the realities of racial politics in education (Closson, 2010). In particular, this theory is used to analyze the way current inequalities are connected to earlier, more overt, practices of racial exclusion (Closson, 2010; Dixson & Rousseau 2005). CRT has been extended and applied to many educational disciplines such as academic motivation, performance, intercultural interactions, and teacher perceptions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995;

Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano, 1997, 1998; Solorzano & Villalpando, 1998; Tate, 1997). According to Solorzano and Yosso (2002), critical race theorist who have focused on schooling, CRT in education is defined as "a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogies that seek to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education" (p.25). CRT provides a historical overview on how society constructs schools and categories to maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom. Critical race theorists asks such questions such as this one: What roles do schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination in American society?

Arguably, one of the most important contributions of CRT to the field of education in general is its robust theorization of race (Ross, 2009; Jennings & Lynn 2005; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). As an aspect of educational research, CRT confronts and challenges traditional views of education in regard to issues of meritocracy, claims of color-blind objectivity, and equal opportunity. CRT posits that racism is endemic in society and that racism has become so deeply engrained in society's and schooling's consciousness that it is often invisible (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Villalpando, 2003). As opposed to fixed conceptualizations of racial identity, CRT scholars conceptualize race (and all other racial identities) as being socially constructed (Chang, 2002; Matsuda et al.,1993).

The theory has been further developed in an effort to show how inequities are reproduced over time through institutional practices, decisions groups, and individual actions (Skiba, Knesting, & Bush, 2002). One important implication of CRT is that such

actions or processes may be implemented by individual or institutional habit patterns without ever reaching a conscious level of awareness on the part of those who participate in those institutional actions. For example, the interactional and evaluative techniques routinely used by teachers may not be adequate to fully identify the intellectual resources and talents of low-status children, who are subsequently assessed as poor performers (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Unchallenged, such patterns can unintentionally re-create and reinforce existing inequities in school processes.

In this study, CRT is offered as a theoretical tool for engaging understandings of issues of whiteness and how ideologies of whiteness influences attitudes to fixed conceptualizations of racial identity. To be specific, CRT is particularly important regarding the role of teacher attitudes toward, expectations of, and beliefs about African Americans prior to pre-referral as it provided the theoretical framework for the development of my research questions and data collection.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which classroom teachers' perceptions affect the referral and disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education programs. In particular, this study intended to identify specific student characteristics and other variables that influence educators' decision-making.

This study is founded on the assumption that the broader historical and cultural contexts encompass differences of cultural incongruity in terms of teacher attitudes, expectations, beliefs, and understanding of African American culture and learning styles (Delgado & Stefancic, 2002). With the best intentions, teachers who are unfamiliar with

African American cultures may inadvertently make invalid special education referrals based on unconscious bias and stereotypes (Lorsen & Orfield, 2002). Several studies have suggested that many teachers expect culturally diverse students to respond according to mainstream European-American cultural standards (e.g. Gay & Howard, 2000). As revealed in a study conducted by Neal, McCray, Web-Johnson, and Bridges (2003), teachers perceived students with African American culture related movement styles as lower in achievement, higher in aggression, and more likely in need of special education services than students with traditional movement styles.

A clear need exists to understand the complexities of teaching students from culturally diverse backgrounds. As educators address the demographic divide (Gay & Howard, 2002), teachers must face the reality that they will continue to come into contact with students whose cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial, and social class backgrounds may differ from their own. Teachers need to recognize the ways in which race constructs their identities and their perceptions of their students. This study has the potential of benefiting educators by providing a rich and detailed description of student characteristics and other variables that may influence educators' decision-making in referring African American males as possible candidates for special education services.

Research Questions

The goals of this study are to (a) provide in-depth descriptions of general educators' perceptions regarding factors affecting overrepresentation of African Americans in special education, (b) identify the relationship between teacher demographics and teacher perceptions of what prompts referrals for special education

services, and (c) explore African American student characteristics (i.e. ethnic background, gender, and SES) considered significant by general education teachers prior to special education referrals. The following questions guided this research:

1. What are general educators' perceptions regarding factors influencing the overrepresentation of African American males for special education?
2. What student characteristics (i.e., ethnic background, gender, and socioeconomic status) are considered significant by general education teachers prior to the referral of African American males' assessment for special education?
3. Do the teacher's demographic characteristics influence reasons for referrals?

Definitions of Key Terms

African American: According to the Census' 2010 definition, this category refers to "a person having origins in any of the racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as "African American, or Negro" or report entries such as African American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian". In the United States, this definition often is used interchangeably with Black or Black American and often includes those of African Caribbean or African Canadian heritage who often seem to share some of the same cultural characteristics.

Critical Race Theory (CRT): CRT is concerned with racism, racial subordination and discrimination. It emphasizes the socially constructed and discursive nature of race, considers judicial conclusions to be the result of the workings of the intersection of race with other social phenomena, but sees race as a primary factor, and opposes the

continuation of all forms of subordination. Scholars have applied CRT to educational research with the express goal of examining issues of race, class, and gender in educational settings (Chapman, 2007).

Disproportionate placement/representation: Disproportionate placement generally refers to the representation of a particular group of students at a rate different than that found in the general population. Student placements can be considered disproportionate if they are overrepresented or underrepresented when comparing their presence in a particular class or category with their representation in the general population (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006).

Perceptions: Formed from ideas, values and beliefs that can influence actions of individuals (Clements & Jones, 2006).

Response to Intervention (RTI) and pre-referral process: Significant changes in the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Education Act of 2004 includes a model of prevention, effective instruction, and intervention referred to as *response to intervention (RTI)* (Hawkins, Kroger, Musti-Roa, Barnett &Ward, 2008; Mellard & McKnight, 2008, Murri-Harris, King, & Rostenberg, 2006). RTI is defined as "an inadequate change in target behaviors as a function of intervention" (Gresham, 2005b, p. 331). RTI is based on systematic procedures involving general education interventions attempting to resolve students' present difficulties accompanied by a form of progress monitoring (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003). The purpose of RTI is founded on the premises that with data-based decision making and evidence-based practices many children, who otherwise may have been identified with a disability, will

now have the opportunity to be served in typical educational environments (Rush, Dobbins, & Kurtts, 2010).

The formation and implementation of such research-based decisions are initiated during the *pre-referral process*. Within the pre-referral process, collaborative, problem-solving teams are formed to address the academic and behavior concerns of students prior to special education referrals/services. Although various names have been used to describe these teams, they share a common and preventive goal. Pre-referral teams work in partnership to eliminate inappropriate referrals, increase the legitimacy of referrals that are initiated, and reduce future student problems in the general education setting by providing classroom-based interventions to address and strengthen student needs prior to special education consideration.

Special education: Specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. Special education services are meant for children over the age of three through age 21, and services are provided to eligible children free of charge through the public school system (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2009). Special education is to be designed with student needs and strengths in mind. Once long-term goals are established, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team develops an instructional program, including any required supports or supplemental services that would aid the student in accomplishing these goals. By law (IDEA, 2004), schools are required to provide a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (an opportunity to be educated with non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible) that is appropriate to the student's needs. Special educators

must use research-validated practices designed to meet the more intensive academic and behavioral needs of students with disabilities. Intensity of instruction, amount of instructional time, and specificity of instructional design and delivery focus on student need distinguish special education from other academic support. Ongoing revisions or modifications in the instructional program, however, may be required during special education intervention, as teachers must use progress monitoring data to judge the adequacy of student improvement (Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008).

Limitations of the Study

This study contains several limitations to be considered when interpreting the results. In terms of the questionnaire, the manner in which the items were presented may have caused the respondent to reply hesitantly. The connotations and interpretations of phrases such as "*acting out* in class," "*subjectivity* in the referral process," and "*negative* preconceptions about the behavior of males" may have caused reluctance in respondents' ratings of such items.

Being the primary researcher and an educator in the participating school system, the responses gathered may have also been given with some reservations. That is, when completing the survey and providing interview responses, the participants may have been inclined to choose answers they presumed were socially acceptable rather than expressing genuine viewpoints. In contrast, due to the nature of the study, the responses gathered may have been given with some reservations. For example, respondents may have hesitated to specify that they used some or all of these criteria in making special education referrals in reluctance to discuss the sensitive issues of race.

This study is limited in size and scope. The number of participants is relatively small, consisting of 250 general education teachers from 1 of the 160 local education agencies (LEAs) in North Carolina. Thus, the findings may not generalize all teachers' perceptions and beliefs in the pre-referral process. In addition, since initial referrals are traditionally in an elementary setting, the survey instrument only targeted elementary grades levels from kindergarten to fifth.

Finally, the study relies mainly on self-reported data and cannot be generalized to all general education teachers in North Carolina without additional research. In general, the self-reported data may contain data presented in a positive light.

Significance of the Study

The results of the present study are significant in that they address real and very pressing factors related to the disproportionate placement of African American students in special education. The results are also important in that the findings from the study can help general educators and others in the field to examine their way of thinking and learn to accept the multicultural and multiethnic classrooms of today. In addition, this research helps professionals to embrace the possibility that individuals in responsible positions should seek and eliminate the unconscious or conscious acts that constrain African American students.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Since the inception of contemporary special education 40 years ago, the disproportionate representation of minorities has been a recognized problem. Examples of the intensity and complexity of these debates permeate litigation; amendments to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); statements from professional and civil rights groups; two National Research Council (NRC) panels in a 20-year period (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982); and research studies, training, and technical assistance initiatives, some of which were supported with federal grants (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010).

Simply defined, disproportionate representation includes both the overrepresentation and the underrepresentation of certain minority groups when compared to their presence in a particular class or category (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006). As noted in IDEA 2004, *disproportionate representation* also includes the "significant disproportionality of children with disabilities, or the placement in particular educational settings of such children" (Wright & Wright, 2006, p. 126). Such rates of disproportionality vary dramatically by gender, category of disability, and race (Parrish, 2002). National census data reported that in 2009 - 2010, while 16.6 percent of children between the ages of 6 and 21 in the general population were Hispanic and 15.1 percent were black, black students make up a larger proportion of students served under IDEA

than do Hispanic students (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System (DANS), 2005). Likewise, the disability distributions among race/ethnicity also present a clear picture of disproportionality patterns. As table 1 illustrates, for all racial/ethnic groups, more students with specific learning disabilities were served than students with any other disability. The percentages of American Indian/Alaska Native and Hispanic students with disabilities who received special education for specific learning disabilities are relatively higher when compared with the percentage for all students with disabilities (56.0 percent and 58.9 percent v. 49.2 percent).The percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students with disabilities who have specific learning disabilities is lower than the percentage for all students with disabilities (42.1 percent v. 49.2 percent). The order of the five largest disability categories is the same for four of the five race/ethnicity groups: specific learning disabilities (SLD), speech or language impairments (SLI), intellectual disabilities (ID), emotional disturbance (ED), and other health impairments (OHI). For students, however, intellectual disability is the second most frequently reported disability category. The percentage of students with specific learning disabilities is lower than the percentage of all students with specific learning disabilities served under Part B (45.4 percent v. 49.2 percent). The percentage of students with disabilities who received special education services for mental retardation is substantially higher than the percentage for any other racial/ethnic group (17.4 percent compared with 8.2 percent for American Indian/Alaska), an alarming rate of African American males identified for this disability category.

When compared to the general school population, calculated percentages for this ethnic group differs significantly. For example, African Americans are two times more likely than White students to be served in the intellectual disability category. At the same time, there is an overrepresentation of African Americans males in high incidence special education categories such as specific learning disabilities (SLD), emotional and behavior disorders (EMD/BED) (Skiba et. al, 2008; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002).

Table 1

Report of Children with Disabilities (IDEA) Ages 6 through 21 Race/Ethnicity by Disability for SY: North Carolina 2009-2010 (OSEP007D)

Disability/ Race Ethnicity	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian or Pacific Islander	Not Hispanic	Hispanic	White not Hispanic	Total	Disability Percentage
Mental retardation	611	196	10,278	1,408	7,140	20,133	12.07%
Hearing impairments	22	49	594	289	988	2,015	1.21%
Speech or language impairment	629	378	6,207	2,019	14,304	24,643	14.78%
Visual impairment	3	19	196	52	349	635	0.38%
Emotional disturbance	*68*	21	3,698	182	2,853	7,184	4.31%
Orthopedic impairment	12	20	202	69	596	931	0.56%
Other health impairment	371	151	9,127	995	17,825	29,751	17.84%
Specific learning disability	1,007	521	20,483	7,560	31,288	63,133	37.86%
Deaf-blindness	0	0	7	5	22	36	0.02%
Multiple disabilities	22	33	645	190	1,173	2,133	1.28%

Table 1 (cont.)

Disability/ Race Ethnicity	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian or Pacific Islander	Not Hispanic	Hispanic	White not Hispanic	Total	Disability Percentage
Autism	52	212	2,521	472	5,997	9,666	5.80%
Traumatic brain injury	0	6	150	37	224	438	0.26%
Developmental delay	61	87	2,237	712	2,663	6,051	3.63%
Total	2,858	1,693	56,345	13,990	85,413	16,749	100.00%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, ED Facts; (SY2009-2010).

Despite seminal works and variations in sampling procedures, patterns of overrepresentation have been documented as a robust and steady trend (Skiba et al., 2008). For example, data collected in the early 1990s estimated that while African American students represented 16.1 percent of students attending public schools, 32 percent of the students with a mild mental disability (MMD), 24 percent of students with serious emotional disturbance (SED), and 18 percent of students with a specific learning disability (SLD, United States Department of Education, 1994). Likewise, more current statistics reveal African American students accounted for approximately 33% of all students identified with disabilities, an overall discrepancy of 17 percentage points from their representation in the school-age population (Skiba et al., 2008). These figures strongly suggest that despite ongoing attention there has been little change of the population served. The issue still remains one of the most “separate but unequal” educational dilemmas of the twenty-first century.

Questions have been raised about the causes for this overrepresentation. And yet, no single factor has been identified responsible for this complex predicament (Artilles & Bal, 2008). An analysis of the literature reveals that probable causes include factors relating to race, culture, class, gender, socioeconomic status, and definitions of the disability. In some schools, testing bias and inadequate access to research-validated instruction have led to inadequate or inappropriate referrals (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Losen & Orfield, 2002). Similarly, factors such as language and a disabling condition of the child have significantly diminished opportunities for success in general education classrooms and increased the likelihood of referral and placement in a special education program (Tam, Heward, & Heng, 2006).

A recent theme in the literature that has addressed disproportionate placement examines teachers' perceptions of culture related identities and their manifestations in the classroom. Given the fact that disproportionate representation of African American students occurs predominantly in the judgmental or "soft" disability categories of ID, SLD, or ED rather than in the nonjudgmental or "hard" disability categories (such as hearing impairment, visual impairment, or orthopedic impairment), it seems likely that teacher expectations may inadvertently be a precursor for this inequity. For example, in a study conducted by Skiba, Simmons, et al. (2006), 66 educators reported that they felt unprepared to meet the needs of students of color and that special education was the only perceived resource available for helping students who were not meeting classroom expectations. From the researchers' analyses, it was found that educational practitioners admitted that the relationship between gender and race hindered their ability to teach

effectively in the general education setting. Common themes that emerged from the practitioner's conversations dealt with social problems, discipline problems, and the overall welfare of the students. Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, and Bridgest (2003) have also speculated that African American males are being placed in special education simply because educators are misinterpreting behavior and misunderstanding cultural differences. In their research regarding teacher perceptions of African males' aggression, achievement, and the need for special education, their results indicated that teachers perceived students with African American related cultures as potential candidates for special education. Simply through observations of culture movements, teachers perceived African American students' "stroll" to indicate lower achievement, higher aggression, and more likelihood of needing special education services than students with a standard, Eurocentric walk.

These realities suggest that race matters, both in educators' initial decisions to refer students for special education and in their subsequent placement decisions for students identified and labeled as having disabilities (Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002). Based on the research, it stands to reason that when characteristics are attributed to members of a group historically viewed through the lens of deficit, ethnicity and culture are inevitably linked variables for investigating the root of the problem. As critical race theorist have asserted, racism is "normal, not aberrant, in American society" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Conceptual Framework

In an effort to understand the disproportionate placement of African American males in special education, it seemed reasonable to examine the most significant step, student referral. More than 30 years ago, Chalfant, Pysh, and Moultrie (1979) initiated the problem-solving team movement by expressing need for [teacher assistance] referral teams (Bahr et al., 2006, p. 2). The purpose of the referral team was to provide early intervention support for teachers who faced curricular, instructional, and behavioral challenges within the general education setting. In spite of variations to the team process across schools, districts, and states, it is notable and perhaps ironic that, while referral teams were clearly identified to support teachers in general education, the impetus for the teams has historically and pervasively been linked with special education (Bahr & Kovleski, 2006). The rationale for this connection derives from the continuing perception that many of the students refereed are identified as having specific learning disabilities (SLD), the largest disability category represented in the population of students with special needs (Gresham, 2002; OSEP, 2007). Children diagnosed with SLD were determined to be those experiencing significant and unexpected underachievement in one or more academic areas according to a discrepancy between IQ and academic achievement (Drame, 2008). More critically, it has been noted that the same discrepancy used to identify students with SLD, inadvertently contributed to the over-identification of many ethnic minorities. Due to the misidentification of students as a result of assessment practices and biased referrals (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Drame, 2008) the issue of disproportionate placement of ethnic minority students in special education has become

documented at national levels in many state and local education agencies. In most cases, general education teachers are the individuals responsible for initiating referrals in the special education evaluation process. This suggests potential special needs are first discovered by the general education teacher, and the teacher perceives the student's needs are beyond the capacity of the general education classroom (National Research Council, 2002). Since many times such referrals are based on personal and professional opinions, teacher bias is an inevitable part of the process.

For these reasons, the disproportionate representation of minority children is compatible with the notion that teachers exert a substantial influence on referral of minority students. Among the conceptual factors that can influence disproportionate representation are issues around race (Hilliard, 2003) and its definition and significance; issues around culture, class and gender oppression (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004); and issues around the definition of disability and the nature of difference (Myer & Patton., 2001). At the same, other conceptual and sociocultural factors like the perceptions, beliefs, and stereotypes about marginalized groups also contribute to the ways that lead to initial referrals and, ultimately, the misdiagnosis of disability.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory (CRT)

A theoretical framework that examines how multiple forms of oppression can intersect within the lives of People of Color and how those intersections manifest in our daily experiences extends from a broad literature base known as Critical Race Theory (CRT). By utilizing the analytical lens of CRT, the researcher hopes to shine light on the practices attributed to the disproportionate rate of African American males as special

education candidates. Through a CRT framework, the desire is to cast a new gaze on the persistent problem of racism in the education setting, as well as find solutions to reverse the problem.

Solorzano (1997) defines Critical Race Theory (CRT) as:

> A framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of People of Color. (p. 6)

Specifically, CRT focuses on challenging the dominant discourse(s) on race, racism, and the practice of law and the ways legal system facilitates and perpetuates the discrimination and subordination of certain ethnic groups (Bell, 1995; Delgado, 1996; Lintner, 2004). CRT originally derived in the mid -1970s from the legal field where scholars such as Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman searched for a way to move away from the civil rights movement and the critical legal studies movement in order to more directly and adequately address race and racism in the United States. Later, its theoretical and practical tenets transferred to other disciplines, most notably education (Linter, 2004). Trans-educational scholars such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, Daniel Soloranzo, and a growing number of scholars introduced CRT to the field of education as a dynamic framework to evaluate and change those aspects of education that continue to subordinate and dominate racial positions in and out of the classroom (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez & Parker, 2003; Lynn & Adams, 2002; Lynn, Yosso, Solórzano, & Parker, 2002; Parker, Deyhle, Villenas, & Crossland, 1998; Tate,

1994, 1997). By definition, Solorzano and Yosso (2000) explain Critical Race Theory in education as:

> a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and *pedagogy* [italics added] that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of [African American and Latino] students. Critical Race Theory asks such questions as: What roles do schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination. (pp. 40–42)

As opposed to fixed conceptualizations of racial identity, the Critical Race Theory framework for education is different from other CRT frameworks because it represents a collective challenge to the existing methods of conducting and interpreting education research on race and inequality (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). Simultaneously, CRT (a) foregrounds race and racism in research, (b) challenges the traditional paradigms, methods, and texts, and separates discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact students of color, (c) helps us focus on the radicalized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color, (d) offers a transformative method when examining racial, gender, and class discrimination, and (e) utilizes the transdisciplinary knowledge and methodological base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, and the law to better understand the various forms of discrimination (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004).

Critical Race Theory consists of five themes that form its basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy (Soloranzo, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The first premise

of CRT stresses race and racism as central factors in explaining how the law reproduces, reifies, and normalizes racism in society. Critical race theorists see racism as a normal and endemic component of our society rather than an abnormal or unusual concept and believe that the majority in this country fail to see this view because the experience of racism is part of our everyday reality (such as gender, class, sexuality, language, culture, immigrant status, phenotype, accent, and surname). Critical race theorists also take the position that the permanence of racism has four tenets: (a) micro and macro components; (b) individual and universal forms; (c) conscious and unconscious elements; and (d) cumulative impact on both individual and group (Soloranzo, 1997). As Ladson-Billings has stated, CRT seeks to "unmask the hidden faces of racism by exposing and unveiling white privilege in its various permutations" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 12).

The second premise of CRT is "interest convergence," which is a belief that European Americans will be concerned about the interests of people of color only when those concerns promote the self-interests of European Americans (Bell, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Lopez, 2003; Taylor, 2000). As such, CRT challenge researchers claims of objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity because they believe that these claims are a mask to assert the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups (Bell, 1987; Calmore, 1992; Delgado, 2003; Solórzano, 1997). CRT researchers argue that gains made by African Americans only take place when they are converged with self-interests of whites (such as access to higher education). However, such gains are not a disruption to the normal way of life for the average white Americans.

The third premise is an overall commitment to social justice and the eradication of racism. This eradication commits to eliminating other forms of subordination such as gender, class, disability, and sexual orientation as well as the empowerment of People of Color or other subordinated groups. It is a call for reinterpretation of civil-rights law "in light of its ineffectuality, showing that laws to remedy racial injustices are often undermined before they can fulfill their promise" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The fourth premise of CRT recognize the importance of counter stories to understand the social, historical, and political developments of racism as declared by others (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Within this particular tenet, researchers advocate that racial reality has been filtered out of the conversations in American society. As such, the use of counter-story telling is used to deconstruct the notion of 'otherness' because it cast doubt on the "validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27). Through counter-storytelling methods such as family histories, parables, testimonies, proverbs, and chronicles CRT explicitly listens to the lives of People of Color to understand, analyze, and teach about racial subordination (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Yosso, 2006). In turn, these literary accounts also are used to challenge the dominant legal, political, and ideological thinking about race and power (Lopez, 2003).

Critical race theory extends beyond disciplinary boundaries to analyze race and racism within both historical and contemporary contexts. In teacher education, CRT focuses on an *interdisciplinary* perspective. This includes developing a pedagogy, curriculum, and research agenda that accounts for the role of race and racism in U.S.

education and works toward the elimination of racism as a part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination in education.

CRT helps unveil deep-rooted barriers encountered by people of color. In particular, the focus of this study is on the first premise of CRT, that race continues to be a significant factor in justifying inequity in education (Billings & Tate, 1995). This dissertation suggests that since racism is a normal and endemic component of our society, it is used to normalize the perceptions, beliefs, and stereotypes maintained by educators who embrace the notion of White European American ways as the normative standard for referrals. For the purpose of this study, it serves as a foundation for the development of the methodology.

Roots of Disproportionality: White Privilege and Racism

The disproportionate referral and placement of African American students in special education programs has become a discursive tool for exercising White privilege and racism (Alexander, 2009; Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; Blanchett & Shealey, 2005). Although the field of special education was created to ensure that students with disabilities were given fair and equitable treatment in the education system, its roots extend in a long history of educational segregation and discrimination. Second, once identified and served in special education, African American students make achievement gains and tend to exit special education programs at lower rates than those of White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Third, despite gains for more equitable treatment and inclusive practices, many African Americas are still served in segregated, self-contained settings with little to no consideration for mainstreaming

(Fierros & Conroy, 2002). These realities suggest that even in a system that was supposed to serve some of the most marginalized students, White privilege and racism are equally prevalent and ingrained in the fabric of American society (Shealey, Lue, Brooks, McCray, 2005).

White privilege is defined as any phenomenon that serves to privilege Whites while oppressing People of Color (Blanchett, 2006). Similarly, racism is defined as forces that serve to discriminate against and disadvantage people of color on the basis of their race for the purpose of maintaining White dominance and power (Bell, 1992). As White privilege and racism exist in American society and its educational system, it can produce false consciousness in which power and oppression are taken for granted realities or ideologies (Alexander, 2009). Together, they serve as habits of the mind that can be identified in many forms such as structural (e.g. curricular, and pedagogical practices geared toward White, middle class students), political (e.g., biased educational policies), economic (e.g., school funding formulas that contribute to inequity), social (e.g., social constructions of race and disability), and individual (e.g., where White norms and privileges are unconsciously accepted as dominant norms through biased teacher attitudes, perceptions, assumptions, and beliefs). For many African Americans in special education, these entities have contributed to and maintained disproportionality in such insidious ways that the situation is perceived as just a way of life.

White privilege differs from conditions of blatant racism, in which a dominant group actively seeks to oppress or suppress other racial groups for its own advantage. Instead, theories of White privilege suggest that Whites view their social, cultural, and

economic experiences as a norm that everyone should experience. Ironically, the idea of White privilege can be a shared perception among all races, as it is often used as the normative standard for achievement or failure. Since an abundance of Western knowledge is founded upon the White experience, this practice filters knowing and coming to know as the standard for the all. Or, to borrow from a common cliché, "what's *White* is right". To further elaborate, it is what Scheurich and Young (1997) assert as an epistemological racism, in which racism is based on the knowledge production process and is able to permeate into society as the dominant norm. From an educational stance, Blanchett (2006) stated that

> educators tend to see as the norm and consequently the academic skills, behavior, and social skills of African American and other students of color are constantly compared with those of their White peers. (Blanchett, 2006, p. 27)

As a result, students of color who are unwilling or unable to be bi-cultural are pushed to the margins and often experience limited access to educational opportunities. As Ladson-Billings observed, this type of instructional racism has also permeated down to societies, institutions, individuals and classrooms. As defined, instructional racism . . .

> is the impact of the relationships among biased unconscious, conscious, and dyconscious ideologies about instruction. These biased ideologies promote institutionalized beliefs of a particular group by virtue of the fact that their ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status are perceived as deficits. (Larke, Webb-Johnson, Rochon, & Anderson, 1999, p. 53)

Patterns of negative teacher expectations and perceptions have been disproportionately reported for African American male youth (Epstein, March, Conners, & Jackson, 1998; Ferguson, 2003; Roderick, 2003). Among the factors posited to increase risk for African American males are falsities and biases in teachers' perceptions (Roderick, 2003). Students from racial and ethnic minorities, in the main, arrive in schools with a great deal of cultural "capital" or "funds" of knowledge, that not only are rarely recognized, built upon, or accommodated by educators and schools (Hale, 2001), but may in fact be misconstrued in ways that lead to misdiagnoses of disability and inappropriate placement in special education programs. A common interpretation of the research findings in the area of teacher expectations is that teachers hold race and ethnicity based expectations for their students. For example, Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) found that teachers' expectations vary across students' ethnic backgrounds, with teachers holding the lowest expectations for the classroom behaviors and capabilities of African American students, as compared to European, Asian and Latino/a American students.

Compounding Factors for Disproportionate Representation

An analysis of the literature reveals factors that contribute to the problem of disproportionate representation. Compounding factors such as socioeconomic variables, language, and a disabling condition often increase the likelihood for placement in a special education program (Tam et al., 2006). Reoccurring factors such as assessment bias, teacher efficacy, and the lack of teacher preparation in issues of diversity also have

been cited as possible contributors (Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, & Jennings, 2010; Ferguson, 2003).

Teachers' Efficacy Beliefs

According to Irvine's (1985, 1990) research, she found that "teachers, particularly white teachers, had more negative beliefs about black children than about white children regarding such variables as potential for success in college, initial impression, deviant behavior, ability, and certain personal characteristics" (Irvine, 1985, p. 339). In a large-scale study, she found that teachers communicated more often with boys than girls. However, she also found teachers had more negative comments about students' behaviors. These behaviors heavily influenced teachers' perceptions for academic failure for the African American student. In fact, behavior was such an influential factor in their decision-making that, despite evidence for student success, teachers' dispositions never changed. In other words, regardless of indications for student improvement, due to behavior, negative beliefs remained the same (Lynn et al., 2010). As a result, teachers failed to implement instructional strategies (such as individualized instruction, the ability to work closely with smaller groups, teacher support, and constructive criticism) to promote meaning, understanding, and mastery (Chester & Beaudin, 1996).

Cultural Differences/Cultural Competence

The need for fully qualified, culturally competent, and diverse teachers to teach a growing and diverse school-aged population is urgent. For instance, Gay (2000) and Howard (2001) noted that teachers, primarily European Americans, may be limited in their skill development, cultural awareness, or astuteness to effectively teach children

from diverse racial/ethnic, cultural and linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. As a result of teachers' limited understanding, they may have predispositions about this population as not benefiting from classroom instruction or even being incapable of learning. In a similar study, Skiba, Simmonsa, et al. (2006) described similar teacher sentiments. In their study, teachers reported that due to their limited understanding of students of color, they felt less capable to adequately incorporate the student's culture or learning style into instruction and that the only option for remediation was special education referrals. Common concerns dealt with issues such as social problems, discipline problems and the overall welfare of the students.

This idea of thinking, also known as process-oriented overrepresentation, has inadvertently and unequally been the precursor for minority referrals. Within the United States, race, social class, language, and gender have been central categories of identity and there is a particular history about how these categories have been defined and treated that permeate the way we think and behave today (Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004). As Artiles and colleagues (2004) have pointed out, process-oriented overrepresentation is grounded on the premise that minority referral to special education is due to bias or discrimination from society (i.e., attitudes and beliefs about a student during referral and in the decision making process).

Allegations of bias or discrimination generally implicate the processes and procedures in which students are considered for placement in various kinds of programs (Ortiz, 2006). A view from which to perceive the inherited values, traditions, and ways of thinking of cultural groups and societies also can be defined in the theoretical framework

known as cultural reproduction. With cultural reproduction, it should be noted that such bias, actions, or processes may be made without ever reaching full level of awareness of the individual or institutional habit patterns. For example, teacher judgments in the referral process combined with the inherent bias of the assessment process contributes to the disproportionate referral and special education placement for many African American students (Patton, 1998; Salend, Duhaney, & Montgomery, 2002).

Despite systemic safeguards, students from racial, ethnic and minority groups continue to be referred to or misidentified for special education for certain disability categories. Research on why African American students are labeled as disabled in disproportionate numbers speaks to the uniqueness of African American students and to teacher and system ignorance regarding their uniqueness (Green, 2005). For example, studies across the nation have shown that educators often perceive behavior unique to youth, such as

> provocative walking styles, rapping, use of slang, expressive hairstyles, excessive use of jewelry, wearing hats (slanted or backwards), unbuckled belts, and untied sneakers as arrogant, rude, defiant, aggressive, intimidating, threatening, and in general, behaviors not conducive to learning. (Corbett, 2011, para. 5)

Of course this is not to imply that all African American youth are the same or exhibit the same mannerisms. However, it does provide an insight on how negative stereotyping can create a culture disconnect in our schools. As our society increasingly comprises children who differ from the mainstream, teachers and other school personnel have a corresponding need to increase their understanding of the integral relationship between

culture context and social behaviors (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). This is especially true when considering referrals to special education.

Socio-demographic Factors

The correlation between poor school performance and poverty has been cited to justify disproportionality (Artiles et al., 2010). The logic is that since children from historically underserved groups are more than likely to live in low-income households, experience stressors, and developmental threats, these same children also will be more likely to fail in school (Skiba et al., 2008). More than half the students taught by special education teachers are children from low status backgrounds (U.S. Office of Education, 2009). This fact has important implications for people of color because national census data also indicate that African American students living in poverty far exceed the number of Whites. Even prior to school entry, the devastating effects of poverty can contribute significantly to a number of problems that are directly and indirectly linked to a student's physical and intellectual development. Poverty brings poor health care and numerous environmental hazards (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002). In addition, children of poverty are also at greater risk for lead poisoning and other environmental toxins linked to disorders such as reading and learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, language impairments, lower intelligence, and other neurological impairments. Other economic risk factors include violence and aggression, incidence of high transience, single-parent homes, and a lack of parental involvement (Artiles et al., 2004; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, et al., 2006). Donovan and Cross (2002) have highlighted a correlation between racial minority status and poverty as both a direct influence and a factor mediating the

risk for biological and social factors. With regard to student achievement and student expectations, teachers raise serious questions about the extent to which students can learn in the face of the effects of poverty (Skiba, Simmons, et al., 2006). Based on the student's identity and socioeconomic status, the teacher may assume that the student does not have the cognitive ability to achieve within a general classroom setting. Research on school performance of children living in poverty reveals that they may experience difficulty in several areas including (a) language, (b) literacy, (c) numerical skills, (d) content knowledge, and (e) social and emotional skills (Artiles et al., 2010). Hence, some teachers perceived these students as lacking the basic skills needed for academic readiness at school entry.

Behavioral Expectations

A mismatch between classroom behavioral expectations and what some have term as *African American behavioral style* has been documented as contributory to special education referral (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). Since much emphasis is based on the values and expectations of White culture, the nuances of the culture may not always be viewed objectively. For example, the unaware teacher who observes African American students speaking Ebonics (a "broken-English" dialect created from lifestyle and culture) may assume that the student lacks the ability to master the English language. Or, when the teacher witnesses students playing the "dozens" or "busting chops" (games of verbal joust and chastise), the teacher may assume that the student is confrontational. Also, the student who wears over-sized and tattered clothes may create false assumptions about their socioeconomic status and overall capabilities.

In an examination of the special education process, the National Research Council (2002) concluded that ineffective management tools for classroom teachers contribute to racial disparities in referral and placement and not the process in itself. For instance, nationally, many African Americans are referred for disciplinary reasons. Statistically, pupils are two to five times more likely to be suspended than their white counterparts (Townsend, 2000). Qualitative findings indicate teachers often deliver harsher reprimands and punitive consequences to children even when youth of other races engage in the same behaviors (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Skiba et al., 2002, Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, et al., 2006). As indicated in a recent meta-analysis of 15 studies, Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) found a small positive effect (*d*=.31) for race/ethnicity on number and type of referrals: African American/ and Hispanic students received a greater number of referrals for disciplinary problems and special education services than Caucasian students.

Educators have used pre-referral teams and special education to attempt to restore order in disruptive classrooms. Ill-equipped to handle behavioral differences, general educators often seek team input to help remedy the problem. The Skiba, Simmons, et al. (2006) research reveals that many teachers believe that they have a general insufficiency of resources for dealing with classroom behavior problems. This lack of resources inevitably contributes to referral. Further, many educators admitted that a cultural mismatch or insufficient training of behavior management skills led to many inappropriate referrals.

Available Resources and Accountability

Since overrepresentation occurs within the school setting, it is important to evaluate infrastructure factors. It is well documented that children in poor neighborhoods are likely to attend poor schools. Cities where minorities constitute the largest segment of school populations are almost three times more likely to have an overrepresentation of minorities in their special education programs. Ironically, poor schools are also the least likely to receive adequate funding. Consequently, this lack of funding results in inequalities in staffing, teacher quality, and classroom treatment. Many special education programs suffer when fewer financial services are available. Educators' frustrations with the insufficiency of district and school resources for assisting students from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., inadequate funding and materials; inequalities in staffing, teacher quality, and classroom treatment) intensify the gravity of the situation. In turn, practitioners may hastily try to seek special education services as a way to find resources to support students. As a result, many ethnic minority students, who already face significant challenges in opportunity to learn because of structural inequalities, are placed in disproportionate numbers in educational programs that produce long-term outcomes that limit further their educational and personal futures.

In addition, national policy on high-stakes testing and accountability may create pressures on teachers to refer students to special education. Despite recent state and federal changes to include all students with disabilities in high stakes testing, standardized testing creates tremendous stress for the teacher to refer students who are not performing at a certain level. This limits the school's ability or willingness to be

sensitive to individual development needs (Skiba, Simmons, et al., 2006). It also places high demands on the teachers to find a reason for low student performance. As a result, many African American students are misclassified or inappropriately placed into special education programs too often because they are the most targeted group.

Education Equity and Ability Differences

Special education has made considerable advances in research, policy, and practice in its short history. However, the fact remains that students from historically underserved groups continue to be disproportionately identified as requiring special education surrounding equity issues. One assumption is that being different is stigmatizing as being deviant. Or, from another point of view, “to avoid being different, one must be the same; that is sameness equals equity” (Minow, 1990). For instance, student characteristics (such as gender, social class, and race) have been associated with bias in referral and placement. Although none of these characteristics should be the subject of partiality, these factors have been identified as the major factors that trigger referrals and the reasons given why students are over-identified for special education services (Artiles & Bal, 2008). Artiles (1998) argued that the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education is problematic in part because assumptions about difference that underlie this debate reify longstanding oppressive perceptions and practices that affect these students. In other words, assumptions about differences are an intrinsic, not a comparative notion.

Another assumption that constructs difference is that the person naming a difference does not have a culture perspective, or the perspective of such person is

typically invisible (Artiles & Bal, 2008). As Minow (1990) explained, due to a lack of knowledge about one's cultural perspective, including identifying and understanding racial traits and characteristics, the pre-referral process may not be as objective as was intended. Example, many examiners write reports about children's performance on cognitive tests that focus solely on the test scores. However, the examiners' assumptions about how a child's second language might mediate performance are not reported (Artiles & Bal, 2008). Similarly, how a history of racial tensions in a community might shape the interactions between White examiners and African American children during the testing are not considered or addressed in the assessment results (Artiles, 1998).

Finally, concerns about this problem have been raised because of the problematic outcomes of the special education system (e.g., achievement level, dropout rate, and post school economic and occupational attainment, access to college). Thus, ethnic minority students, who already face significant challenges in opportunity to learn due to structural inequalities, (such as teacher quality, school, and funding) are placed in disproportionate numbers in educational programs that produce long-term outcomes that will limit further educational and personal futures (Artiles & Bal, 2008).

Conclusion

The problem of disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education is a complex and persistent one that must be examined in the context of larger societal and social phenomena. To add to the literature base, additional research is needed to document probable ways in which White privilege and racism can create and maintain disproportionality at all levels (i.e., the individual, institutional, educational, research,

policy, and practice levels), as well as a way to develop appropriate strategies and interventions to eradicate these practices. Finally, additional research is needed to develop research, policy, and practice interventions designed to address issues of inadequate allocation of educational resources, employment of inappropriate and culturally unresponsive curricula, and inadequate teacher preparation, and to examine their impact on the problem of disproportionality over time and in a variety of settings. This study specifically targets general educators on the issue of African-American overrepresentation to analyze the dynamics and process of special education referrals. By looking intensely at teacher perspectives and expectations, the researcher expected to identify a local perspective of how African American males are referred.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Although research to date has not identified the exact cause of overrepresentation of minorities in special education, data point to susceptibility variables and system bias (Shippen, Curtis, & Miller, 2009). For example, recent literature associates negative teacher perceptions with the extent to which African American youth are over identified (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006; Wood, Kaplan, & McLoyd, 2007). Studies have shown that high referral-to-identification rates rely heavily on general educators' role to identify students based on personal beliefs (Artiles et al., 2010). Specifically, research has indicated that the interaction among teachers' perspectives, classroom practices, curriculum expectations, and students' characteristics either minimize or maximize a student's possible referral for special education (Dunn et al., 2009).

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the professional literature on factors contributing to the over-identification of African American male candidates prior to the pre-referral process. By surveying general educators' perceptions of these students, the intent was to identify emergent themes, correlate patterns, and generate hypotheses related to this critical topic. In particular, the study was designed to address three questions:

1. What are general educators' perceptions regarding factors influencing the overrepresentation of African American males for special education?

2. What student characteristics (i.e., ethnic background, gender, and socioeconomic status) are considered significant by general education teachers prior to the referral of African American males' assessment for special education?
3. Do the teacher's demographic characteristics influence reasons for referrals?

Design of the Study

Survey research was selected as a method to explore an array of issues that contribute to this phenomenon. There are some clear advantages of using surveys. One advantage is that their design can provide a greater amount of description and detail related to complex issues than what might be available using other methods (Creswell, 2005). By design, surveys can provide a great amount of description and detail related to complex issues. For example, a continuum of social, cognitive, and behavioral strengths and limitations that are often presented in the pre-referral process were explored for this study. Ideally, the survey was designed to represent varying views and interpretations of issues related to minority placement in high-incidence disability categories. However, its overall intent was to highlight the placement dilemmas surrounding the process as a whole (Harry, Klinger, & Cramer, 2007).

Survey methods also have the advantage of allowing the researcher to collect information from a large group of people with ease and efficiency. Since survey data can be found in many areas and their application is common to the general public, participants do not need extensive directions or training on how to complete a survey (Tate, 2009). Surveys' multiple uses are evident in the fact that researchers from many

disciplines use surveys to create new knowledge, analyze problems, or test hypotheses against theories and controversial phenomenon (Greener, 2011; Mills et al., 2010).

In education, survey techniques have been applied in a variety of situations to measure critical variables such as teacher and student relationships (Mills et. al, 2010). Finally, surveys can be either qualitative or quantitative in nature. Their fluidity and flexibility accommodate changes to the traditional paradigmatic boundaries of mixed methods research designs (Creswell & Plano-Clark 2007). For instance, this study used both closed and open-ended questions to elicit participants' perceptions. The decision to use both types of questions was made to add depth to responses from the forced choice (quantitative) questions and maximize what could be learned from open (qualitative) questions. In fact, researchers often use close-ended survey questions in the beginning of a survey to provide some background on the issue and then present open-response questions for more elaborated answers (Yin, 2009).

Although survey research makes a significant contribution to the literature, some caution exists when using this method. One challenge concerns non-response and item non-response (Mills et. al, 2010). For example, since surveys are designed to provide detailed information, it may be difficult to hold a reader's interest if the survey is perceived as too lengthy. Similarly, non-responsiveness can occur because individuals may not know the answers or feel intimidated by questions related to sensitive topics. As a result, participants may skip over questions, fail to respond or fail to record answer items presented in the survey. Another caution is that the wording or interpretation of survey statements may be confusing, subjective, or leading.

Specific to this study were concerns about the phrasing presented with force-choice items. Inadvertently, the wording of the questions may generate skewed or invalid results. Further, as Mills and colleagues (2010) posited, the validity of the information gathered is contingent on individuals' honesty and willingness to participate. Nonetheless, a survey method was chosen over other designs such as a case study or focus groups due to the number of elementary general educators available in the district. By using surveys, the researcher had the option to collect a large amount of data in relatively short period of time (Dillman, 2007; Creswell, 2005). Additionally, a survey was an efficient way for the researcher to quickly assess the perceptions of a group for the purpose of describing, comparing, and explaining their knowledge and perceptions (Gresham, 2005a).

Finally, to delve deeper into referral-related topics, semi-structured interviews were utilized to ensure a complete and accurate account of participants' beliefs. Interviews are often an efficient and valid way of understanding someone's perspective within and across conversations. This is particularly important for getting at tacit understandings and generating the rich data needed to adequately analyze the research questions (Creswell & Planko-Clark, 2011). Just as important, interviews allow the researcher to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues through direct contact (Creswell, 2005). Since interviews involve close interactions between the individual and the researcher, ultimately the researcher has an opportunity to build trust. In turn, the researcher can probe for further information and understanding. In a nonintrusive environment, a rich source of information can be provided and the opportunity for meaningful exchanges can be created.

Dilemmas in the field of evaluation include how to access hard-to-reach stakeholders (Mathison, 2005, p.210). Since most interviews are conducted on a voluntary basis, there is no guarantee that the researcher would be able to obtain the desired number of participants. Conversely, direct interaction to the interviewer could be considered a limitation. Case in point, as a member of the population being study, as well as the sole researcher, my professional relationship may inadvertently interfere with responses. For example, due to the sensitivity of the subject, interviews may reflect only the thoughts and opinions considered appropriate. As a result, interview responses may lack true reflections or include limited opinions. Finally, a potential problem to consider is that interviews are time consuming. To get an in-depth interview, the researcher must allow participants a chance to express themselves freely without limitations. Additionally, in-depth interviews require the researcher to tape-record, transcribe, and code the data at a later time (Gilner, Morgan & Leech, 2009). All the same, interviews were chosen to supplement the research because they can provide valuable context. Interviews can reveal stories and provide everyday accounts from participants than could be gathered solely from survey research (Gilner et al., 2009).

Method

The process of collecting and analyzing data, integrating findings, and drawing inferences using both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single study is known as mixed methods research (Bickman & Rog, 2009; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). For a study of this nature, it is important to note that there were some clear advantages to employ both qualitative and quantitative methodology. First, mixed methods are

particularly adept at identifying diverse results across different data sets (Bickman & Rog, 2009). For example, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data provided a more complete understanding of the phenomenon under study than using the data separately. As noted, using both data sets provided the researcher with richer narratives and numerical data to make sure that a complete picture of the phenomenon of interest was obtained (Creswell, 2005). As such, a full picture was much more meaningful to the overall study. Another reason for choosing this design was because it increased diversity and reduced the risk that conclusions would reflect systematic biases or limitations (Creswell, 2005). In educational research, this is particularly crucial because there are serious risks in making recommendations based on a single criterion (Isaac & Michael, 1981). Thus, by using a mixed methods design, it was possible to obtain divergent pictures of the same phenomenon to gain breadth and depth of data analysis. Ideally, these divergent findings would be compared and contrasted (Greene & Caracelli, 2003). Finally, the decision to use a mixed method design was used to assess the credibility of inferences obtained from one approach by using the other. For example, errors in one type of data would be reduced by another (Johnson & Turner, 2003). Furthermore, a mixed method design confirms data accuracy by focusing on a single process. As a result, validity and accuracy of the data is increased.

The site for this study was a mid-sized school district in North Carolina. It is one of five largest systems in the state and ranks among the top 100 in the nation. Approximately 52,000 students are enrolled. The school system has 42 elementary schools, 16 middle schools, 11 high schools, and 11 special schools that do not follow a

traditional model or curriculum (this includes schools serving individuals with primarily physical disabilities, those requiring homebound/hospital services, or those in need of alternative services). District-wide, 45 percent of the students are white, 31 percent are black, 18 percent are Hispanic, 2 percent are Asian, 4 percent are multiracial, and less than 1 percent are Native American.

Historically, this district has addressed the overrepresentation of minority youth in special education for more than 10 years (NC Department of Exceptional Children Child Count Reports, 2010). As related to the total student population, both African American males and females have been over identified for special education services. The most prominent area of concern has been eligibility for the category serious emotional disability (SED). As reported in 2010 federal child count data, North Carolina's counts of children ages 3 through 21 receiving special education and related services under IDEA (Part B), a total of 206 students in the district were reported receiving services in the SED category (NC Department of Exceptional Children Child Count Reports, 2010). Of that total, 140 students were reported as African Americans; 30 students were African American females and 110 students were African American males. This disproportionate rate averages 70% percent of African Americans placed in special education. In contrast, student counts by race and disability reported 51 students as white (25 %), 13 students as multiracial (0.063%), 1student as Hispanic (0.004 %), 1 student as Native American (0.004 %), and 0 Asian students were identified as SED.

Participants

General education teachers play a clear role in the referral-to-identification process for students with disabilities. This is particularly the case among general education teachers who initiate the referral process of students who later become identified with a disability (Dunn et al., 2009). As Dunn et al. (2009) noted, "the interaction of teachers' perspectives, classroom practices, curriculum expectations, and students' characteristics work together to either minimize or maximize a student's possible referral for special education." To attain an additional perspective, Dunn (2006) completed a qualitative study with 15 general education teachers in a southern Ontario school and found that teachers used five main referral criteria: (a) inattentiveness, (b) needing assistance, (c) inability to apply the presented information, (d) inability to complete tasks, and (e) students' "look," either their demeanor or disposition projected an attitude for not wanting to learn. The results of this study indicated a combination of student characteristics that teachers observed (inattention, lack of comprehension, inability to complete tasks in the allotted time, and poor test performance) and what teachers inferred (e.g., about the way a student looks) (Dunn, 2006, p. 135).

For this study, only teachers at the elementary level were chosen as participants. General educators from kindergarten to fifth grades who were currently employed by the school district were solicited. A total of 256 teachers from 42 elementary schools were invited to participate in the survey. This total included 80 general education teachers who were recruited prior to the study during a district- sponsored Title I/Equity Plus conference, a federally funded program designed to help low-achieving students meet

state academic content (Appendix A). All volunteers were selected based on (a) their role as elementary educators, (b) their agreement to respond to a survey, and (c) their willingness to candidly discuss this sensitive topic. The selected participants also were asked to consider participating in a single audio-taped interview. Based on their willingness, 12 interviewees were contacted by the researcher to further inform emerging findings reflective of teachers' perceptions.

Instrumentation

Measures for this study included an on-line survey developed by the researcher. The survey instrument, *Gresham-Revised* (GR), was adapted from Dr. Doran Gresham's original instrument (The Gresham Survey, 2005a). To suit the needs of this particular study, questions were either modified/deleted from Dr. Gresham's survey. Specifically, questions 7, 8, 9, and 16 from Section I (factors for referral) and questions 4,7,11, and 12 from Section II (teacher demographics) were addressed. As such, adaptations to the final instrument consisted of a five-part survey: Section I: sought information from elementary general educators about the overrepresentation of African American males as pre-referral candidates for special education services (now, 29 questions adapted from the Gresham survey); Section II: asked for the participant to make further comments; Section III: sought demographic information from the respondents of this study (now 15 questions adapted from the Gresham survey); Section IV: asked for the participant to make further comments; and Section V: asked for participation for an interview (to be conducted at a later time). Permission to modify and administer the GR, as proposed, was

granted by Dr. Gresham (Appendix B). In addition, interview questions based on a review of the literature, were developed by the researcher.

Design

Survey. Based on criteria for survey design, the researcher determined that the GR took a cross-sectional approach. Technically, this meant that the survey had characteristics of a mixed-methods design. First, it was based on a sample, with the aim being to have as large a sample as necessary to capture all of the variation in the population in a single point of time (Greener, 2011). Second, the GR design was predominantly quantitative in that the aim was to see patterns within the data. Third, the survey had elements of qualitative data in the form of open-response items. Open-response items were included to provide a deeper understanding of the research questions by allowing respondents to use their own evaluative words and ideas.

Interview. Selected participants were given the opportunity to be interviewed by the researcher. Questions for the interviews were developed from direct observations, archival records, and a review of the literature. An interview protocol was used to facilitate and guide the discussion.

Validity. To ensure validity of both instruments (cross-sectional survey and interview), the researcher's advisor/committee chair provided significant input to several drafts, and revisions were made accordingly. In addition, once a draft of the instruments was completed, reviewed, and revised, a pilot study was conducted with colleagues from the identified district. The pilot participants were 10 general educators who were not considered participants for the study. They consisted of primary reading teachers and

other part-time specialists with previous classroom experience. Pilot procedures were implemented as follows:

A cover letter explained the intent of the study and survey protocol to the 10 respondents. A consent form was included with the other materials. Once consent was granted, each teacher was provided with an inter-office manila envelope containing a paper copy of the GR. Teachers had the option to return the completed questionnaires through the district's mail or to have the researcher come a week later to retrieve the completed self-assessments. Only one teacher mailed the survey scale to the researcher. The researcher returned approximately one week later to retrieve the other nine assessments. All pilot surveys were returned within four weeks.

These same teachers also were invited to participate in a single interview session. Of the 10 participants, only three teachers opted to participate. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were audio taped and later transcribed. Teachers were interviewed in a location of their choosing where privacy could be assured. To confirm the accuracy of the interview, the teachers were later contacted in a process that is called member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through member checking, teachers were given a chance to add, change, or delete information. For this process, each teacher was given a copy of the transcription to review the accuracy of the contents.

Suggestions to the final instruments included feedback pertaining to the wording of specific questions in section one of the survey. Other suggestions included ways to enhance the basic format and overall appearance of the survey. It is important to note that

one significant change made by the researcher was the decision to distribute the final survey electronically through a third-party website. Online surveys can be an effective tool in collecting information (Gaide, 2005). The decision to use this strategy was based on the efficiency of disseminating the instrument, an anticipated higher response rate for a larger population, and the efficiency of data collection and analysis. Another advantage of using an online survey was that participants could access the survey instrument and complete it at their convenience. It also may have increased participants' willingness to respond to questions of a sensitive nature. An additional benefit of online surveying is that it expedites data collection and decreases data entry error. For example, the traditional format often requires manual data entry. However, with online surveys data were collected through software. Finally, to ensure confidentiality, the decision to use a web-based survey company was utilized. With the web-based site, security and privacy were guaranteed and data was gathered throughout the process.

Of course, there are potential limitations of using online survey methodology. Although many of these problems also are inherent in traditional survey research, some are unique to the computer medium (Wright, 2005). This includes sampling error and the nature of self- reported information (Dillman, 2007; Gaide, 2005). For example, relatively little may be known about the characteristics of people in online communities, aside from some basic demographic variables, and even this information may be questionable (Dillman, 2000; Wright, 2005). Similarly, with self-reported data, there is no guarantee that participants will provide accurate characteristics or response information. To remedy this problem, a membership email list was obtained to provide an

online survey invitation and a link to every member on the list. Other limitations that were considered included a variety of technical glitches that may occur while a respondent is filling out the survey. As noted, factors linked to browser or server crashes, error messages, and double entries could deter participants and significantly reduce the response rate (Information Technology Services Online: Disadvantages of Online Surveys, 2011). Likewise, online surveys run the risk of being considered as spam or junk mail (Gaide, 2005). As such, the survey maybe deleted or undelivered. Ultimately, a web-based survey company was utilized as the format for conducting the online survey so as to minimize potential errors.

Survey

The final instrument, a 47-item survey, was developed to identify factors linked to the disproportionate representation of African American males in special education. A copy of the Gresham-Revised survey appears in the appendix (Appendix C). The survey included five sections. Section I of polled participants' level of agreement to 29 statements regarding bias, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, parental involvement, and medical and environmental factors related to factors that may contribute to the referral of African American students prior to special education. A 5-point Likert-type scale measured teacher perceptions of these variables as linked to pre-referrals (Likert, 1932; Suter, 2006). Ratings included "strongly disagree," "somewhat disagree," "neither agree/disagree, "somewhat agree," and "strongly agree". Section II was an open-ended question that required a narrative response. The question asked participants to provide any additional factors that they perceived to be critical in the overrepresentation of

African American males as pre-referral candidates. Section III consisted of 15 demographic questions concerning the characteristics of the respondent. Collected data provided background information and a better understanding of the cultural, racial and professional experiences of each teacher. Section IV was an open response question that asked for further elaboration or comments from the preceding section. Section V asked participants to volunteer for an interview conducted by the researcher at a later time in a location to their choice. If "no" was selected, the survey ended and the respondent was thanked for his or her time and participation. If "yes" was selected, a separate link allowed volunteers to submit their name, phone number, and e-mail address. At that point, the survey ended and the respondent was thanked for his or her cooperation. It is important to note that Section V was intentionally positioned at the end of the survey. This was done to preserve anonymity and increase the chance for completed responses.

Interviews

An interview protocol was developed by the researcher. The content of these questions was developed based on focus group methodology, in which a common area of concern is investigated through the perceptions of the participants regarding the specific topic (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2009). Interviews (a) provided in-depth descriptions' of general educators' perceptions regarding factors affecting the overrepresentation of African Americans for special education, (b) informed a relationship between teacher demographics and personal perceptions, and (c) explored causal factors/student characteristics (i.e., ethnic background, gender, and socioeconomic

status) considered significant by general education teachers prior to referral. A copy of the interview protocol and questions appear in the appendix (Appendix D).

Validity. As mentioned, for the interview questions, validity was established through the expert judgment and feedback provided by the researcher's advisor/committee chair. Additionally, the revised questions were used in a pilot-study. The researcher intended to develop questions that would potentially identify indicators of systematic bias without directly questioning participants if, in their perception, systematic bias exists within the system.

Procedure

Prior to implementing the study, an Institutional Review Board application was submitted to the university and the school district participating in the study. It described the strategies for recruiting participants, securing consent, maintaining confidentiality, and security of data. Permission to conduct research was granted from both review boards with exempt status.

Data Collection

1. In August 2010, the researcher had an opportunity to rally potential participants for her upcoming study by participating in a district-sponsored conference. As such, a formal application was made requesting permission to have a table at the annual conference. Once permission was granted, the researcher solicited participants through a poster presentation. The presentation explained the purpose of the potential study as well as a request for possible volunteers. Prospective participants had an opportunity to be a

part of the study by completing and submitting contact information on a registration form. In addition, information was provided about a drawing for a $100 gift card to be awarded to a randomly drawn participant once the study was officially completed. A total of 80 registration forms were gathered during the fall conference.

2. In order to conduct the study, the district made one stipulation. The researcher was asked to conduct the study without sending out a massive group message. This request was made as a way to prevent an overloaded server that could not support the distribution of large group e-mails. To circumvent the problem, every lead secretary for each school was contacted via e-mail December 6, 2010 (Appendix E). The correspondence asked for the school's permission and assistance with circulating a mass survey for an upcoming study conducted by the researcher. To be specific, the posting specified that the future survey would only be distributed among their general education faculty. If schools were willing to participate, contact information such as a lead name (i.e. elementary school principal) and an e-mail address were requested. For this part of the study, a staff person from the district provided assistance with distributing the initial e-mail. After receiving a copy of the district's approval, a total of 42 lead secretaries and school administrators were contacted. However, only two schools responded to participate.
3. January 10, 2011 the researcher made phone calls to school principals. Phone calls were made in an attempt to compile a complete e-mail list of those

schools that did respond to the December 6, 2010 e-mail. Through scripted dialogue, the main objective for the follow-up calls was to identify a primary contact person for distributing an online survey (Appendix F). A complete roster was compiled March 2, 2011.

4. After securing a list of e-mail addresses, recruitment e-mails were sent by the researcher with instructions to begin the actual study. In, April 2011, the researcher sent e-mails to each contact to thank them for their cooperation with the study. In addition, an electronic cover letter, survey instructions, and an online link to the survey were provided within the body of the correspondence (Appendix G). The electronic letter explained the purpose, compensation, risks and benefits of the study. The survey instructions described the survey format as well as the targeted population. For example, the researcher only requested general education teachers who served students kindergarten to fifth grades for the study. Other school personnel such as resource instructors, primary reading teachers, and specialists were purposely excluded from the study because they are less likely to initiate pre-referrals.
5. Simultaneously, the researcher sent the survey links to each conference participant recruited during the fall 2010 conference (Appendix H). To avoid duplicated responses, the researcher registered conference addresses with a with a web-based survey company. Responses were restricted to 1 per Internet Protocol address (IP address), a numerical label assigned to each device (e.g., computer, printer) participating in a computer network. The IP address was

recorded to ensure participants could only take the survey once. No other identifiable information, other than email addresses, was used to identify the participants. All e-mail addresses and electronic survey responses were password protected. Once survey responses were made from the registered addresses, no other attempts for responses were allowed. Both postings included a statement about a compensation drawing for a $100 gift card granted at the completion of the researcher's study. Thus, a separate link allowed each participant to submit their contact information for a chance to win the gift card (Appendix H).

6. After one month (May 2011), the researcher sent email reminders to both respondent groups (Appendix I). The body of the email message was the same as the email distributed in April 2011; however, the wording in the subject line changed slightly in an effort to increase the likelihood of the email being opened. The researcher's efforts to increase the typical email response rate are based on the literature about survey research (Bickman & Rog, 2009).
7. Finally, to provide a more in-depth description of participants' perceptions and experiences, they were asked to volunteer for a formal interview conducted by the researcher. That is, a final question-item on the online survey allowed interested participants to submit their contact information through a separate link to schedule an appointment at a time and in a location of their choice. Based on over survey responses, twelve participants were chosen. The identities of the interviewees were kept confidential by the

researcher and transcripts from the interviews were secured. The interviews were conducted, audio-taped, and transcribed by the researcher. Further, once interviews were transcribed, participants were contacted and given the opportunity to review the content for accuracy. No changes were made to the original transcripts. The data collection period for both quantitative and qualitative data expanded nine weeks, April 2011-June 2011.

Data Analysis

In this section, we analyzed the survey and interview data using quantitative and qualitative methods respectively.

Analysis of Quantitative Data

Quantitative data from the survey were entered into Statistical Analysis Software (SAS). Responses to the 5-item Likert scale were recorded and analyzed using means and standard deviations, as well as multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). In addition, two open-response questions were coded to verify common themes and/or emergent issues that recur in the data (Powell-Taylor & Renner, 2003). The categorizing process began with basic coding in order to distinguish overall themes, followed by a more in depth, interpretive code in which more specific trends and patterns could be interpreted. Specific data analyses for each research question were as follows:

Research Question 1: What are general educators' perceptions regarding factors influencing the overrepresentation of African American students for special education?

To examine research question one, the researcher analyzed two open-ended questions incorporated in the survey as well as the forced choice-items. Descriptive statistics frequencies, percentages, and response rates comprised data analysis.

Research Question 2: What factors/student characteristics (i.e. ethnic background, gender, and SES) are considered significant by general education teachers prior to referral of African American students for special education?

The researcher used descriptive statistics that included frequency and percentages for nominal data. In addition, factor analyses were used to determine significant factors that may influence teachers' referrals of African American male for special education. Potential casual factors included subjectivity, low achievement, behaviors, cultural beliefs, ethnic differences, biases, socioeconomics, medical, environmental, and single families.

Research Question 3: Do the teachers' demographic characteristics influence reasons for referrals?

Multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine the main and interaction effects of categorical variables on multiple dependent interval variables. Thus, to examine research question three, MANOVAs were used to determine whether or not personal demographic data (such as age, gender, ethnicity, level of education, and years of experience) played a role in referral decisions. A MANOVA analysis allowed the researcher to determine a relationship between demographic variables and survey data.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Qualitative data were reviewed to identity common themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). First, the transcripts were read and reread for general coding (Creswell, 2005). Then, the meaningful quotes were identified and clustered together to form a category. The next step of the thematic analysis identified all data related to the already classified category. If data did not fit into an already classified category a new category was created.

In summary, this study was designed to gather data about reasons general educators refer African American males prior to the pre-referral process. An online survey was chosen as the most convenient and efficient method for gathering data from a large group of participants throughout the district. Personal demographic data enhanced understanding about the selected population. In addition, qualitative data provided further insight into the complexity of the issue, thus providing a means for a fuller description of general educators' perceptions.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Even with recent changes to reduce disproportionality in educational assessment and programming, African American males are still identified at a high rate by general educators as possibly in the need of special education services. Among the many contributing factors for such a disproportionate rate, one identified factor can be attributed to the influence of teacher perceptions towards African American males. As Dunn et al. (2009) noted the interaction of general educators' perspectives play a key role in the referral-to-identification process for students with disabilities. Moreover, racial disproportionality continues to be an intractable problem, with African American students experiencing the most negative outcomes (Social Reform, 2011).

The purpose of this study was to understand classroom teachers' perceptions of African American males and the reasons why they refer this particular group. Information gleaned from this study adds to the knowledge base on overrepresentation by identifying several factors significant in the referral process. Of the 256 participants contacted, 216 general educators completed the survey comprising this study. Thus, the overall response rate was eighty-five percent (84.7%).

Quantitative Results

The quantitative portion of the survey included questions regarding questions related to participant demographics (survey Section III) and teachers' perceptions of

factors influencing referrals of African American males (survey Section I). The results of the survey are organized in the following sections according to the three research questions that guided this investigation.

Demographics

Of the 216 responses to the item regarding gender, 205 (85%) identified themselves as females; 28 (13%) identified themselves as male. Two participants did not respond to gender items. A majority of the survey respondents, 140 (65%) indicated their ethnicity as Caucasian. A total of 58 (27%) were African American, 7 (3%) were Hispanic/Latino, two (1%) were Asian, and none were Native Americans. Seven respondents (3%) indicated "other" as their ethnicity. Age of respondents ranged from 21 to 70 years. The largest age category ranged from 31 to 35 (17%). The distribution of participants is summarized in Figure 1.

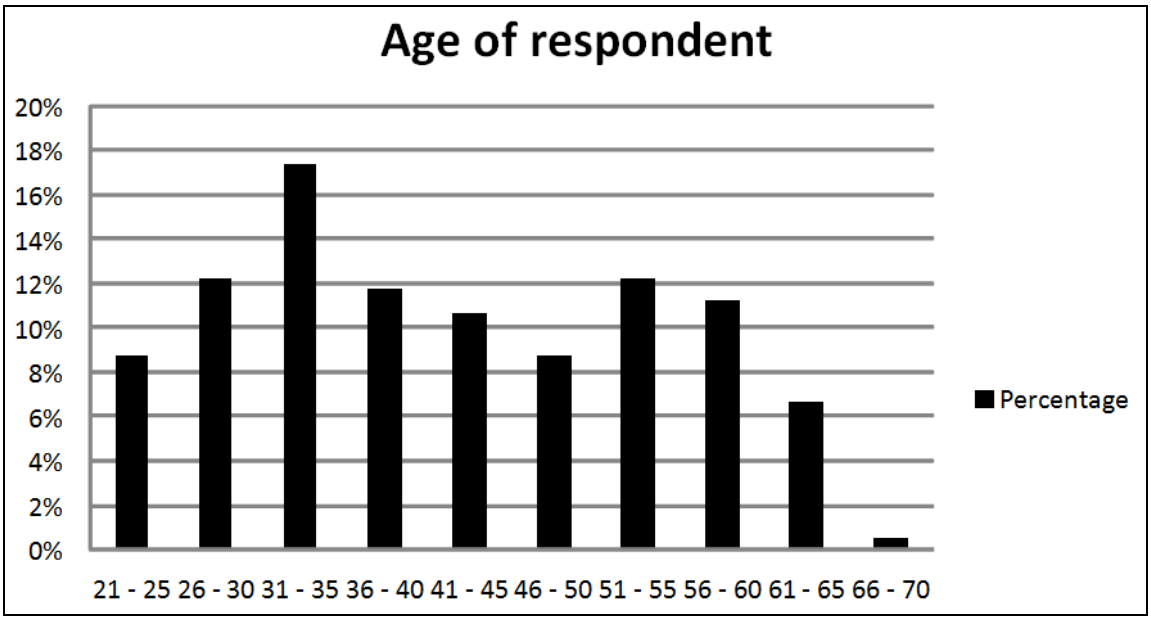

Figure 1. Age of Respondents

In response to the item regarding number of years teaching, the largest group, with 56 respondents (25.6%) indicated they had taught ten to fourteen years. The next largest group of 41 (19%) respondents taught five to nine years. The third largest group had 35 (16%) respondents who had been teaching fifteen to nineteen years, followed by 28 (13%) respondents who only had zero to four years of experience. Forty-one (41) respondents taught more than twenty years and approximately 24 respondents taught more than thirty years. The smallest group, more than 40 years, had two respondents.

Regarding highest degree earned, of the 216 participants, 108 (50%) earned Bachelors' degrees. Surprisingly, just as many educators earned Masters' degrees, 104 (48%) total. And, 2 (1%) respondents earned terminal degrees.

The majority of survey respondents indicated they held current license in the state of North Carolina and every elementary grade level was represented (kindergarten-fifth grades). A large number of survey respondents indicated they received multi-cultural training and/or cultural sensitive training during their pre-service training and though the current system which they are employed. A total of 181 (84%) indicated "yes" and 35 (16%) indicated "no" on this item.

In contrast, 82 (38%) reported that they received disability training and 132 (61%), results that are nearly the opposite to those related to cultural sensitivity training. However, those who did receive disability training reported information related to nearly all areas of eligibility (specific learning disability, other health impaired, SED, intellectual disability; as well as speech and language impaired, autism, visual impaired, and orthopedically impaired).

Specific data summaries for each research question were as follows:

Research Question 1: What are general educators' perceptions regarding factors influencing the overrepresentation of African American males for special education?

To examine research question one, the researcher used descriptive statistics (i.e. frequencies, percentage, means, and standard deviations) for responses to the 29 statements presented in Section I of the *Gresham Survey-Revised* survey. Overall, mean distributions range from 2.5-3.5 and standard deviations are clustered closely around the mean, approximately within one standard deviation (1.0). Table 2 includes a summary of those data presented in Q1- Q29. Summations of the responses are also provided.

Table 2

Gresham Survey-Revised

Statements	Strongly Disagree %	Somewhat Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	*M*	*SD*
1. Language barriers between teacher and student.	28.70	25.93	16.67	24.07	4.63	2.50	1.26
2. Ineffective behavior management strategies on the part of the general educator referring the student for special services.	13.49	23.72	11.16	38.60	13.02	3.14	1.29
3. Inappropriate teacher training.	15.28	21.76	18.52	32.87	11.57	3.04	1.28
4. Subjectivity in county referral process.	10.19	13.89	32.87	30.09	12.96	3.22	1.15
5. The lack of clarity in school guidelines for special education referrals.	12.96	15.74	21.76	36.11	13.43	3.21	1.24

Table 2 (cont.)

Statements	Strongly Disagree %	Somewhat Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	*M*	*SD*
6. Culturally biased assessment instruments.	14.81	22.69	21.30	27.31	13.89	3.03	1.29
7. There are more males in the elementary school population.	22.79	21.40	37.67	13.49	4.65	2.56	1.12
8. The perception that African American males are low achievers	25.58	20.47	10.79	30.23	13.02	2.85	1.43
9. Teachers' negative preconceptions about the behavior of African American .males	18.98	23.15	12.50	30.09	15.28	3.00	1.38
10. Ethnic differences between teacher and students	13.52	16.20	14.81	37.50	12.96	3.10	1.34
11. Cultural beliefs and/or differences between teacher and students (e.g. heritage, religion, socioeconomic status (SES).	17.69	18.06	18.06	33.33	12.96	3.06	1.31
12. Certain biases (e.g. racial prejudice) on the part of the general educator.	25.36	19.44	15.28	27.78	12.04	2.81	1.40
13. Certain biases (e.g. racial prejudice) on the part of the student.	12.09	17.67	17.21	44.65	8.37	3.20	1.19
14. Certain biases (e.g. racial prejudice) on the part of the student' families.	7.91	14.88	11.63	53.95	11.63	3.47	1.12
15. Students' style of dress	27.78	18.06	23.15	22.69	8.33	2.66	1.32
16. Students' hairstyles	35.65	19.91	25.93	11.57	6.94	2.34	1.26
17. Students' walking styles	31.48	18.98	20.83	22.22	6.48	2.53	1.31

Table 2 (cont.)

Statements	Strongly Disagree %	Somewhat Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	*M*	*SD*
18. Students' use of culturally different speech patterns or slang	15.89	16.82	13.55	45.33	8.41	3.14	1.26
19. Hereditary factors (e.g. pre-natal exposure to drugs, biological transmission of mental illness, etc.)	7.87	7. 87	17.59	47.22	19.44	3.63	1.21
20. Environmental factors (e.g. factors (e.g. exposure to drugs and violence).	5.09	4.17	13.89	50.93	25.93	3.88	1.01
21. Being raised by a single parent (Mother)	16.20	11.57	25.00	37.96	9.26	3.13	1.23
22. Being raised by a single parent (Father)	17.59	13.89	28.70	34.72	5.09	3.00	1.18
23. Being raised by two biological parents	24.54	17.59	44.44	11.11	2.31	2.49	1.05
24. Being raised by adopted parents	24.07	14.81	46.30	14.35	0.46	2.52	1.03
25. Being raised by foster parents	16.67	13.43	32.41	32.41	5.09	3.00	1.15
26. Being raised by extended family (e.g. aunt, uncle, grandmother)	12.52	13.43	29.17	39.81	5.09	3.12	1.11
27. Being raised by legally separated or divorced parents	13.95	13.49	34.42	34.88	3.26	3.00	1.09
28. Being raised by economically wealthy parents or guardians	24.54	18.52	33.80	20.37	2.78	2.58	1.15
29. Being raised by economically poor parents or guardians	12.96	12.04	23.61	39.36	2.04	3.35	1.21

Responses that were “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” were combined for analysis to indicate “yes.” Similarly, “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” were combined to indicate “no. Summations of the responses are also provided. Table 3 includes the agreement ranks of those data presented for Q1 – Q29.

Table 3

Factor Agreement Ranks

Question	Agree	Disagree
Q20	76.86	9.26
Q19	66.66	15.74
Q14	65.58	22.79
Q29	51.39	25
Q13	53.02	29.76
Q18	53.74	32.71
Q5	49.54	28.7
Q21	47.22	27.77
Q4	43.05	24.08
Q26	44.9	25.93
Q10	50.46	34.72
Q2	49.62	37.21
Q27	38.14	27.44
Q11	46.29	35.65
Q22	39.81	31.48
Q3	44.44	37.04
Q25	37.5	30.1
Q6	41.2	37.5

Table 3 (cont.)

Question	Agree	Disagree
Q9	45.37	42.13
Q8	43.25	46.05
Q12	39.82	44.9
Q15	31.02	45.84
Q28	23.15	43.06
Q17	28.7	50.36
Q24	14.81	38.88
Q1	28.7	54.4
Q7	18.14	44.19
Q23	13.42	42.13
Q16	18.51	55.66

Based on response rates, the levels of "agreement" and levels of "disagreement" were used to identify reasons significant for African American male referrals for special education. In ranking order, prominent factors included (a) environmental factors (e.g. exposure to drugs and violence); (b) hereditary factors (e.g. prenatal exposure to drugs; biological transmission of mental illness, etc.); (c) certain biases (e.g. racial prejudice) on the part of the student's families; (d) low socio-economic status (e.g. being raised by economically poor parents or guardians); (e) biases (e.g. racial prejudice) on the part of the student; (f) students' use of culturally different speech patterns or slang; (g) lack of clarity in school guidelines for special education referrals; (h) being raised by a single mother; (i) subjectivity in the county referral process; and (j) African American males being raised by extended family (e.g. aunt, uncle, or grandmother).

Research Question 2: *What factors/student characteristics (i.e. ethnic background, gender, and SES) are considered significant by general education teachers prior to referral of African American students for special education?*

To examine question 2, a factor analysis was performed to determine the strength of the relationships among specific survey items, completed using the principal component method. Initial analysis confirmed four factors for the data as evidenced by the number of Eigen values greater than 1. Tables 4 and 5 summarize the final factor loadings of the questions with respect to the four factors and their communalities respectively.

Questions Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q27 and Q28 loaded to Factor 1 with the factor loadings of 0.804, 0.824, 0.744, 0.722, 0.743 and 0.738 respectively. Factor 1 was labeled "Raised by Extended Family". Questions Q15, Q16, Q17 and Q18 loaded to Factor 2 with the factor loadings of 0.816, 0.858, 0.899 and 0.663 respectively. Factor 2 was interpreted as "Cultural biases". Questions Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, and Q6 loaded to Factor 3 with the factor loadings of 0.637, 0.667, 0.769, 0.627 and 0.519 respectively. Factor 3 was interpreted as "Ineffective training." Questions Q19 and Q20 loaded to Factor 4 with the factor loadings of 0.710 and 0.746 respectively. Factor 4 was interpreted as "Environment" (Refer to Table 4 for question-item responses).

The communality, which is the sum of the square of the factor loading, was used to describe the relative importance of the reasons for referral. For example, in Table 4 Question 2 communality was computed using by $(0.222)^2 + (0.241)^2 + (0.637)^2 + (-0.010)^2 = 0.513$. The student walking styles (Q17), the student hair styles (Q16), the students'

style of dressing (Q15), being raised by adopted parents (Q24) and being raised by two biological parents were among the top 10 reasons for referral of African American students. From the factors perspective, the cultural biases (e.g. racial prejudice) on the part of the educators (F1) and raised by extended family (F2) were the main underlying reasons for referral of African American students.

Table 4

Factor Loadings

Questions	Factor 1: Raised by Extended Family	Factor 2: Cultural Biases	Factor 3: Ineffective Training	Factor 4: Environment
Q2	0.222	0.241	0.637	-0.010
Q3	0.222	0.202	0.667	0.035
Q4	0.090	0.133	0.769	0.087
Q5	0.059	0.046	0.627	0.205
Q6	0.17	0.323	0.519	0.006
Q15	0.173	0.816	0.239	0.055
Q16	0.212	0.858	0.257	0.038
Q17	0.195	0.899	0.177	0.082
Q18	0.242	0.663	0.180	0.209
Q19	0.134	0.059	0.080	0.710
Q20	0.226	0.137	0.134	0.746
Q23	0.804	0.121	0.249	0.002
Q24	0.824	0.195	0.239	0.065
Q25	0.744	0.164	0.144	0.303
Q26	0.722	0.216	0.013	0.308
Q27	0.743	0.241	0.078	0.207
Q28	0.738	0.120	0.190	0.005

Table 5

Variable Communalities

Questions	Communalities
Q17	0.884
Q16	0.848
Q24	0.779
Q15	0.755
Q23	0.723
Q25	0.693
Q26	0.663
Q27	0.659
Q20	0.644
Q4	0.625
Q28	0.595
Q18	0.574
Q3	0.536
Q19	0.531
Q2	0.513
Q5	0.441
Q6	0.395

Demographic data were valuable in identifying characteristics of the respondents. These data were used to determine main and interaction effects for research question 3.

Research Question 3: Do the teachers' demographic characteristics influence reasons for referrals?

To analyze question three, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to determine the main effects of gender, ethnicity, age, highest degree obtained, years of experience, multicultural training and disability training on the reasons for referrals of the African American students. Table 6 includes the MANOVA analysis.

Table 6

MANOVA Analysis

Main Effect	Wilkes Λ	F statistics	p-value	Significant $\alpha = 0.05$
Gender	0.86	$0.56_{(29,101)}$	.9603	No
Ethnicity	0.131	$1.77_{(145,504)}$	< 0.0001	Yes
Age	0.1056	$0.56_{(261,892)}$	.4213	No
Highest Degree	0.3070	$1.69_{(87,303)}$	0.0007	Yes
Years of Experience	0.0903	$1.25_{(232, 798)}$	0.0137	Yes
Multicultural Training	0.8092	$0.82_{(29, 101)}$	.7229	No
Disability Training	0.5660	$2.67_{(29, 101)}$	0.0002	Yes

Overall, the MANOVA criteria showing a significant effect identified ethnicity, highest degree earned, years of experience, and a lack of disability training. MANOVA test criteria for the hypothesis of no overall Ethnicity effect showed a significant Ethnicity main effect with Wilkes $\Lambda = 0.131$, $F_{(145,504)} = 1.77$, and $p < 0.0001$. Tukey's Studentized Range Test also showed that there was significant difference in the means of all the dependent variables except Q7 there are more in the elementary school population, Q19 heredity factors, and Q20 environmental factors.

MANOVA test criteria for the hypothesis of no overall Highest Degree obtained effect showed a significant Highest Degree obtained main effect with Wilkes $\Lambda = 0.3070$, $F_{(87,303)} = 1.69$, and $p = 0.0007$. Tukey's Studentized Range Test also showed that there was significant difference in the means of Q10 Ethnicity between the teacher and the student, Q11 Cultural beliefs and or differences between the teacher and the student, Q16 Students' hair style, Q19 Hereditary factor, Q20 Environmental factors, Q21 Being raised by single mother, Q22 Being raised by single father, Q26 Being raised by extended family, Q27 Being raised by legally separated or divorced parents, and Q29 Being raised by economically poor parents or guardians, when Highest Degree obtained was considered.

MANOVA test criteria for the hypothesis of no overall Years of Experience effect showed a significant Years of Experience main effect with Wilkes $\Lambda = 0.0903$, $F_{(232, 798)} = 1.25$, and $p = 0.0137$. Tukey's Studentized Range Test also showed that there was significant difference in the means of Q3 Inappropriate teacher training, Q5 Lack of clarity in school guidelines for special education referrals, Q9 Teachers' negative preconceptions about the behavior of African American males, Q17 Students' walking styles, Q24 Being raised by adopted parents, Q25 Being raised by foster parents, Q26 Being raised by extended family, Q27 Being raised by legally separated or divorced parents when Years of Experience was considered.

MANOVA test criteria for the hypothesis of no overall Disability Training effect showed a significant Disability Training main effect with Wilkes $\Lambda = 0.5660$, $F_{(29,101)} = 2.67$, and $p = 0.0002 < \alpha = 0.05$. Tukey's Studentized Range Test also showed that there

was significant difference in the means of Q5 Lack of clarity in school guidelines for special education referrals, and Q23 Being raised by two biological parents.

MANOVA was also performed to determine interaction effects between Gender and Ethnicity, Gender, Ethnicity and Highest Degree obtained, Gender and Years of Experience, Multicultural training and Ethnicity and Disability training and Ethnicity on the referrals of African American students. All analysis used questions 1 to 29 as dependent measures. Table 7 includes the interaction effects.

Table 7

Interaction Effects

Interaction Effect	Wilkes Λ	F statistics	p-value	Significant $\alpha = 0.05$
Gender & Ethnicity	0.7750	$1.01_{(29,101)}$	0.4635	No
Gender, Ethnicity, & Years of Experience	0.0482	$1.05_{(348, 1161)}$	0.2954	No
Gender & Years of Experience	0.3588	$1.02_{(116,404)}$	0.4242	No
Ethnicity & Multicultural Training	0.8262	$0.73_{(29,101)}$	0.8302	No
Ethnicity & Disability Training	0.4135	$0.193_{(58,202)}$	0.0004	Yes

Overall, there was only one interaction effect identified. MANOVA test criteria for the hypothesis of no overall Ethnicity and Disability Training interaction effect showed a significant Ethnicity and Disability Training interaction effect with Wilkes Λ = 0.4135, $F_{(58,202)} = 0.193$, and $p = 0.0004$ ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Qualitative Results

The qualitative portion of the survey included two open-ended items. Section II of the survey instrument asked the follow-up question, "*Are there any other reasons that you believe to be critical about the overrepresentation of African American males as pre-referral candidates that has not been addressed?"* The other response question, in Section IV of the survey, asked the participant to provide "additional comments" pertaining to any portion of the survey. In all, a total of fifty-five (*n*=55) individuals responded to the first question and thirty (*n*=30) responded to the second question.

Finally, to complement the survey data with richer information about referral-related topics, semi-structured interviews were utilized. In Section V of the survey instrument, participants were given the opportunity to volunteer to be interviewed by the researcher at a later time. In all, a total of twenty-three participants (*n*=23) volunteered to section V of the survey instrument. However, only twelve (*n*=12) interviewees were chosen for this study. Interviewees were chosen based on their availability and willingness to meet with the researcher. An interview protocol was used to facilitate and guide the discussion for a twelve (*n*=12) interviewees. Data from the participants' responses were coded, labeled and categorized. Some of the responses addressed multiple topics and were divided accordingly and assigned to the emergent themes.

All qualitative responses were used to enrich the research questions: (a) *What are general educators' perceptions regarding factors influencing the overrepresentation of African American males for special education?*, and (b) *What factors/student characteristics (i.e. ethnic background, gender, and SES) are considered significant by*

general education teachers prior to referral of African American students for special education? Ideally, the opened-item responses addressed research question one and the interviews provided insight to research question two.

Pen Response Survey Items

Are there any other reasons that you believe to be critical about the overrepresentation of African American males as pre-referral candidates that has not been addressed?

The most common reason among responded comments to this open-response item suggested that African American males are overrepresented as pre-referral candidates because there is a lack of parental involvement. Other common reasons dealt with issues related to poverty, student behaviors, ineffective behavior management strategies, failure to use differentiated instruction, lack of early intervention strategies, high stakes testing, accountability, subjectivity in the referral process, educators' perceptions of African American males as low achievers, a lack of parental knowledge in the referral process, a lack of teacher and parent communication, media influence, an influx of African Americans in the population, a lack of multi-cultural training, and African American males raised in a single family home.

Collaboration with families. Respondents viewed the lack of parental involvement and support, lack of parents' understanding of the referral process, and lack of communication in the African American home as reasons for pre-referral. Repeatedly, respondents suggested that more home-school partnerships would reduce the need for referrals and thus, the problem of overrepresentation. Proactive and collaborative partnerships include parental involvement with homework, more interaction within the

schools, reinforcement with literary skills, and stronger parental skills/parental training in the home environment. A general education teacher responded,

> It is NOT all about teachers . . . it's about home environments and support of *home* . . . whether grandparents/uncles/big brothers/big sisters. Helping in the HOME . . . so students CAN FOCUS and do homework and have assistance in doing homework WOULD HELP CLOSE THE GAP GREATLY FOR ALL UNDERACHIEVING CHILDREN. LET'S GET REAL.

Similarly, responses report that in the referral process, teachers may not provide open dialogue with the parent. In large, the lack of communication leads to high referrals based on the sole opinions and beliefs of teacher. Data suggested that, more often than not, the lack of communication between teacher, parent, and school ultimately lead to identification and a label. As reported, there's a lack of open and honest communication between the teacher, the students and the parents. As noted,

> African American parents are easy influenced by a school system that is suppose to care and do what is best for their student. This is not always the case. It is easier for some teachers to label than to try to understand what an African American child may be going through.

Responses also noted that teachers fail to communicate with African American parents about student performance. And, in turn, African American parents fail to become active partners in the referral process. As a result, teachers and other professionals make important decisions for African American males with limited parental input. Data suggest that the lack of parental involvement is due to parents effectively knowing "how" to advocate for their child(ren). According to responses, this "lack of

knowledge" is predominant in the low socioeconomic levels of the African American community.

Effects of poverty. According to responses, there is a common concern by teachers about the impact of poverty in relation to a child's development and learning potential. The negative effects of poverty such as high crime, drug abuse, lack of prenatal care, and the stability of the family contributes to poor developmental outcomes and low educational achievements. And,

> . . . unfortunately many African American students that are being referred come from low social economical backgrounds which correlates to low education exposure. While there are students of other ethnic backgrounds who live in poverty and experience similar conditions growing up, there is a higher percentage of African Americans in poverty in many areas, and so this leads to the overrepresentation issue.

Simply put, based on "certain regional locations," African American males will be "inevitably be referred and thus disproportionality represented."

Similarly, general educators report that African American male referrals stem from those students who are raised by a single parent and/or extended family. Data suggest that educators believe that African American male candidates are often the same individuals who may have young parents with little to no parental skills; this includes a lack of early intervention skills and follow-up support. It is also suggested that students raised in such an environment lack the necessary male role model necessary for personal growth and advancement. Participant comments report,

> there is a rising number of students who are growing up in unstable homes with single or very young parents that don't have parenting skills, don't prepare their

> children for learning when they are pre-school age (i.e., reading to them, talking to them, taking them to museums, zoos, etc.), and don't know or don't care about supporting their learning in school (making sure homework & nightly reading is done, for example).

Behaviors. Responses indicate inappropriate behaviors by African American males and ineffective behavior management strategies within the classroom setting contribute to an increase of special education referrals. Data suggest that behavior issues stem from a variety of sources including the student, parental involvement, educators, and school/administration. One participant's comment stated, "There are a lot of behavior patterns acceptable in the community that are not acceptable in the classroom. The lack of discipline or chosen discipline styles at home, exposure to inappropriate materials, lack of school support, and lack of educational opportunities (including self-discipline)." Another teacher commented,

> Some prevalent attitudes that are detrimental include believing their child is always right, assuming teachers make decisions based on race, and that schools are responsible for all aspects of a child's upbringing. My experience with parents is that they come in when they are very upset, yell, and then fail to follow through on any agreed upon discipline at home. This makes these students believe their parent will defend them no matter the behavior. All racial groups have issues and problems, however, many behavioral patterns we see in children coming out of the community are particularly incongruent with the values and goals of schools.

Likewise, teachers reported that administration fails to support the staff. When it comes to administrators supporting teachers from inappropriate behaviors displayed from students and parental action, there is little to none. As one educator stated,

> [*there is*] Not enough accountability for students' behavior and work ethic. Administration tends to avoid confrontation with parents and students so that

> school records do not show that a school may have behavioral issues in their school. Then as a domino effect, students are in 5th grade and not able to read due to loss of instruction due to behavior. Then . . . they want to refer to EC.

Data-based decision making. Responses for this theme indicate that the pressure from high stakes test-based performance influxes African American referrals. Data suggest that administrators and teachers feel pressure to increase accountability ratings. As such, both teachers and administrators tend to recommend African American males as special education candidates to reduce low performing scores. Also, it is implied that this population is overrepresented because, often than not, those students who need instructional support are not able to obtain the services due to the demands of "teaching to the test," an educational practice where curriculum is heavily focused on preparing for a standardized test. As such, other instructional implementations (e.g. remediation) are lacking. One teacher commented, that students are unable to receive "remediation in regular education and are unable to get it as a part of the regular academic day, due to large class size and teacher pacing guidelines." Similarly, due to the demands of high-stakes testing, African American males are referred because teachers are "concerned that student's poor performance on end-of-grade tests will have a negative effect on teacher's results".

Cultural understanding. Responses indicate that referrals occur because teachers lack multicultural experiences and training. Data suggest the lack of training occurs at both levels; with pre-service and veteran teacher. As noted, "more colleges/universities fail to provide teachers with the multicultural experience(s) prior to entering the classroom and little to no professional development is offered in the field."

Furthermore, “many schools in the School System do not have an active multi-cultural committee. How many schools have multi-culture workshops? I get tired of hearing I don’t see color. You have to see color of the child in order to see them.”

Subjectivity in the referral process. According to participant respondents, subjectivity in the referral process contributes to higher referrals of African American males. Data suggest that educators tend to make predetermined decisions to identify and qualify a student for special education services, prior to any formal testing. In contrast, data suggest that educators believe that African American males are overrepresented in special education because they tend to be misdiagnosed. As stated,

> Instead of testing to see if the student qualifies for SLD services, and having a full picture of the child’s capabilities based on comprehensive testing, our district still takes the easy route of qualifying a child OHI because a parent has gotten a diagnosis of ADHD in order to get test mods and removal of what is considered a *problem* child from the classroom for a period of time each day. Also, many teachers call parents in for conference when teachers already have a *label* for the student.

Differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction, the ability to design and deliver effective learning experiences, was identified as another reason for referral. In sum, educators reported an inability to address the learning needs and preferences of African American male students due to biased judgments, a lack of training and choices made by district/administrative authorities concerning delivering the curriculum. One teacher commented,

> education is being increasingly scripted and standardized to the point that it makes it difficult for children with different learning styles to succeed. In [*our district*], we are following a program that relies heavily on whole group, scripted

> instruction. It is particularly frustrating to children who need to move and actively participate in learning. This would be, essentially, all children, but I think it most impacts our most at risk population. These are not children who benefit from sitting still and answering chorally.

Another teacher admitted, “Many times teachers do not know how to teach to the learning styles of their students. It is important to have the proper training of how to learn about your students and how that should look in the actual real world classroom.”

Early intervention strategies. The lack of early intervention strategies ultimately leads to an increase of special education referrals for African American male students. Data suggest the importance of early childhood prevention and early intervention programs prior to formal school training are crucial in setting the foundation for lifelong learning. In particular, general educators believe that early intervention strategies are particularly important for African Americans coming from poverty-related backgrounds. For example, one respondent mentioned,

> Many African American males (and females) are not exposed to a literacy-rich environment before entering school. They have not been reading bedtime stories or building their vocabulary since birth. At home, they are not reading or seeing parents read for leisure and many do not develop an interest in reading. Many students are not given consequences for missing homework, class work, or behavior problems in school. Also, they are dealing with issues relating to poverty and living without a father present in their lives which creates issues more important to them than education.

Educators’ perceptions of African American males as low achievers. Media come to represent our social realities (Brooks & Herbert, 2006). As this theme indicate, much of what educators know and understand about African American males is based on

the perceptions, images, and symbols portrayed by television, film, music, and other media. As noted,

> media and what we see in the news has a lot to do with the perception of African American males. How television and music portray the African American male also affects how they are perceived by some teachers in the classroom.

Likewise, data suggest that many adverse depictions of the male tend to make them candidates for referrals. For example, one educator response indicated that African American males were identified as individuals that are feared. As one educator noted, "I believe that there is a fear of African American males and therefore before some educators try to reach them they would rather 'write' them off as candidates for special education."

Finally, respondents indicated that a "cultural disconnect and stereotypical view of African American males as a low achievers" contribute to high referrals.

> I believe that overall it is a race issue and the fact that most teachers don't understand African American men and therefore cannot connect with them and help them excel to the next level in their education. Instead of understanding and trying to help they just refer them to special ed. that way they don't have to deal with the issue.

Sectional IV (of the Survey Instrument): Additional Comments

Of the thirty (30) responses, most of the comments given for this section of the survey paralleled themes identified in Section III of the survey instrument. This included 1responses related to early intervention strategies, lack of parental involvement, ineffective behavior management, African Americans raised in single parent families,

subjectivity in the referral process, poverty, lack of parental multicultural education training, poverty, and cultural differences. All responses to this item either stated that referrals were based on academic needs or denied that race play a factor in renewals. Table 4.8 includes the emerging themes from Section IV of the survey instrument. Participant comments regarding academics needs are included below. (Please note: N/A, None, etc. were not included in the data count. This included a total of two responses.)

Table 8

Common Themes Regarding African American Referrals—Section IV

Theme	*n*
Academics	11
Early Intervention Strategies	2
Lack of Parental Involvement	3
Ineffective Behavior Management Strategies	1
African Americans Raised in Single Parent Family	1
Subjectivity in the Referral Process	3
Poverty	2
Lack of Multi-Cultural Training	2
Poverty	2
Cultural Differences	1
Total	28

Note: N/A, None, etc. were not included in the data count

Participant comments that support academic theme:

- I have referred students of all ethnicities for special education. The decision is always based on learning needs and they have qualified based on IQ's below 70, or 15 point differences between IQ and performance.

- As a teacher, it's hard to see a student struggle and not be able to make meaning of what is being taught to them. If a referral results in that student being able to get additional support, the student gains meaning and acceptance.
- Unfortunately, many of the male African American students do not end up qualifying for services due to their achievement being in alignment with their aptitude. They are considered "slow learners" and do not qualify for any EC services. There are many more "slow learners" in schools than children who receive EC services.

Interviews

Section five of the survey instrument asked participants to volunteer for semi-structured, informal interviews conducted by the researcher during a time and location of their choice. From the twenty-two respondents, the researcher chose a total of twelve (N=12) classroom teachers from kindergarten to fifth grade. The twelve (N=12) interviewees were chosen based on their willingness and availability. Each participant agreed to participate in a single, digitally-recorded interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. The main purpose of the interview was to generate data relative to referral reasons that would supplement and deepen those obtained through the survey. Each interview began with this question: Think about an African American male student you have referred. What were you reason(s) for referral? A series of follow-up followed: *If academic, what area(s) (reading, writing, and math)? [Subquestions: What is the student's current functioning level? Describe the student's level of difficulty; What*

informal assessments were used prior to referral; What formal assessments were used prior to referral?], If the student was referred for behaviors, describe the occurring behaviors? [Subquestions: Were the behaviors significant to impede the student's learning and that of others? (If yes,) describe the student's behavior?]; What other factors were considered critical to referral? Additional questions included these: *How does socioeconomic status and family conditions affect your decision to refer an African American male; How does parental involvement affect your decision to refer an African American male?; How does culture affect your decision to refer African American males? How do environmental factors affect your decision to refer an African male?* The closing question was as follows: *Do you wish to add anything else we may have missed?* This allowed each participant the opportunity to end each interview with closing comments.

A digital recording of each interview was made and transcribed. To validate the transcripts, member checks were completed. After reading the data several times, the transcripts were coded (Creswell, 2005). First, to help organize the data into categories, topical codes were assigned by the researcher based on the reading of a subset of answers, as well as topics related to the literature on Critical Race Theory. Coded themes and patterns were displayed graphically in matrices in order to identify coherent themes or patterns. Then, the illustrative quotes were identified and clustered together to form a category. The next step of the thematic analysis identified all data related to the already classified category. If data did not fit into an already classified category responses were not coded.

Educators' Views Regarding Referrals

The most frequent reasons given for special education referrals were for academics, with the most prominent area identified in reading. However, teachers admitted the underlying reason for referral was viewing a student as needing assistance:

> I knew he was having difficulty. To be honest, my "gut" feeling felt like that there was something. I thought that he was missing something. To tell you the truth, that's where it originally started I had to go with my "gut" feeling. (Fourth-grade teacher, 1)

As required for the identification process, all teachers reported using both informal and formal assessments to determine student's functional levels. A majority of the teachers identified students' functioning levels at least two grade levels behind. The most frequently mentioned assessment involved teachers' observations of students' inability to apply presented information in their work:

- We always do what we called an informal assessment, teacher's observation. Uh . . . we had, each week, at the end of each quarter; we had specific skills in which they had to be proficient in & . . . he never made them. (Second-grade teacher, 3)

- At the beginning of the school year, we used the AGS screening (I'm not sure what does letters stand for) to test your cognitive and language skills. He was very low on that. Which is surprising for an African American student to score that low. (Second-grade teacher, 3)

Another sign reported by educators was a students' inability to complete tasks in the allotted time. A first grade teacher reported,

> Processing time was very slow. He needed an inordinate amount of time across the board. And he would sit quietly. He was a very quiet child, polite child.

> Uh…very meticulous when he wrote. His penmanship was very mechanically, very beautiful penmanship. He was very detailed. But, when I called on him to answer a question, he looked at me & stared at me. It was like he was looking for the answer but he would stare & then blink, blink, blink, & blink. And, I gave him the wait time because, eventually he would get the answer.

Those students referred for behavior problems were described "*acting out*" as result of struggling:

- Um . . . behaviors were there but I felt like that they were more related to the fact that like "I'm struggling with reading, so I don't want to read." (Fourth-grade teacher, 1)
- He had a little defiance . . . but I felt like it was a lack of reading. When he couldn't, you know, he couldn't read the words. Um . . . not just a out and out. (Fourth-grade teacher, 1)

Significant behaviors often included misbehavior perceived as a means to avoid work. A fourth grade teacher commented that difficulties with components of a task, especially group work, would lead to disruptive behaviors.

- . . . Yeah. There were behavior problems; especially his learning. And when I have him in small groups, he would disturb others learning as well (Fourth-grade teacher, 8)
- Because when it was his turn to either read or discuss a story, at times, he would just shut down. With his work, he didn't do very well with that (Fourth-grade teacher, 8)
- He was just like wild & up and running around the room and disturbing others but . . . I guess others could have learned with in there if he didn't have to participate in like group work or partner work or anything of that nature (Fourth-grade teacher, 8)

'Other' factors related to referral identified the importance of parental involvement. This included inconsistency of home/parental support with academics and the overall lack of authentic parental involvement in the child's education:

> Parental involvement is also a factor that I take into consideration when thinking about referring any student regardless of race or socioeconomic status because the parents are truly the 1st teacher of the child and the ones who spend the most time with the student; it is imperative that the parent partners with the school and vice versa. (Third-grade teacher, 3)

Whether the following questions were too sensitive in nature or, whether true accounts were given, interviewees reluctantly admitted that socioeconomic status, parental involvement, culture and environmental factors can be reasons for initial referrals of African American males. As reported, regardless of race, "these factors have to be taken in consideration at some point because *they are all tied in together*." Identified were the results of poverty (e.g. limited resources), parental involvement (e.g. students raised in single parent homes), culture (e.g. White versus African American culture; *two ways to act*), and environmental factors (e.g. exposure to drugs and violence).

It should be noted that many interviewee responses were self-reflective evaluations of their performance, individual experiences, and/or personal philosophies. For example,

> And I guess this is personal. But sometimes, I wish that we could stop looking at the outside factors and uh . . . start looking more at things that surrounds the individual. As an educator, I look at that child as a child who has a God given gift to make it. He has the potential to succeed no matter what or where he comes from. Hmm . . . hmm . . . Because we have so many people who came from poor socioeconomic situations have parents who are uneducated but they succeeded. And, if we could take each individual we come in contact with and say, this is

someone I can work with, as a teacher, this is me as a teacher, and then bring that person to their potential.

Summary

The responses provided in the quantitative sections of the survey seem to suggest that there are several factors influencing the referral of African American males for possible special education services. The most prominent reasons were being raised by extended family, cultural biases among teachers, ineffective trainings for teachers, and student environmental factors.

In contrast, the qualitative data from interviews were not as clear. For example, interviewees denied that race affects referrals but, then again, factors related to race (such as poverty, parental involvement, culture, and environmental factors) had to be taken into consideration because these issues are not separate issues.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

As we enter the 21st century, African Americans are still disproportionately placed in special education, receive segregated special education placements, have the poorest postschool outcomes, and continue to be segregated from their White and nondisabled peers (Blanchett, 2009). Research suggests that the most significant factor for such an overrepresentation can be attributed to teacher bias generated at the level of special education referral and decision making (Chu, 2011; VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Naquiin, 2003). For example, classroom observational studies have suggested that teachers tend to have more positive interaction with white students than students of color (Maholmes & Brown, 2002; Casteel, 1998). Similarly, students of color have been found to receive harsher punishments and disciplinary actions than their white counterparts (Friend, 2011; Fenning & Rose, 2007). Whether referrals are made because of overt or unintentional racial and ethnic biases, it is apparent that the way educators perceive a student can greatly influence the likelihood for special education referrals (Friend, 2011; Skiba et al., 2008).

Given the continuous patterns of disproportionality, it is important to examine and understand the relation between teacher perceptions and the potential biases that can lead to referrals of African American males in special education. Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify specific student characteristics and other variables that influence

general educators' pre-referral decision-making. Employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the *Gresham Survey-Revised* and semi-structured interviews, were used to explore the role of teacher beliefs about African Americans males prior to pre-referral.

This chapter discusses the findings of this study. This include educators' perceptions of factors influencing the overrepresentation of African American males as pre-referral candidates, significant student characteristics considered in the process, as well as the influence of demographics as they relates to referral decisions. Next, a synopsis of the semi-structured interviews will be provided. Finally, limitations, future recommendations, and a summary of the research study are explained.

Educators' Perceptions

Findings of this study suggest that educators' perceive a variety of factors relate to the disproportionate referral rate of African American males. Of the 216 survey responses, environmental factors (e.g. exposure to drugs and violence) were ranked as the most significant factor that would influence educators' decision to refer. According to responses, teachers shared concerns about the impact of poverty in relation to a child's development and learning potential. This includes a correlation between poor school performance and low socio-economic status. The perception of respondents was that because African American males are more likely to live in low-income households and experience stressors and developmental threats, they more than likely will fail in school (Skiba et al., 2008). As noted in one fourth grade teacher response, environmental factors also could impede a student's learning because "9 times out of 10 environment, culture,

and socio-economics are all tied in together." Research on school performance and children of poverty reveals that this group may indeed experience difficulty in several areas. Children of poverty may experience noticeable difficulties in (a) language development, (b) literacy, (c) numerical skills, (d) content knowledge, and social and emotional skills (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

It should also be noted that the impact of biological/hereditary factors (e.g. lack of prenatal care, biological transmission of mental illness, and delayed cognitive developments) also were cited as contributory causes for referral. These findings seem to mirror research supporting the assumption that the outcome of living under particular conditions (such as low-income households) is an inherent and defining feature of this group (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010) and may exacerbate innate factors. As Gregory et al. (2010) noted, because data on the impact of poverty are often presented in terms of biological factors that cause developmental problems in these groups (e.g. low-birth weight, exposure to alcohol during pregnancy, poor nutrition that can lead to limited vocabulary, delayed cognitive development), the evidence seems to also solidify the assumption that outcome of living under these particular conditions targets the group for failure. And unfortunately, these assumptions are ingrained in the general public's consciousness, including school personnel (Gregory et al., 2010).

Survey respondents also agreed that environmental factors such as being raised by one biological parent (e.g. single mother) or an extended family (e.g. aunt, uncle, or grandmother) were casual in nature for referral decisions. From survey responses, being raised by one biological parent and being raised by an extended family member were

mentioned a similar number of times by respondents. This may occur because of teachers' perceptions about the nuclear family and the benefits of being raised by biological parents. One might conclude that teachers perceived this family structure to be more positive because of the inclusion of a male role model in the home, financial stability, and academic support (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2004; Gresham, 2005b).

Significant Characteristics

General educators identified four factors that were considered statistically significant prior to pre-referral. Student characteristics included (a) being raised by extended family, (b) cultural biases, (c) ineffective training, (d) and environmental factors. However, from a communality perspective, two factors prevailed. According to factor analysis, cultural bias and being raised by an extended family from low socio-economic backgrounds were the fundamental reasons for referral of African American students.

Cultural Bias: Communication Styles

Culture provides the underlying beliefs, attitudes, and actions that shape the thoughts and behaviors of a group of people (Johnson & McIntosh, 2009). Based on many factors (e.g. the environment, what is learned, and what is shared), our culture provides the lens in which we determine what is right and wrong. It is the way we view and interpret the world (Pang, 2001). In general, the majority of respondents attributed culture bias as a reason for pre-referral. Specifically identified were characteristics associated with students' use of culturally different speech patterns or slang. According

to survey data, 53% of the respondents identified communication styles between African American males and school personnel's perceptions about language as a reason for high referral rates. These findings suggest that cultural misunderstanding and misattributions can give way to biases exhibited from our dominant culture. As Day-Vines & Day-Hairston (2005) noted, African Americans with high levels of ethnic affiliation exhibit a distinctive set of communication styles that does not conform readily in dominant, mainstream education settings. For example, many African American students communicate with one another and school personnel in a manner characterized as loud, intense, and confrontational even without having accompanying feelings of anger. But for the onlooker, when interpreted outside a particular cultural context, certain interaction styles may be regarded as rude, inappropriate, and an impediment academic progress (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005). As a result, misinterpretations of communication patterns may lead to a culture disconnect and an increase in referrals.

Cultural Bias: Extended Families (of Poverty)

Undoubtedly, culture dominates teacher values and perceptions as it pertains to family dynamics. As data indicated, being raised by a non-traditional family dominates educators' decision to refer. As reported, 51% percent of respondents agreed that being raised by economically poor parents or guardians had a large impact on special education referrals. For example, participants expressed that students come to school with a lack of foundational academic skills causing them to fall behind their peers. As noted by one teacher,

> Parents of these students are less likely to implement learning strategies suggested by teachers at home (such as extra practice, flash cards, real world connections), so these students don't get the support they need to catch up on their skills. While there are students of other ethnic backgrounds who live in poverty and experience similar conditions growing up, there is a higher percentage of African Americans in poverty in many areas, and so this leads to the overrepresentation issue.

Another opined, "I think the erosion of the family has an enormous impact on achievement. I see this as a problem in society as a while, but especially in families." The effects of poverty supports the findings of Abgenyega and Jiggets (1999) that poverty effects have intensified over enrollment and placement, into special education, for families living below poverty levels, from homes of teenage mothers, without husbands, from divorced parents, from parents who are minimally educated, and from homes where they are latchkey children.

Teacher Demographic Characteristics

Overall, general educators in this study are experienced in the field. From the quantitative data, 56 respondents (25.6%) indicated they had taught ten to fourteen years in varied elementary levels (kindergarten-fifth grades). Nearly all the respondents (205, 95%) identified themselves as females. Likewise, a majority of the survey respondents, (140, 65%) indicated their ethnicity as Caucasian. Ages ranged from 31 to 35 (17%) and there was almost an equal amount of participants who had earned Bachelors' and Masters' degrees; respectively 108 (50%) to 104 (48%) total. Based on the results, it would appear that the majority of respondents are representative of the national norm. According to Zumwalt & Craig (2005), teachers generally come from middle-class,

Anglo-American backgrounds. In contrast, in the past decade, the number of teachers has declined as the population to African American students has risen (Robles, 2011).

In addition, the majority of survey respondents indicated they held current license in the state of North Carolina. A large number of survey respondents, 181 (84%) indicated they received multi-cultural training and/or cultural sensitive training during their pre-service years and through the current system which they are employed. In contrast, only 82 (38%) reported that they received disability training in varied areas of eligibility (specific learning disability, other health impaired, serious emotional disability, intellectual disability; as well as speech and language impaired, autism, visual impaired, and orthopedically impaired). These findings suggest that general educators lack professional development training and knowledge construction to determine the criteria for special education referrals. Based on the perspective of the informants, the underlying problem is there is a lack of clarity in school guidelines for special education referrals and an accompanying need to define the important initial steps in the special education identification process. The fact that teachers had culture sensitivity training but still are adamant to make referrals suggests that there is an imbalance between the racial/ethnic composition of the student population and the racial/ethnic makeup of the teaching force (Dykes, 2008). This contention supports Kea and Utley (1998) research that there continues to be a lack of personnel which “create conditions that detract from building a successful multicultural society and excellence for all students” (p.45).

To determine if teachers’ demographics influenced referral decision making, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed. Overall, only one

interaction effect was significant; the interaction effect was between ethnicity and disability training. In sum, when ethnicity and disability trainings were considered simultaneously, they significantly affected the reason for referral of African American students. This suggests that an individual's views about race and the connotations implied about disabilities might reasonably serve as an explanation for some referrals of African American males.

Interviews

Past research has documented the initiation of a student being referred by classroom teachers as a powerful predictor of subsequent special education placement (Dunn, 2006). The key pre-referral criteria that general educators used to nominate African American males for special education services included a combination of student characteristics that teachers observed (e.g., inattention, lack of comprehension, inability to complete task, poor work performance**,** and certain behaviors) and teachers inference (e.g. perceptions of African American males as low achievers, fear of individual students, and student appearance- walk, hair, and dress). For example, one educator indicated that African American males are identified as individuals who are feared. She stated, "I believe that there is a fear of African American males and therefore before some educators try to reach them they would rather write them off as candidates for special education." Another educator stated that many teachers have "below academic expectations in general for African American students." Comments such as these suggest a cultural disconnect and stereotypical view of African American males. Prior to any formal testing, bias occurs in the referral process and predetermined decisions are made.

Researchers argue that a student who presents himself as different, academically unable, or with atypical comportment to the teacher is interpreted as needing referral for special education (Dunn, 2006). As one informant proclaimed,

> I believe that overall it is a race issue and the fact that most teachers don't understand African American men and therefore cannot connect with them and help them excel to the next level in their education. Instead of understanding and trying to help they just refer them to special education. That way they don't have to deal with the issue.

Respondents viewed the lack of parental involvement and support, lack of parents' understanding of the referral process, and lack of communication in the African American home as reasons for pre-referral. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), shared decision-making and parent membership are mandatory components of referral process (Staples & Diliberto, 2010). However, based on data from this study, many teachers believed that African American parents were non-supportive in both home and school. Teachers reported that getting parents involved in their child's education and school activities often is a challenge. This leads to academic failure, especially for students in the African American home. One respondent was very adamant that the researcher considered parental involvement as a reason for referral. She asked, "Has there been any part to your study of the role/responsibility that the parent has in working with the school environment? Shouldn't they be accountable for making sure they do everything they can (whatever amount that is) to do right by their child...helping him/her to be ready each day for school?"

Another finding dealt with an elevated sense of pressures related to accountability and the implementation of high stakes testing which is used to evaluate districts and individual campuses. Responses indicated that the pressure from high-stakes test performance had impacted referral of African American students. As a result, both teachers and administrators tend to recommend African American males as special education candidates to reduce the number of students scoring as low performing. The finding of this study parallel the findings of a study by Losen & Orfield (2002) indicating that students are referred in order to exclude them from high stakes testing. In a similar study, Agbenyega and Jiggers (1999) maintained that schools railroad children from African American backgrounds into special education to maintain a school's meritorious test scores. While principals denied this fact, both special education administrators and teachers noted the pressure to complete instruction in specified subject areas based on state assessment content led to special education referrals. Also, it is implied by respondents that this population is overrepresented because, more often than not, those students who need instructional support are not able to obtain the services due to the demands of "teaching to the test. Thus, other instructional strategies are never utilized or lack in-depth or consistency. For example, educators reported an inability to address learning needs because the curriculum is "so scripted". The practice of using ddifferentiated instruction and other early intervention strategies were limited due to choices made by district/administrative authorities concerning delivering the curriculum.

Finally, responses indicated that referrals occurred because teachers lack multi-cultural experiences and training to address student behaviors. Based on interview

responses, teachers conveyed that ineffective behavior management strategies within the classroom setting contributed to an increase in special education referrals. Findings also suggested that teachers felt underprepared to address behavior issues that may be related to cultural factors targeting behaviors of African American boys. Of particular interest, the discussions of multi-cultural training and behavior issues lead to a discussion focused on racism specific to ethnicity and gender. As Grossman (1998) concluded, prejudice and discrimination against non-European Americans is rampant and that much of the prejudice is unconscious. Additionally, Artiles (1998) remarked, "ethnic minority groups have been traditionally seen as 'problem people' and that discrimination, prejudice, and racism are subtly and openly enacted everyday in our country" (p. 33).

Theoretical Implications of the Data

Grounded in the modern Eurocentric belief system, the traditional paradigm does not acknowledge any biases or values attached to human judgment in its knowledge claim. Nevertheless, there are deep concerns and issues regarding racial and other forms of discriminatory practices in education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2003). In particular, distinctive elements of racism embedded in education are valid when viewed through the lens of critical race theory, the theoretical framework used in this study. As stated, education and its relationship to racism are still a normal and endemic component of our social fabric that maintains the subordination and marginalization of people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lopez, 2003; Soloronzo, 1997). As evident in this data, data reveal that race and racism are a part of the everyday

reality among educators' decision-making in referring African American males as pre-referral candidates for special education.

Quantitative finds reported that educators considered biological factors (i.e., hereditary, mental illness, and behavior) as one reason for pre-referral. Perhaps this deficit view of Black people, in particular males, derives from normative values and expectations conceived in a White culture. More often than not, African American males are associated with low cognitive abilities and lack of basic skills (Solorzano, 1997). The belief is reified by school system assessments that too frequently cite that African American males are the "faces at the bottom of the well" (Bell, 1992). Based on Eurocentric values, educators (or the study's educators) made value judgments of what is and what is not, what can be and what cannot be. Therefore, behaviors as observed in African American males that were not perceived to be normal by educators' standards led them to label them as incompetent as related to the academic work and classroom social interactions.

The study's educators also acknowledged environmental factors as key elements for referrals. From the quantitative data, the effects of poverty, such as lack of prenatal care, were cited as reasons for referral. Likewise, qualitative finds also noted that exposure to drugs and high crime rates persuaded teachers' decisions to refer. Using the premise of Payne's (2001) poverty model, responses such as these represent the concept of deficit thinking. The idea of deficit thinking is that there is something wrong with people who live in poverty and that they need to be fixed accordingly to become acceptable and functional by middle-class values and standards. More specifically, the

face of poverty has become code for and synonymous with African Americans and [people of color] (Taylor, 2012). Those who live in poverty are considered, at times, to be lazy, dysfunctional, ignorant, underserving, less-than, deficit, and shiftless, all descriptors of that could be considered by educators when thinking about African American males in the pre-referral process.

Culture is not a static concept; it is "a category for conveniently sorting people according to expected values, beliefs, and behaviors" (Dyson & Geneishi, 1994, p. 3). Rather, culture is dynamic and encompasses other concepts that relate to its central meaning. In relationship to culture, educators reported biases in their perceptions of African American males. More specifically, quantitative findings supported high referral rates for students who exhibited different speech patterns or used slang. Delpit (1998) asserted, there are codes or rules for participating in the "culture of power." As such, these codes and rules are considered the norm in relation to linguistic forms, communicative strategies, and presentations of self (that is, ways of talking, writing, dressing, and interacting). While it is true that different ethnic/cultural groups may have various languages, dialects, idiomatic expressions, and slang used to deviate from Standard English, the conscious or unconscious decision by them to code switch language use for school purposes may cause teachers to view their students through a deficit lens. In other words, those who frequently use Standard English when appropriate are more capable and "powerful" than those who do not. Furthermore, qualitative findings also supported a cultural mismatch between educators' perceptions of African American males as evidenced in their behavior patterns. Blanchett (2006) believes that

"educators tend to see Whiteness as the norm and consequently the academic skills, behavior, and social skills of African Americans [and other students of color] are constantly compared with those of their White peers" (p. 25). In sharing her experience of White privilege and racism in the special education referral and placement process, one teacher said:

> There are a lot of behavior patterns acceptable in the Black community that are not acceptable in the classroom. The lack of discipline or chosen discipline styles at home, exposure to inappropriate materials, lack of school support, and lack of educational opportunities all play a big role in Black students' referral for behavioral and learning problems. Some prevalent attitudes that are detrimental include [the parent] believing their child is always right, assuming teachers make decisions based on race, and that schools are responsible for all aspects of a child's upbringing. My experience with Black parents is that they come in when they are very upset, yell, and then fail to follow through on any agreed upon discipline at home. This makes these students believe their parent will defend them no matter the behavior. All racial groups have issues and problems; however, many behavioral patterns we see in children coming of the Black community are particularly incongruent with the values and goals of schools.

Generalizations about African American parenting may have also yielded unwarranted assumptions about referrals. Quantitative findings revealed that being raised by a single mother and/or an extended family (i.e., aunt or grandmother) led to biases about family structure. Rooted in "the now time worn and obsolete 1950s ideology of a two-parent, heterosexual household with two children, a dog, and a house with a white picket fence" (Taylor, 2012, p. 4), educators inherently linked character, motivation, and intelligence to the academic success of African American males. In comparison, qualitative findings also supported educators' beliefs that African American students who did not have the traditional, nuclear family structured lacked parental involvement within school and had

little or no support at home with homework and other study skills. It was also noted that educators also believed that the lack of an African American male in the home ways paramount to academic achievement. Considering CRT, the idea of what constitutes a family in our schools as well as what determines parent involvement in schools guides educators' perceptions of what is not only necessary for academic success, but also who ultimately determines what is proper and what is not. People in power make decisions and those decisions are frequently made from their own beliefs and value systems.

Lastly, quantitative findings support educators' beliefs that referrals are made due to a lack of clarity in special education guidelines. Although the field of special education has moved toward more equitable treatment of students with disabilities, many African American students are still disproportionately referred to and placed in high-incidence, judgmental categories. The implications suggest that teachers continue to refer African American males with prior negative perceptions of "Blackness" based on their sense of entitlement regarding White privilege intact (Blanchett,2006). Qualitative responses also support that subjectivity in the referral process is strongly influenced by accountability, teaching to the tests, and an absolution of blame. These realities suggest that even in a system that was supposed to serve some of the most marginalized students in the American educational system, the White privilege and racism that are ingrained in the fabric of American history and society are equally prevalent (Shealey, Lue, Brooks, & McCray, 2005).

Limitations

A number of important limitations need to be considered when reviewing this research. The current study analyzed the data from only 1 of the 160 local education agencies (LEAs) in North Carolina, thus limiting generalizabilty. The results may have been different if the study included multiple districts from North Carolina and/other states. The current study was limited in size and scope. The number of participants was relatively small, consisting of 216 general education teachers. Thus, the findings may not generalize all teachers' perceptions and beliefs in the pre-referral process. In addition, since initial referrals are traditionally in an elementary setting, the survey instrument targeted only elementary grades levels (kindergarten through fifth). It would be interesting to know if similar perceptions exist among educators at the middle and high school levels.

The researcher made every effort to avoid bias, but as with any analysis process, this may be a potential pitfall. For example, given my role as a special education teacher in an elementary school and as the researcher in this study, my personal attitudes and background as well as those of the informants may have influenced the data. That is, when completing the survey and providing interview responses, the participants may have been inclined to choose answers they presumed were socially acceptable rather than expressing genuine viewpoints.

In contrast, due to the nature of the study, the responses gathered may have been given with some reservations. For example, respondents may have hesitated to specify that they used some or all of these criteria in making special education referrals in

reluctance to discuss the sensitive issues of race. Also, through the posed questions, classroom teachers were led away from their own routine thoughts to the issues concerning this study. Therefore, the interviewer needs to consider one's own participation in the discussed issues when analyzing the data.

This study relies mainly on self-reported data, and they may present general education teachers' perceptions in an unrealistically positive light. For example, some researchers reject use of self-reported data due to its alleged poor quality. However, Chan (2009) argued that the so-called poor quality of self-reported data is nothing more than an urban legend. Driven by social desirability, respondents might provide the researchers with inaccurate data on some occasions, but it does not happen all the time. For example, it is unlikely that the respondents would lie about their demographics, such as gender and ethnicity. In addition, while it is true that respondents tend to fake their answers in experimental studies, this issue is less serious in measures used in field studies and naturalistic settings.

This study contains several limitations to be considered when interpreting the results. In terms of the questionnaire, the manner in which the items were presented may have caused the respondent to reply hesitantly. The connotations and interpretations of phrases such as "*acting out* in class," "*subjectivity* in the referral process" and "negative preconceptions about the behavior of males" may have caused reluctance in respondents' ratings of such items.

Finally, the issue of how one comes to investigate this topic as an educated middle-class person merits mention. Briggs (1982) refers to this as scientific colonialism.

Addressing this topic from the point of view of a teacher implied an emphasis on the interviewer's perspective as a special education teacher and those of the classroom-teacher informants. Inevitably, the way the research has been conducted and viewed involves contradictions and assumptions that would generate different data with another researcher. Creating a schedule of interview questions, conducting interviews with a group of people, and interpreting the data gives the researcher a significant degree of power over the whole process (Dunn, 2006). As a consequence, it is important to view the exercise as objectively as possible when using the data to draw conclusions (Dunn, 2006).

Future Research

The current study revealed several areas that need further study. One area of particular importance is clarity in the procedure of referral implementation. Future research in this area should focus on how to structure professional development to maintain a quality pre-referral structure. This includes redesigning guidelines of the pre-referral and intervention process. For example, in the traditional pre-referral process or response to intervention (RTI) procedures, a systematic examination of classroom and teachers variables should be included.

In addition, variables relating to teacher effectiveness with multicultural populations, student cultures, curriculum aspects, cognitive styles and overall quality to learning should be carefully taken in consideration as part of pre-referral process (Atwater, 2008; Rudea, Klinger, Sager, and Velasco, 2008). Likewise, research also should investigate the impact of professional development opportunities and trainings

such as multicultural education and cultural awareness to determine if components of these trainings (such as diversity strategies, culturally relevant methods, and the implementation of research-based interventions) would better prepare teachers to work with a broader spectrum of children and thus become more effective at ameliorating this unyielding problem.

Research could consider the impact that standardized testing itself is having on the referral process. That is, another means to extend this research would be to compare a typical standardized curriculum classroom setting with an educational environment focusing on learning styles to determine how this alternative method might affect the number of students referred for special education services. To expand on the findings of this study, future research also should include a more nationally representative sample of teachers. A replication of this study in a different demographic is recommended to address similar findings with different dynamics. For example, certain aspects are unique to urban areas, whereas other rural and suburban factors may be generalizable to rural and suburban areas.

Additionally, a replication of the study would be beneficial if special education teacher's perceptions were included in the data. This study only included the perceptions of the general education teachers, because they are usually the first involved with the pre-referral process. However, since special educators are also knowledgeable about students who struggle academically and need intervention in regular instruction, they should also be included in the sample. These teachers also would have valuable perceptions to share.

Conclusion

The goal of this research was to draw attention on the impact of teachers' perceptions of African American males during the pre-referral process. Based on overall findings, what can be concluded is that reasons for referral vary. These include the effects of poverty, disruptive behavior, unstable homes, lack of parental involvement, and teacher trainings. Students were also referred for less obvious reasons such as cultural bias (in the student's walk, talk, and dress). However, the overarching reason for referrals implied that race and culture matters in every aspect. As Banks (2006) noted, this complex relationship (that between race and culture) varies with respect to the extent to which individuals adopt characteristics associated with a particular group or internalize values and standards associated with that group.

The results of the present study are significant in that they address real and very pressing factors related to the disproportionate placement of African American male students in special education. The results are also important in that the findings can help general educators and others in the field to examine their inner perceptions, and in turn change their thinking and their behavior. In addition, this research helps professionals to embrace the possibility that individuals in responsible positions should seek and eliminate the unconscious or conscious acts that may limit African American students from reaching their potential.

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APPENDIX A

CONFERENCE SOLICITATION

Have Your Say and Win a $100 Gift Card!

Hello! My name is Charmion Rush, a University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) doctoral student about to begin dissertation.

I need your help! I am seeking Winston-Salem/Forsyth Schools (WS/FCS) ***general educators*** who are ***willing to give their valuable input for an upcoming study!***

Once I have approval for the study (anticipated early this fall), I will be in touch to ask for your participation for an on-line education survey.

Participation will help me survey your perceptions, values, and beliefs of African American males in the pre-referral process. The desired outcome is to gain an understanding of factors linked to the overrepresentation of African American males.

If you participate you will have the opportunity to voice your opinion, as well as have a chance to win a $100 gift card (once the study is completed).

In advance, thank you for your help with this project!

Name:

School:

Position/Grade Level:

E-Mail:

The provided information is for an upcoming doctoral study conducted by Charmion Rush and a chance to win a $100 gift card (granted at the end of the study).

APPENDIX B

GRESHAM PERMISSION

From Doran Gresham, Ed.D <dvgresham@gmail.com>

To Charmion Rush <cbrush@uncg.edu>

date Fri, Feb 25, 2011 at 12:37 PM

subject Re: permission to use survey

mailed-bygmail.com

signed-bygmail.com

hide details Feb 25 (2 days ago)

This looks pretty good. Are you going to pilot test the instrument? How has the reliability and validity changed? Let's call it The Gresham Survey - Revised. Send me something that points out specific details about why certain areas were changed as soon as you can. I'd like to know your rationale.

Best to you and good luck!

Approval: Granted

Sent from my iPhone

- Show quoted text -

On Feb 25, 2011, at 12:05 PM, Charmion Rush <cbrush@uncg.edu> wrote:

> ---------- Forwarded message ----------

> From: Charmion Rush <cbrush@uncg.edu>

> Date: Thu, Feb 24, 2011 at 5:50 AM

> Subject: permission to use survey

> To: Doran Gresham <dvgresham@gmail.com>

>

> Dr. Gresham,

>

> I know it's been a while since my last contact but I wanted to bring

> you up-to-date. My committee has finally given me approval to proceed

> with my study, however, changes to the survey instrument have been

> made. Originally, I proposed to you a survey instrument in which a

> case study (along with adaptions from the Gresham survey) were used to

> determine general educators' perceptions of African American males as

> pre-referral candidates for special education. But, as of now, the

> committee has decided to eliminate the case study and only keep the

> adaptations from your survey as my final instrument.

>

> To suit my needs, I have either modified/deleted questions 7,8,9, and

> 16 from Section I and modified/deleted questions 4,7,11, and 12 from

> Section II of your original survey. As such, my adaptions consist of

> a five-part survey:

>

> Section I: seeks information from elementary general educators about

> the overrepresentation of African American males as pre-referral

> candidates for special education services (now 29 questions adapted

> from the Gresham survey)
>
> Section II: asks for the participant to make further comments
>
> Section III: seeks demographic information from the respondents of
> this study (now 15 questions adapted from the Gresham survey)
>
> Section IV: asks for the participant to make further comments
>
> Section V: asks for participation for an interview (to be conducted
> at a later time)
>
> In my opinion, the changes are no longer significant enough to brand
> both of our names, but I really need to continue with my study. Thus,
> I'm requesting to use your survey as I have now presented, giving you
> full credit, of course. (If necessary...Since changes have been made
> to the original survey, I could also indicate the adaptions as a
> footnote).
>
> I've attached the new instrument for you to review. Please let me know
> how you wish for me to proceed with title/credit.
>
> Charmion Rush
> UNCG Ph.D. Candidate
> <Gresham Survey 2.docx>

From Charmion Rush <cbrush@uncg.edu>

To Doran Gresham <dvgresham@gmail.com>
bcc"Marilyn Friend, Inc." <marilynfriend@marilynfriend.com>

date Thu, Feb 24, 2011 at 5:50 AM
subject permission to use survey
mailed-byuncg.edu

hide details Feb 24 (3 days ago)

Dr. Gresham,

I know its been a while since my last contact but I wanted to bring you up-to-date. My committee has finally given me approval to proceed with my study, however, changes to the survey instrument have been made. Originally, I proposed to you a survey instrument in which a case study (along with adaptions from the Gresham survey) were used to determine general educators' perceptions of African American males as pre-referral candidates for special education. But, as of now, the committee has decided to eliminate the case study and only keep the adaptations from your survey as my final instrument.

To suit my needs, I have either modified/deleted questions 7,8,9, and 16 from Section I and modified/deleted questions 4,7,11, and 12 from Section II of your original survey. As such, my adaptions consist of a five-part survey:

Section I: seeks information from elementary general educators about the overrepresentation of African American males as pre-referral candidates for special education services (now 29 questions adapted from the Gresham survey)

Section II: asks for the participant to make further comments

Section III: seeks demographic information from the respondents of this study (now 15 questions adapted from the Gresham survey)

Section IV: asks for the participant to make further comments

Section V: asks for participation for an interview (to be conducted at a later time)

In my opinion, the changes are no longer significant enough to brand both of our names, but I really need to continue with my study. Thus, I requesting to use your survey as I have now presented, giving you full credit, of course. (If necessary...Since changes have been made to the original survey, I could also indicate the adaptions as a footnote).

I've attached the new instrument for you to review. Please let me know how you wish for me to proceed with title/credit.

Charmion Rush
UNCG Ph.D. Candidate

APPENDIX C

GRESHAM-REVISED SURVEY

Gresham Survey:

Section I: seeks information from elementary general educators about the overrepresentation of African American males as pre-referral candidates for special education services

Section II: asks for you to make further comments

Section III: seeks demographic information from the respondents of this study

Section IV: asks for you to make further comments

Section V: asks for your participation for an interview (to be conducted at a later time)

By clicking the following link you are agreeing that you have read and you fully understand the contents of this document and are willingly consenting to take part in this study. You also agree to have your information entered in a one-time drawing for a chance to win a $100 gift card.

To begin, please click the link, or you may copy and paste it into your web browser.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/.....

Gresham Survey-Revised

Adapted by: C.B. Rush, 2011

Section I.

The following statements relate to your perception of causal factors that may contribute to the referral of African American male students prior to special education. Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement(s).	**Strongly disagree**	**Somewhat disagree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Somewhat agree**	**Strongly agree**
1. Language barriers between teacher and student.	○	○	○	○	○
2. Ineffective behavior management strategies on the part of the general educator referring the student for special services	○	○	○	○	○
3. Inappropriate teacher training.	○	○	○	○	○
4. Subjectivity in county referral process.	○	○	○	○	○
5. The lack of clarity in school guidelines for special education referrals.	○	○	○	○	○
6. Culturally biased assessment instruments.	○	○	○	○	○
7. There are more males in the elementary school population.	○	○	○	○	○
8. The perception that African American males are low achievers	○	○	○	○	○
9. Teachers' negative preconceptions about the behavior of African American males	○	○	○	○	○
10. Ethnic differences between teacher and students	○	○	○	○	○
11. Cultural beliefs and/or differences between teacher and students (e.g. heritage, religion, socioeconomic status (SES).	○	○	○	○	○
12. Certain biases (e.g. racial prejudice) on the part of the general educator.	○	○	○	○	○

13. Certain biases (e.g. racial prejudice) on the part of the student.	○	○	○	○	○
14. Certain biases (e.g. racial prejudice) on the part of the student' families.	○	○	○	○	○
15. Students' style of dress	○	○	○	○	○
16. Students' hairstyles	○	○	○	○	○
17. Students' walking styles	○	○	○	○	○
18. Students' use of culturally different speech patterns or slang	○	○	○	○	○
19. Hereditary factors (e.g. pre-natal exposure to drugs, biological transmission of mental illness, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○
20. Environmental factors (e.g. factors (e.g. exposure to drugs and violence)	○	○	○	○	○
21. Being raised by a single parent (Mother)	○	○	○	○	○
22. Being raised by a single parent (Father)	○	○	○	○	○
23. Being raised by two biological parents	○	○	○	○	○
24. Being raised by adopted parents	○	○	○	○	○
25. Being raised by foster parents	○	○	○	○	○
26. Being raised by extended family (e.g. aunt, uncle, grandmother)	○	○	○	○	○
27. Being raised by legally separated or divorced parents	○	○	○	○	○
28. Being raised by economically wealthy parents or guardians	○	○	○	○	○
29. Being raised by economically poor parents or guardians	○	○	○	○	○

Section II. Additional Comments

Are there any other reasons that you believe to be critical about the overrepresentation of African American males as pre-referral candidates that has not been addressed?

_____

_____

Section III. Demographics

1. Gender of Referring Teacher?: ○Male ○ Female
2. Ethnicity of Referring Teacher? ○Caucasian ○African-American ○ Hispanic or Latino ○Asian ○ Native American ○Multi-Racial ○ Other
3. Age of Referring Teacher?
4. Highest degree earned? ○Bachelor's ○Master's ○ Doctoral ○Post-Doctoral
5. Do you currently have a teaching license in the state of North Carolina?
6. Specify your grade level (s)? ○ Knd ○ Grade 1 ○ Grade 2 ○ Grade 3 ○Grade 4 ○ Grade 5
7. Total Years of Experience? :
8. Have you ever received any type of formal multicultural and/or cultural sensitivity training? ○Yes ○ No
9. If yes, who provided the training?

○ The current system, which you are employed

○ A teacher education program

○ A different school system

○ Other (please describe)

10. Have you received training from your current school system on how to refer students for special education referrals? ○Yes ○ No
11. Have you received training from your school on characteristics of a disability? ○Yes ○ No
12. If so, in which area of eligibility?
    ○ SLD ○ OHI ○ SED ○ ID ○ Other (please describe)
13. Have you ever referred on or more African Americans for special education services? ○Yes ○ No
14. Have any of these referrals resulted in placements for special education services? ○Yes ○ No
15. If so, in which area of eligibility?
    ○ SLD ○ OHI ○ SED ○ ID ○ Other (please describe)

Section IV.

Additional Comments

_____
_____
_____

Section V.

If you are willing to participate in a formal interview to further facilitate this investigation please provide your contact information. Indicate your name, phone, and/or e-mail address.

○ **I do wish to participate in an informal interview.**

Name _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

○ **I do not wish to participate.**

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

APPENDIX D

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Project: General Educators' Perceptions of African-American Males Prior to Pre-Referral

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

The purpose of this study is to survey your perceptions, values, and beliefs of African American males prior to the pre-referral process. The desired outcome is to gain an understanding of factors linked to the disproportionate representation of African American males in special education. Data from interviews will be used to benefit the researcher's understanding by indentifying specific characteristics and other variables that may influence educators' decisions to refer. Your feedback will be used only the stated purpose(s) of this research. Additionally, once the interview is transcribed, you will be contacted and given the opportunity to review the content to make necessary changes.

All transcriptions and taped interview data will be kept in a locked file cabinet for 5 years in the researcher's personal office and then destroyed by cutting the tapes and shredding the written copy.

Interviews should take approximately 30 minutes.

May I begin?

<If yes, taping begins.>

Lead Questions:

"Think about an African American male student you have referred. What were you reason(s) for referral"?

1. If academic, what area(s) (reading, writing, and math)?
    - What is the student's current "functioning" level? Describe the student's level of difficulty?
    - What informal assessments were used prior to referral?
    - What formal assessments were used prior to referral?
2. If the student was referred for behaviors, describe the occurring behaviors?
    - Were the behaviors significant to impede the student's learning and that of others? Describe the student's level of difficulty?
3. What other factors were considered critical to referral? Explain.

In your opinion:

4. How does socioeconomic status and family conditions affect your decision to refer an African American male?
5. How does parental involvement affect your decision to refer an African American male?
6. How does culture affect your decision to refer African American males?
7. How does environmental factors affect your decision to refer an African male?
8. Do you wish to add anything else we may have missed?

Thanks….

<end taping>

APPENDIX E

SECRETARY'S E-MAIL

To: secretary@wsfcs.k12.nc.us

From: Charmion Rush <crush@uncg.edu>

Date: 10/6/2010 12:36PM

Subject: Doctoral Survey

Lead Secretaries:

On behalf of Charmion Rush, a UNCG doctoral student and fellow WSFCS employee, I am forwarding this e-mail to request your assistance with her future research study.

The study, *GENERAL EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES PRIOR TO PREREFERAL*, would involve your cooperation in distributing an online survey to your general education faculty. For the purpose of her study, only general educators Knd-5th are being asked to participate. However, prior to launching the study, Mrs. Rush will need to generate a contact list for distribution as stipulated by WSFCS Research and Evaluation.

If your school is willing to assist, please forward a contact name and e-mail address. Once this has been received, I will give Charmion your name and she will send you a follow-up e-mail with directions to distribute the survey link. You may expect Ms. Rush's follow-up correspondence mid-February 2011.

In advance, thank you.

APPENDIX F

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

January 10, 2011

May I speak to the Lead Secretary or Principal?

Hello. My name is Charmion Rush and I am a UNCG doctoral candidate. The reason for my call, I am interested in having your school participate in a dissertation project. The purpose of the study is to examine general educators' perceptions of African American males as pre-referral candidates for special education. The project would involve your cooperation in distributing an online survey to your general education faculty. I am asking that all general education teachers, Knd-5th, are considered. At the end of the survey an optional interview may be conducted at a later time, given that the teacher grants permission. In exchange for their time, each participant will be enter for a one-time drawing for a gift card. The drawing will be held at the end of the study.

Are you willing for your school to participate in the research project? Yes____ No___

If no, **Thank you for your time.** <End call>

{If yes, proceed as follows:}

Great. If I may, I would like to verify that I have the correct contact information.

School Name: _____

Grade Level: _____

Contact Person/Position:_____

Contact's e-mail address: _____

Also, could you give me an estimate of how many general educators' will receive the online survey? _____

Ok. I will send you a follow-up e-mail with directions to distribute the survey link. Will I send the e-mail to the address you provided? **(If not, ask for other address)**

Other Address**:** _____

Thank you so very much for your time and cooperation. You may expect my correspondence the week of March 21, 2011 (or April 4, 2011). <end call> ***After each call, record information on status sheet*** .

APPENDIX G

PRINCIPALS' E-MAIL

To: principals@wsfcs.k12.nc.us

From: Charmion Rush <crush@uncg.edu>

Date:

Subject: Doctoral Survey-for general education teachers only

Once again, thank you for agreeing to be a part of my study. As promised, I am sending you the online link for the education survey regarding general educators' perceptions, values, and beliefs of African American male students. The desired outcome is to gain an understanding of factors linked to the disproportionate representation of African American males in special education. For this study, I am requesting only classroom teachers who serve students kindergarten to fifth grades as participants for the survey. *Other school personnel such as resource instructors, primary reading teachers, and specialists should not be included.*

Please share this link with your general education teachers. Response to the survey will only take about 15 minutes.
http://www.surveymonkey.com

If you have questions please feel free to contact me.

Charmion

Informed Consent Form for: General Educators' Perceptions of African American Males Prior to Pre-Referral Survey

As general educators of the Winston-Salem/Forsyth School System, you are being invited to participate in a doctoral research study conducted by Charmion Rush in the Department of Specialized Education Services of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG).

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research study is to survey your perceptions, values, and beliefs of African American males prior to the pre-referral process. The desired outcome is to gain an understanding of factors linked to the disproportionate representation of African American males in special education.

PARTICIPATION: (1) You will be asked to read a brief exceptional children (EC) referral of an African American male. Following the reading, you will be asked for your opinions of casual factors that may relate to the initial referral. Your participation for the ***survey responses should take about 15-20 minutes***. (2) To further facilitate the study, you will be asked to participate in an informal interview conducted by the researcher. If you so choose, you will be contacted by the researcher at a later date to schedule an appointment for a ***single audio-taped interview lasting approximately 30 minutes***. The interview will be conducted in a location of your choice and you may ask questions, withdraw or stop the interview at any time. In addition, after each interview is transcribed the teachers will be contacted and given the opportunity to review the content and make any changes necessary.

RISKS & BENEFITS: There are no foreseeable risks associated with your participation in this study. Results from the data will benefit the researcher's understanding by identifying specific student characteristics and other variables that may influence educators' decision-making to refer African American males as recipients for special education services. Your feedback will be used for the purpose of this research only.

COMPENSATION: If you participate you will have the opportunity to voice your opinion, as well as have a chance to win a one-time drawing for a$100 gift card (once the study is completed).

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: Please understand that participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason, without penalty.

CONFIDENTIALITY: (1) In order to preserve the confidentiality of your survey responses, random numbers have been assigned to this consent form and the questionnaire you will fill out. You will not be asked to provide your name or any information, other than your email address, which may be used to identify you. Your email address and electronic survey responses will be password protected and the responses are collected and maintained through SurveyMonkey.com (2) If you are willing to participate in an informal interview, you will be asked to provide contact information to schedule an appointment at later time. However, the anonymity of the interviewee will be kept confidential by the researcher and transcripts from the interview will be kept secured under lock and key.

Your individual privacy will be maintained in all publications or presentations resulting from this study. After five years, all obtained information (electronic and transcribed) will be shredded and erased. By signing this consent form, you agree that you understand the procedures and any risks and benefits involved in this research. You are free to ask questions, refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary. Your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which insures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and this consent form. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by Charmion B. Rush by calling (336) 334-5173 or by e-mail cbrush@uncg.edu. The Research and Evaluation Board of Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools also granted permission to conduct this study. Additional questions regarding this study can also be answer by WS/FCS at (336) 727-2964. Also, any new information that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project.

A copy of this consent form will be emailed upon request.

By answering **"yes"** below, you are agreeing to participate in the project described to you by Charmion B. Rush. You also indicate that you understand the above information, have had all of your questions about participation on this research project answered, and you voluntarily consent to participate in this research.

○ **Yes, I have read and understand the above consent form and I voluntarily consent to participate in this research.**

○ No, I do not wish to participate.

APPENDIX H

CONFERENCE/PARTICIPANT E-MAIL

Bcc: Survey Participants

Subject: Chance to win a $100 gift card by taking Education Survey

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA GREENSBORO

As a general educator of the Winston-Salem/Forsyth School System, you agreed to participate in a doctoral research study conducted by Charmion Rush in the Department of Specialized Education Services of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). In advance, thank you for your valuable input.

The purpose of this research study is to survey your perceptions, values, and beliefs of African American males prior to the pre-referral process. The desired outcome is to gain an understanding of factors linked to the overrepresentation of African American males.

Please be assured that all the information you supply will be kept strictly confidential. All the information will be destroyed when the research project has been completed. There will also want to assure you that no personal identifiers will be included in any report resulting from this study.

This survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes of your time, but will help tremendously to get this research done. Please understand by clicking the following link you are agreeing to the terms and conditions of the privacy policy, which can be found below the link.

Please click the link, or you may copy and paste it into your web browser.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/.....

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: General Educators' Perceptions of African-American Males Prior to Pre-Referral

Project Director: Charmion B. Rush

Participant's Name: _____

What is the study about?

This is research project. The purpose of this research project is to examine the extent to which classroom teachers' perceptions affect the referral and disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education programs. In particular, this research project intends to identify specific student characteristics and other variables that influence educators' decision-making regarding these students.

Why are you asking me?

Since most initial referrals occur at the elementary level (and less likely initiated by other school personnel such as resource instructors, primary reading teachers, and specialists) ***only classroom teachers are asked to participate in the study*.** Specifically, this research project requests kindergarten to fifth grade teachers currently employed with the school district as participants for the study.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

Teacher participation involves completing a survey (15-20 minutes) regarding teacher perceptions of African American males as pre-referral candidates. Once surveys are completed, participants will also be asked to volunteer in an interview regarding their experiences of the pre-referral process. If in agreement, the student researcher (Charmion Rush) will make contact with selected participants to schedule an appointment for a single audio-taped interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. The interviews will be conducted in a location, date, and time of the participants' choice.

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this study such as potential physical discomfort from the topics addressed in the interviews and surveys. However, results from the data will benefit the researcher's understanding by identifying specific student characteristics and other variables that may influence educators' decision-making to refer African American males as recipients for special education services. Your feedback will be used for the purpose of this research only.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which insures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and the consent form. Questions regarding rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself can be answered by the student researcher, Charmion Rush, at (336) 785-4433 or by e-mail cbrush@uncg.edu. The principal investigator, Dr. Marilyn Friend, can also provide answers regarding the research at (336) 256-0153 or by e-mail marilynfriend@marilynfriend.com. Lastly, the Research and Evaluation Board of Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools has granted permission to conduct this study. Additional questions regarding this study can be answer by Dr. Marty Ward at (336) 727-2964.

Are there any audio/video recording?

To provide a more in depth description of teachers' perceptions and experiences, a single audio-taped interview lasting approximately 30 minutes will be used for those willing to participate in an interview. Those who participate will be asked to provide contact information to schedule an appointment at later time in a location of their choice. Volunteers will be asked as part of the survey questions. Interview participants will be selected based on the researcher's needs.

There are minimal foreseeable risks anticipated using this measure. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below.

However, please remember that participants are "free to ask questions, refuse to participate or to withdraw their consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; participation is entirely voluntary."

What are the dangers to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. As mentioned, minimal risks associated with your participation in this study may involve potential physical discomfort from the topics addressed in the interviews and surveys. In addition, potential identification of audio recordings cannot be guaranteed. However, the researcher will try to limit access to taped interviews to maintain confidentiality.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which insures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and the consent form. Questions regarding rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Dr. Marilyn Friend who may be contacted at (336) 256-0153 or by e-mail

marilynfriend@marilynfriend.com. Questions regarding the research itself can be answered by the student researcher, Charmion Rush, at (336) 785-4433 or by e-mail cbrush@uncg.edu. Lastly, the Research and Evaluation Board of Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools has granted permission to conduct this study. Additional questions regarding this study can be answer by Dr. Marty Ward at (336) 727-2964.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

Individual participants will receive no direct benefit from the study. However they may benefit indirectly by contributing professional knowledge to the field and receiving information from others in return. All may benefit from the final data by identifying specific student characteristics and other variables that may influence educators' decision-making to refer African American males as recipients for special education services.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

From this research study societal benefits may include an increased understanding of current practices as they relate to understanding general educators' perceptions of African American students in the pre-referral process. Future impact from the results may influence teacher preparation programs, professional development workshops, trainings, policy, and practice decisions.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you for participating in this study. However, each participant will have an opportunity to win a $100 gift card that may be used to purchase classroom resources for meeting the needs of their students. During the survey, participants will be asked to submit their contact information to participate in the study and for a chance to win a $100 gift card. The gift card will be rewarded after the end of the study to one selected participant.

How will you keep my information confidential?

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Every effort to protect participants' privacy will be maintained by assigning random numbers to the consent form and the questionnaire. Email address and electronic survey responses are password protected and the responses are collected and maintained through a web-based survey company. (2) Those willing to participate in a formal interview will be asked to provide contact information to schedule an appointment at later time. However, the anonymity of the interviewee will be kept confidential by the researcher and transcripts from the interview will be kept secured under lock and key (i.e. student researcher's locked files). (3) Both survey and interview participants will be asked to submit their contact information to participate in a one-time drawing for a chance to win a $100 gift card. After the gift card is rewarded, the information will be discarded. (4) Individual privacy will be maintained in all publications or presentations

resulting from this study. After three years, all obtained information (electronic and transcribed) will be shredded and erased.

Since this is Internet Research, **absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.**

Please also note additional security measures by web-based company, Survey Monkey:

Survey Monkey is aware of our users' privacy concerns and strives to collect only as much data as is required to make our users' experience with SurveyMonkey as efficient and satisfying as possible. We also aim to collect data in the most unobtrusive manner possible.

SurveyMonkey utilizes some of the most advanced technology for Internet security commercially available today. When a user accesses secured areas of our site, Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) technology protects user information using both server authentication and data encryption, ensuring that user data is safe, secure, and available only to authorized persons.

SurveyMonkey requires users to create a unique user name and password that must be entered each time a user logs on. SurveyMonkey issues a session "cookie" only to record encrypted authentication information for the duration of a specific session. The session cookie does not include either the username or password of the user.

In addition, SurveyMonkey is hosted in a secure data center environment that uses a firewall, intrusion detection systems, and other advanced technology to prevent interference or access from outside intruders. The data center is a highly protected environment with several levels of physical access security and 24-hour surveillance.

However, no method of transmission over the Internet, or method of electronic storage, is perfectly secure. Therefore, we cannot guarantee absolute security. If SurveyMonkey learns of a security systems breach that affects certain users, then we will attempt to notify those users electronically so that they can take appropriate protective steps. SurveyMonkey may also post a notice on our website if a security breach occurs.

If you have any questions about security on the SurveyMonkey website, please email us at support@surveymonkey.com

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you have read it, or that it has been read to you and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing to consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Charmion Rush

APPENDIX I

CONFERENCE/PARTICIPANT E-MAIL SECOND NOTICE

2nd Notice

Date: May, 2011

Bcc: Survey Participants

Subject: Your chance to win your $100 gift card will end June 10, 2011.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA GREENSBORO

If you have already taken part in the education survey regarding your perceptions, values, and beliefs of African American male students, thank you for your participation and please disregard this email.

However, if you have not taken the brief survey, you are strongly encouraged to participate. Your valuable responses are needed by the researcher to better understand factors that are linked to the overrepresentation of African American males as pre-referral candidates for special education.

Please understand by clicking the following link you are agreeing to the terms and conditions of the privacy policy, which can be found below the link.

To begin, please click the link below (or you may copy and paste it into your web browser).

http://www.surveymonkey.com/

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: General Educators' Perceptions of African-American Males Prior to Pre-Referral

Project Director: Charmion B. Rush

Participant's Name: _____

What is the study about?

This is research project. The purpose of this research project is to examine the extent to which classroom teachers' perceptions affect the referral and disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education programs. In particular, this research project intends to identify specific student characteristics and other variables that influence educators' decision-making regarding these students.

Why are you asking me?

Since most initial referrals occur at the elementary level (and less likely initiated by other school personnel such as resource instructors, primary reading teachers, and specialists) ***only classroom teachers are asked to participate in the study*.** Specifically, this research project requests kindergarten to fifth grade teachers currently employed with the school district as participants for the study.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

Teacher participation involves completing a survey (15-20 minutes) regarding teacher perceptions of African American males as pre-referral candidates. Once surveys are completed, participants will also be asked to volunteer in an interview regarding their experiences of the pre-referral process. If in agreement, the student researcher (Charmion Rush) will make contact with selected participants to schedule an appointment for a single audio-taped interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. The interviews will be conducted in a location, date, and time of the participants' choice.

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this study such as potential physical discomfort from the topics addressed in the interviews and surveys. However, results from the data will benefit the researcher's understanding by identifying specific student characteristics and other variables that may influence educators' decision-making to refer African American males as recipients for special education services. Your feedback will be used for the purpose of this research only.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which insures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and the consent form. Questions regarding rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself can be answered by the student researcher, Charmion Rush, at (336) 785-4433 or by e-mail cbrush@uncg.edu. The principal investigator, Dr. Marilyn Friend, can also provide answers regarding the research at (336) 256-0153 or by e-mail marilynfriend@marilynfriend.com. Lastly, the Research and Evaluation Board of Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools has granted permission to conduct this study. Additional questions regarding this study can be answer by Dr. Marty Ward at (336) 727-2964.

Are there any audio/video recording?

To provide a more in depth description of teachers' perceptions and experiences, a single audio-taped interview lasting approximately 30 minutes will be used for those willing to participate in an interview. Those who participate will be asked to provide contact information to schedule an appointment at later time in a location of their choice. Volunteers will be asked as part of the survey questions. Interview participants will be selected based on the researcher's needs.

There are minimal foreseeable risks anticipated using this measure. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below.

However, please remember that participants are "free to ask questions, refuse to participate or to withdraw their consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; participation is entirely voluntary."

What are the dangers to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. As mentioned, minimal risks associated with your participation in this study may involve potential physical discomfort from the topics addressed in the interviews and surveys. In addition, potential identification of audio recordings cannot be guaranteed. However, the researcher will try to limit access to taped interviews to maintain confidentiality.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which insures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and the consent form. Questions regarding rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Dr. Marilyn Friend who may be contacted at (336) 256-0153 or by e-mail

marilynfriend@marilynfriend.com. Questions regarding the research itself can be answered by the student researcher, Charmion Rush, at (336) 785-4433 or by e-mail cbrush@uncg.edu. Lastly, the Research and Evaluation Board of Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools has granted permission to conduct this study. Additional questions regarding this study can be answer by Dr. Marty Ward at (336) 727-2964.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

Individual participants will receive no direct benefit from the study. However they may benefit indirectly by contributing professional knowledge to the field and receiving information from others in return. All may benefit from the final data by identifying specific student characteristics and other variables that may influence educators' decision-making to refer African American males as recipients for special education services.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

From this research study societal benefits may include an increased understanding of current practices as they relate to understanding general educators' perceptions of African American students in the pre-referral process. Future impact from the results may influence teacher preparation programs, professional development workshops, trainings, policy, and practice decisions.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you for participating in this study. However, each participant will have an opportunity to win a $100 gift card that may be used to purchase classroom resources for meeting the needs of their students. During the survey, participants will be asked to submit their contact information to participate in the study and for a chance to win a $100 gift card. The gift card will be rewarded after the end of the study to one selected participant.

How will you keep my information confidential?

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Every effort to protect participants' privacy will be maintained by assigning random numbers to the consent form and the questionnaire. Email address and electronic survey responses are password protected and the responses are collected and maintained through a web-based survey company. (2) Those willing to participate in a formal interview will be asked to provide contact information to schedule an appointment at later time. However, the anonymity of the interviewee will be kept confidential by the researcher and transcripts from the interview will be kept secured under lock and key (i.e. student researcher's locked files). (3) Both survey and interview participants will be asked to submit their contact information to participate in a one-time drawing for a chance to win a $100 gift card. After the gift card is rewarded, the information will be discarded. (4) Individual privacy will be maintained in all publications or presentations

resulting from this study. After three years, all obtained information (electronic and transcribed) will be shredded and erased.

Since this is Internet Research, **absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.**

Please also note additional security measures by web-based company, Survey Monkey:
Survey Monkey is aware of our users' privacy concerns and strives to collect only as much data as is required to make our users' experience with SurveyMonkey as efficient and satisfying as possible. We also aim to collect data in the most unobtrusive manner possible.

SurveyMonkey utilizes some of the most advanced technology for Internet security commercially available today. When a user accesses secured areas of our site, Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) technology protects user information using both server authentication and data encryption, ensuring that user data is safe, secure, and available only to authorized persons.

SurveyMonkey requires users to create a unique user name and password that must be entered each time a user logs on. SurveyMonkey issues a session "cookie" only to record encrypted authentication information for the duration of a specific session. The session cookie does not include either the username or password of the user.

In addition, SurveyMonkey is hosted in a secure data center environment that uses a firewall, intrusion detection systems, and other advanced technology to prevent interference or access from outside intruders. The data center is a highly protected environment with several levels of physical access security and 24-hour surveillance.

However, no method of transmission over the Internet, or method of electronic storage, is perfectly secure. Therefore, we cannot guarantee absolute security. If SurveyMonkey learns of a security systems breach that affects certain users, then we will attempt to notify those users electronically so that they can take appropriate protective steps. SurveyMonkey may also post a notice on our website if a security breach occurs.

If you have any questions about security on the SurveyMonkey website, please email us at
support@surveymonkey.com

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you have read it, or that it has been read to you and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing to consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Charmion Rush.