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DISPROPORTIONALITY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: SPECIAL EDUCATION

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT DISPROPORTIONALITY OF AFRICAN

AMERICAN STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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DISPROPORTIONALITY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: SPECIAL EDUCATION
TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT DISPROPORTIONALITY OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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DEDICATION

To my Family, Especially my mom, Children Elizabeth and Barak, Friends, Teachers

and Students and Memories of My Dad, Brother and Sister.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

African American students experience school failure in many different ways and a disproportional number are placed into special education. Disproportionality in special education is an issue that needs to be investigated as it poses a societal concern, because the school and post-school outcomes of students receiving special education are less desirable than peers not receiving special education services. Researchers and educational leaders suggest reasons for ethnic disproportionality in special education, including cultural and historical background of African American students, parental and family perceptions towards educators and special education, special education evaluation procedures used to screen students for special needs, early identification of African American youths and intervention they receive, and perceptions of school personnel towards African American youth.

To explore why perceptions of school personnel contribute to the disproportional numbers of special education placements, I undertook and used qualitative case study methodology to explore African American special education teachers' perceptions about cultural misunderstanding as a possible cause for overrepresentation of African American students in special education. I interviewed six African American special educators. The findings strongly suggest cultural misunderstanding exists and it contributes to the disproportionality of African American students in special education. Cultural misunderstanding occurs when educators of African American students fail to recognize underlying factors manifest in the cultural behaviors of African American students. Cultural behaviors are those deemed inappropriate in a learning environment. Cultural misunderstanding impacts more upon

African American male youths than females. Implications of these results are also
discussed.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Disproportionate representation of African American students in special education is a problem that has been in existence for more than three decades (Shealey & Lue, 2006). Indeed, this persistent reality is noticeably mind boggling to many researchers in Special Education. According to Whiting (2009), African American youths are overrepresented in this area, but reasons for this overrepresentation are not clear despite many attempts to explain this phenomenon. The question that keeps coming to my mind as well as many researchers is, "How does one reconcile being black in a society where racial injustices continue to exist and permeate institutions deemed transparent, academic, and for lack of a better word, noble?" Nevertheless, to view overrepresentation as a mere racial cultural trend, spawned by racial bias, would be myopic on my part and demonstrate lack of understanding basic research. This then would, in turn, undermine the educational research institution where I strive to belong and which is the impetus for my study.

Overrepresentation Defined

Overrepresentation occurs when the percentage of students with specific characteristics such as race, ethnicity, language background, socioeconomic status, and gender is proportionally higher than the general population in one particular setting (Blanchett, 2013; Patton, 1998).

Studies indicate the issue of overrepresentation of African American youth in special education has multiple dimensions. Whiting (2009) argues social, economic, and cultural baggage dating back to the slave era contribute to upheavals which schools have failed to use toward black youths' educational advantage. Smith (2002) observed

special education is used as an instrument of removal for African American males with perceived behavioral issues from regular instructional classes. Perceived behavioral issues are identified when the behavior of a given student alters from what is deemed societally acceptable behavior in a predominantly caucasian culture. Smith's work contends African American males enter the school environment with a set of unique, and legitimate, cognitive and linguistic behavioral constructs not embraced by some educators, but these constructs reflect the cultural background of the student. According to West-Olatunji and Baker (2006), the constructs manifest as behaviors which require understanding of the black males' social-cultural backgrounds. Educators who recognize these unique charateristics become successful teachers of African American youth, whereas educators who lack an overall understanding of such become contributosr to the problem of overrespresentation..

As society continues to evolve culturally, racially, and linguistically, many scholars argue teacher education institutions should continually provide multicultural education courses to create culturally competent educators (Ford, 2012; Grant & Dieker, 2011). African American male youths have barriers to surmount in order to achieve social or peer acceptance. While these barriers can theoretically be overcome through education, educators who perceive students as stereotypes commonly related to the African American culture become inhibited from seeing and acknowledging academic strengths of African American youths (Maholmes & Brwon, 2002). The lack of cultural education in turn allows for educators to subconsciously have lower expectations for black students (Ford, 2012).

Disproportionate representation phenomenon is a major societal concern first brought to national attention in the May 17, 1954 ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education,* which reads:

> We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does….We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. (Blanchett, Brantlinger, & Shealey, 2005, p. 71)

African American students experienced a new form of segregation soon after integration was enforced due to the ruling of *Brown* as the landmark ruling struck down the "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson*'s 60 year old legislation was declared unconstitutional (Blanchett, et al., 2005; Harris, Brown, Ford & Richardson, 2004). Blanchett et al. (2005) observed,

> Although many of the promises of *Brown* have not been fulfilled, and that much of the progress made in the decades succeeding it is eroding, the Supreme Court decision placed the American educational system on an expedition toward equitable schooling for all children and, surprisingly, provided the legal impetus for special education as we currently know it. (p. 7)

This desegregation landmark decision led to historical identification of the underserved population of special needs students caused by racial, cultural, and economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010). Before the enforcement of integration, poorly-funded black schools did not provide the same quality of education as the well-funded white schools (Artiles et al., 2010). The mandate to integrate schools following the *Brown* ruling allowed for instantaneous identification of special needs students who were largely from low socio-economic backgrounds. Students from these backgrounds experienced sustained academic failures over time. The reason for the failures could be the system behind academic predictors for referrals and eventual placement in special education that was deemed biased and construed to mean yet another segregation and marginalization of black students (Hosp & Reschly, 2004). Due to an upsurge and sudden change in the overall demographics of schools due to integration, the special education system began to be misused by labeling incoming African American students as special needs due to cultural differences, thus providing the white majority a sense of control and safety. Causes of disproportionate representation, according to other scholars, are linked, but not limited to a variety of reasons, such as failure to recognize and provide acceptable accommodations cultural differences among minority groups (Ford, 2012), along with the use of inappropriate assessment strategies for English language learners and students of an ethnic minority backgrounds (Harris et al., 2004). Additionally, the failure to reasonably accommodate and involve parents of students with limited English Proficiency as consultants for their own children's education has led to a disconnect between school and family and has created limited learning opportunities for the

student. Finally, the lack of responsiveness on the part of educators to the students'

cultural and socioeconomic differences and subjective procedures leading to special

education referrals are proposed (Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas, 2012).

Even before special education was formally codified in the education system,

students of color, as well as those from immigrant or economically disadvantaged

households, were overrepresented in classrooms for students perceived to be cognitively

impaired (Sullivan et al., 2009). Sullivan et al. (2009) suggest reasons for this

disproportionality issue which include:

- Differences in school readiness, ability, and academic achievement among student groups;

- Bias in referral, assessment, or placement practices;

- Interpersonal bias, lowered expectations, and misinterpretation/pathologization of behaviors of students who are CLD;

- Inequitable opportunities to learn because of academic tracking, limited and/or poorer quality curriculum and instruction, and teachers with fewer years of experience and limited qualifications;

- Lack of culturally responsive curricula, instruction, and intervention that adequately represent the experiences, contributions, and assets of diverse groups;

- Insufficient professional training to work effectively with diverse students;

- System characteristics that limit family and community involvement in education;

- Inequitable resource allocation and funding appropriations that favor special education identification; and

- Structural inequities, racism, and systemic bias that disadvantage students who are CLD.

Overrepresentation of African American students has been evident for four decades (Goff, 2010; Shealey & Lue, 2006). Labeling students as disabled, or rather having a disability, when they really do not leads to unwarranted services and support. Misidentified students are likely to face limited access to rigorous high level academic instruction, and suffer diminished expectations that may create false impressions of students' intelligence and academic potential (Harry & Klinger, 2005). Harry and Klinger identified a wide array of causes of disproportionality perpetuated by the race factor as a powerful predictor of placement into special services. Although causal explanations may not justify disproportionality, they provide light to possible solutions. Many scholars agree possible solutions revolve around teachers, school psychologists, school culture, student attitudes and behaviors, parental and family factors, ideological and political-economic environments, and possibly a combination of these factors (Harry & Klinger, 2005). Once a student is assessed and qualified for special education services, the label by which he or she is identified tends to stay throughout the student's educational career under the same services rendered through special education classes. Indeed, many studies on the issue of overrepresentation, as will be seen in the review of literature, agree that the problem actually exists in attributes, such as cultural background, evaluation procedures, school policy, parental involvement, and teacher efficacy.

According to the US Department of Education (2010), a higher percentage of African American students between the ages of 6 to 21years are served in special education compared to other racial/ethnic groups. Although African American students comprise 15% of the school age population, 21% are served in specific learning disability, 29% in emotionally disturbed and 31% in mental retardation. These numbers are staggeringly evident, mainly in the categories of emotionally disturbed (ED) and intellectually disabled (ID), or mental retardation and have remained steady for several decades. Despite the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1997, 2004), and its effects on federal, state, and local education agency regulations, African American students of this age are about 1.5 times more likely to receive special education services under IDEA than the students' peers who have other racial backgrounds. Also from the same overall statistics, more males than females are served in special education in all categories across the spectrum.

Other studies link this discrepancy in the percentage to reasons related to the structure of African American families. Many African American families are matriarchal (Tamis-LeMonda, Briggs, McClowry, & Snow, 2009), have low social economic status (Hosp & Reschly, 2004), typically marred by low education levels, poor family structure, poor language or communication skills, and inadequate child-rearing practices (Achenbach, Howell, Quay, & Conners, 1991; Bailey, Delaney-Black, Covington, & Sokol, 2006). Although the overrepresentation phenomenon is a major societal concern, essential questions still remain. Students who are misidentified are likely to discern education with a different view. I will discuss these areas in my attempt to address this issue of overrepresentation based upon causal comparative representation

and, finally, offer implications of some of the proposed solutions to this issue upon completion of this study. The overrepresentation issue is not a mythological frenzy, nor is it a scientific hypothesis gone wrong, but a reality of intricacies that have bedeviled African American students, some of which are linked to failures of school systems and poor methods of instruction. As indicated earlier, there are several factors to this causality. The literature review will reveal some of the empirical studies conducted on this topic over the years to give a sense of or to answer the question about over representation.

Statement of the Problem

Disproportionality of African American students in special education plagues schools nationwide, and many reasons contribute to this imbalance (Bryan et al., 2012). I hypothesize the concept of cultural misunderstanding by educators may contribute to the disproportional numbers of African American students in special education. To remedy this situation, more must be known about cultural misunderstanding and how it contributes to disproportionality of African American students being given special education labels and often special education placements.

Theoretical Framework: Cultural Misunderstanding

The concept of cultural misunderstanding represents foundational theory I used to build the framework of dissertation study. Cultural misunderstanding occurs when mistakes happen between one culture and another due to differences in communication and interaction (Howard, 2001). Cultural misunderstanding can lead to ethnic prejudice and hostility (Hagendoorn, 1993). Misunderstanding in communication is universal and inevitable. This study explored the causes of misunderstanding from cultural

perspective and how misunderstanding can lead to misidentification of African American students for special education. The study examined how cultural differences influence individuals' interpretations of basic elements of communication such as word choices, behaviors and speech. This study also illustrates the ongoing educational dynamic processes which nonetheless should bear in mind failing to recognize the hidden discrepancies in these elements and behaving based on one's cultural constructs is the root cause of misunderstanding. This study depicts cultural misunderstanding between African American culture and Eurocentric culture as the dominant culture.

A brief history of African American culture upon which cultural misunderstanding represented the foundational theory I used to build the framework, will help in better understanding the direction of this study. In it I briefly explain the African American culture emanation in light of this misunderstanding phenomenon.

Historical background. Communication among African American people follows a historic pattern. Critics ignore the historical and community contexts of black students' behavior and focus almost exclusively on the transactions between the students and their school (Ogbu, 2004). The Ogbu argument says although there is no historical evidence authors are aware of that the black people wanted to mimic white behavior, yet, due to oppositional collective identity, black people have a history of cultural frame of reference.

White denigration of black culture, began during slavery. Black cultural values, behaviors and speech were presented as incorrect and improper (Ogbu, 2004). Studies show during slavery, black people became bicultural and bi-dialectical. This historical pattern should not be overlooked. Blacks continued to suffer a variety of discrimination

even after emancipation. Blacks were denied free and fair access for goods and services by whites. On social domains, residential, sexual, social and school segregation continued. The black people were made collectively responsible for the offence of one person and as a result, black people were residentially segregated by statute, regulatory authority and custom. They found out by simply following the rules of the white majority, getting ahead still needed additional requirements such as accommodations, integration, and social response against the tyranny of intimidation and implied inferiority (Ogbu, 2004).

Although white people did not require blacks should behave and act like them before emancipation, after the emancipation, blacks were required to behave and act or talk the way white people actually talked in order to gain social acceptance, and to be treated as social equals with whites (Ogbu, 2004). Therefore, the black people were forced to act and talk among themselves in a certain way and behave, talk and act in another way in socially white controlled areas. They suffered expressive discrimination and intellectual denigration because of their culture, which distinctively differed from their Eurocentric counterparts.

African American students continue to be denied equal educational opportunities through their misplacements into special education. Such misplacements are a byproduct of culturally biased referrals, testing, and a placement process which perpetuate ideology that blacks are innately inferior and chip away at the self-concept of African American children. In essence, African American children are yet in a new 21st century manifestation of segregated schooling (Blanchett, Mamford & Beachum, 2005).

Brief example. Cultural misunderstanding can be experienced in a variety of areas. For example, a psychiatric team may diagnose minority group patients wrongly because behavior patterns are attributed to individual factors and not a minority group culture or job application from ethnic minorities may be rejected because of their expression of politeness are misunderstood by another cultural group of employers as showing a lack of interest (Hagendoorn, 1993). Therefore, social, religious or political mores of another culture may be perceived as a cultural imbalance to another. Cultural imbalances may be caused by factors such as valuations of time, labor, sexual, marital, rules of hygiene, and verbal or nonverbal codes in their expressions, which can become sources of misunderstanding between people of different cultures (Hagendoorn, 1993).

I chose to investigate cultural misunderstanding as a causal factor to disproportionality of African American students in special education, to build on other researchers' work about communication among African American youths (Sherwin & Schmidt, 2003), and African American parental satisfaction of services received from public schools (Zionts, Zionts, Harrison & Bellinger, 2003). These cultural constructs will be investigated through the voices of the teachers while maintaining the inherent properties of their culture as a basis to build this inquiry (Gephart, 1988).

Purpose of the Study

I undertook this dissertation study to investigate the perceptions of African American special education teachers to better understand if cultural misunderstanding could be a possible cause of the disproportional representation of African American students in special education. To do this, I conducted an in-depth qualitative case study of African American special education teachers' perceptions of cultural

11

misunderstanding. These results may be a first step to equip educators and policy makers with critical advice to assist school reform efforts, which will hopefully enable decrease numbers of African American students entering special education classes, and increased numbers of African American youth to finish high school and transition into further education and/or employment.

The results address issues associated with causing disproportionality of African American students in special education. Maholmes and Brown (2002) observed teachers assigning negative meanings to the students' adaptive behaviors produced hasty referrals for special services. This observation suggests how strongly student behaviors influence teachers' perceptions of various students. Maholmes and Brown (2002) indicated, "if a teacher focuses on what she perceives as a child's unfavorable characteristics, then the new information will be assimilated into a "deficit framework" (p. 47). The "deficit framework" guides teachers' instruction and classroom management. Applied to African American students, a deficit framework will continue sending African American students into special education (Whiting, 2009). Stevenson (1998) observed African American students require a context that is both supportive and challenging: one that understands the social barriers of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination, and yet holds them accountable for his/her own behavior when it violates social norms and harms other individuals. "This view, unfortunately, is not always taken and the consequences of inappropriate referrals and placements are detrimental to the personal and academic future of African American students" (p. 46).

I conceived this study because both my students and myself have been victimized by academic elitism and policies, such as requiring high performance on

high stakes standardized tests. To conduct this study, I tried to distance myself from policies, actions, and reactions to my thoughts and reactions to over simplified solutions to complex problems so I could maintain empirical integrity (Brown & Dowling, 2012). As a consumer of educational policies, and a doctoral student researcher, I attempted to undertake a theoretically grounded and practical research study. Through epistemological and ontological attitudes, this study makes claims following coherent rules of constructive dialogue on the subject matter presented to answer the following research questions.

Research Questions

I undertook this study to confirm the hypothesis that cultural misunderstanding contributes to the disproportional representation of African American students who receive special education services. Answers to the following three questions would enable me to confirm or reject this hypothesis.

1. What is cultural misunderstanding?
2. Is disproportionate representation of African American students in special education caused by cultural misunderstanding?
3. Does cultural misunderstanding impact more upon African American male students or female students? If so, Why? Or Why Not?

Significance of This Research

No study appears to have investigated African American special educators' perception of disproportional numbers of African American students receiving special education services. If so, my dissertation may present for the first time the voices of African American special educators explaining how cultural misunderstanding leads to

disproportional representation of African American students receiving special education services. I hope this study translates the perceptions of these educators into methods to improve the school and post-school outcomes of African American youth and young adults (i.e., Trainor & Lecko, 2014). As an African American special education teacher myself, I see policies and practices impeding the educational success of African American students, and perhaps uncovering the role cultural misunderstanding plays in over identification of African American students as being disabled may lead to policy changes and improvement of educational practices.

As the primary researcher conducting this study wanting to maintain a high level of empirical integrity, I distanced myself from modifying my research to align with any political effort (i.e., Brown & Dowling, 2012). As a consumer and researcher, I come with experience not as a producer of systematic anecdotes, but a theoretical and practical empirical transmitter of pedagogical ideas courted by educational research industry. Through epistemological and ontological attitude, this study ensues claims related to consistent and coherent rules of constructive dialogue of the subject matter presented.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This literature review will build a foundation of current understanding to enable me to answer my research questions. First, I will present the rationale for this study. Second, the historical and cultural background of African American people and how these phenomena impact upon African American school age children will be examined. Third, the perceptions of evaluation procedures will be discussed as a starting place for cultural misunderstanding. Fourth, the role early intervention may play due to cultural misunderstanding. Fifth, the effect of cultural misunderstanding will be seen through an examination of dropout and graduation outcomes of African American students. Sixth, and last, cultural misunderstanding often results in disciplinary actions, so this concept must also be examined as one of the major factors affecting cultural misunderstanding with African American students.

Rationale for the Study

This study investigated African American special education teachers' perceptions about cultural mismatch as a causality issue in the overrepresentation of African American students in special education in all categories: Elementary, middle, and high school. Six teachers were interviewed, two representing each category. I had three African American females and three African American male special education teachers in my inquiry. The purpose was to investigate the impact of cultural misunderstanding of African American students and if this element played a role in being misidentified in special education. Artiles et al. (2010) argue special education disproportionality placement practices happen to affect students who are from traditionally and historically underserved communities. This study was conducted with

African American teachers because as African Americans these educators are more apt to understand the African American culture, behavior, background, and overall challenges faced by African American students within the school system.

Effective teachers should take into account the students' cultural background (Chu, 2011). Disproportionate representation of African American students continues to be problematic (Trainor, 2003). To be a special education student of color is especially challenging. If teachers believe they have relatively little influence on the performance of their students, they quickly give up trying to manage a child's challenging behavior and instead refer such a student to special education (Chu, 2011). Understanding African American culture can provide teachers with tools they need to become more culturally responsive (Ford, 2012), and to become aware of the negative experience of the children of color (Green, 2008), and the existence of discriminatory restrictive disproportionality (Cartledge, 2005), as well as understanding special education is not one-size-fits-all for every individual student.

In the light of African American special education teachers' perspectives, this qualitative study can be used to help create awareness of the cultural differences that exist between African American students and those of the general population. I used the qualitative case study methodology to annihilate the misconceptions that come with the idea teachers do not make instructional decisions based on research (Trainor, 2003) and add to the idea teachers can be a rich source of quality empirical study as well as contribute to the qualitative scholarly work in special education.

Most students who are identified with academic disabilities remain in special education classes throughout their K-12 school years. Indeed, there has not been a prior

functional exit plan in place, nor has there been any defined standard achievement I am aware of to warrant that exit. In theory, when a student with special needs attains a certain level, he or she should be dismissed from the services and then be re-enrolled in general education classes. How many special education teachers are aware of this and how many actually practice this protocol? Although I have dismissed some students from special services in my teaching tenure, most parents are often not aware this can be done and the system makes the process more complex. For example, the student has to be reevaluated by the school psychologist. This one time data does not support the teacher's continuous progress and should not be considered representative of the child's academic achievement level.

Policy is not simplistic, and/or a paradigmatic shift of events governing an institution, but rather application of such should be mindful of potential inequitable outcomes. Therefore, appropriation of policy and analysis of disproportionate results should not be tantamount to stimulation of issues deeply rooted in power driven regiments in a racially divided society. Thorius, Maxcy, Macy, and Cox (2014) conducted a study about local Response to Intervention (RTI) and concluded a critical practice approach asserts policy is never simply implemented. Rather, it is interpreted, negotiated, and appropriated by multiple actors in educational environments.

These environmental factors position educators as key actors in the policy process, rather than implementers or recipients of existing policy rules; and shifts inquiry to the relationships between policy and local use. Local policy actors create a new version informed by personal histories, contextual circumstances, and institutional and historical forces. Acknowledged this way, each school operates in a local zone of

mediation, which signals and channels cultural patterns from the macro-level educational managements and political systems guided by architects who, after all, would not ascertain the purposes onto which those policies were designed (Thorius et al., 2014).

It is sad to say the application of school policies in some instances are only aimed at teacher implementation efforts. Poor teaching exists and so do bad governances and policy makers. What becomes problematic are the policy implementers whose intertwined beliefs play a role in their execution of these policies. That is where teachers and administrators become factors in the disproportionality problem in special education.

Educational studies presented in the qualitative extant literature hold the integrity, significance, and importance in the social sciences where problems are addressed and tackled (Trainer & Leko, 2014). It is my belief this study will be an exemplary contribution to the special education research institution. This study was developed through intense literature embedded in explicit factors that helped in laying the groundwork of this proposal.

Historical and Cultural Background of African Americans

Historical and Cultural background of African American people was significant as a starting point in building this literature review. The history of disproportionate representation of African American students took shape immediately after the land mark changes to the landscape of public education was of the 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* court decision (Johnson, 1994). The *Brown* case demonstrated racial segregation caused psychological harm to African American children and therefore it

was time for justice to be done. Aimed at providing African American children with the opportunities to have the same educational advantages as their white counterparts, this case stood the test of time (Blanchett et al., 2005). Before the enforcement of integration, poorly-funded black schools did not provide the quality of education that matched the well-funded white schools (Artiles et al., 2010). However, integration changes took another turn. It led to historical identification of underserved population of students with exceptionalities caused by the 'mayhem' of closing the black schools and integrating their students into an unfamiliar environment with limited familiar faces. The irony was while the move was a good idea, it created the students with special needs caused by racially, culturally, and economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Artiles et al., 2010).

The mandate to integrate schools paved the way for identification of special needs students along social and economic lines. Students of non-European descent and from low socio-economic backgrounds sustained school or academic failures over time due to this historical event (Artiles et al., 2010). A reasonable explanation for this endeavor could be the approach behind deciding when to refer and eventually place students in special education without possible biases that would link educators to activities of isolationism within integration (Hosp & Reschly, 2004).

Since its inception, integration became a discursive tool for exercising white privilege and racism (Blanchett, 2013). First, African American students have been disproportionately referred to and placed in the high-incidence special education categories of mental retardation, emotional or behavioral disorders, and learning disabilities (Zhang & Katsiyanis, 2002). The US Department of Education (2010)

19

reported similar findings with staggering numbers in those categories. Second, African American students who are placed in special needs services make significant gains and exit these services at lower levels than those of White students diagnosed with similar disabilities (Blanchett, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Third, although the field of special education has made significant gains towards more equitable and inclusive general education placements, African American students who are served in low-incidence categories of developmental disabilities are often served in segregated self-contained restrictive settings with little or no exposure to their non-disabled peers (Blanchett, 2013).

African American students have experienced this system failure under this racial divide largely from low socio-economic backgrounds. Students from these backgrounds experienced sustained school failures (Artiles et al., 2010). The reason for this could be the method behind academic predictors of referrals and eventual placement in special education that was deemed biased and construed to mean yet another segregation and marginalization of black students (Hosp & Reschly, 2004). Another problem with desegregation was African American students had no familiar faces with which to identify as many educators of color were forced to look for other professions since they were not easily absorbed in the integration process with African American students into the desegregated schools (Ladson-Billings, 2004).

Ladson-Billings (2004) contends *Brown's* initiative occurred naturally towards improved race relationships, but did little to benefit the educational fronts of the students of color. But, Appleby (1992) argued *Brown's* decision was inspired by America's theory of exceptionalism courted by a peculiar form of Euro-centrism, rather

than improved racial relationships. Indeed, regardless of the preexisting forces that fronted this move, the results gave birth to racial discussions that exist in schools today.

America's odd form of Euro-centrism did not affirm the principle of original and authentic diversity (Appleby, 1992). Some thought the enactment of *Brown's* decision could prove to the people of every race, nationality, and color that freedom stems from America's democracy. The *Brown* case was a devotion to contemporary justice and equality shaped by the powers of the Supreme Court (Ladson-Billings, 2004). *Brown* reversed the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* ruling of 1896, which allowed segregation as long as the facilities utilized by blacks were equal to those established by whites. *Brown* was also influenced by the 1950 *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)* Race Question (Statement on the nature of race and race differences, 1951). This declaration following World War II was signed by internationally renowned scholars and attempted to scientifically justify racism while morally condemning it. Educators used *Brown's* ruling to author education policies that paved the way for solutions that were mathematical and did little if anything to solve a socio-economic problem (Ladson-Billings, 2004).

Recently some scholars report school segregation is coming back to districts as a result of economics, rather than exclusively race, although race is still a factor in some circumstances (Parker, 2010). Parker (2010) argues segregation of schools remains entrenched, because society is either morally exhausted with racial integration or the economic values governing school systems have overshadowed everything else that plays a role in educational development. Other scholars argue America is profoundly organized by race, with whites as a dominant group utilizing various instruments of

hegemony to maintain power (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Powers, Hagans-Murillo, & Restori, 2004). One such instrument is education; education is a powerful tool that can create distinct classes and various cognitive abilities. These differences, according to some scholars, constitute institutional racism, because white cities are typically the ones who create and maintain these classes (Coutinho & Oswald 2000; Powers et al., 2004). Coutinho and Oswald (2000) and Powers et al. (2004) argue disproportionality is a result of socio-political history linked to legal proscriptions against African American literacy and longstanding separate-but-equal opportunities. The attitude behind this perspective perpetuates the "intellectual inferiority" of African people and other non-European descendants. This separation is evident through residential settlements (Parker, 2010). Parker (2010) noted as more affluent families moved to the city suburbs, they left behind poor, urban, less diverse, and/or racially-isolated schools (Ladson-Billings, 2004; Parker, 2010).

Frankensberg (2009) supports the theory of 'white flight' and argues structural residential segregation offers significant benefits to whites who choose to isolate themselves in high-income communities, and schools. This claim supports the theory of residential mobility that includes space, particular neighborhoods, and amenities, such as good schools and safe environments (Iceland, Goyette, Nelson, & Chan, 2010). Iceland et al. (2010) cite these constructs as factors that reshape patterns of segregation in modern American society. In addition to these complex parameters of segregation after desegregation, Sparber (2008) saw this as diversity and economic dependence and asserted racial affiliation matters less if the two neighbors are of the same economic status.

To support this theory of suburban movement as a historical fact, Iceland et al. (2010) view suburban growth as a form of evolutionary Darwinism. Although Darwinism referred to a theory that favored natural selection biologically, his counterpart British philosopher Herbert Spencer drew parallels with his theories while using the phrase "survival of the fittest", only Spencer's theories were economic. When applied to this phrase "survival of the fittest" not in a biological sense (which is not supported in this paper), Spencer makes good economic sense to put together Iceland and colleagues' (2010) and Sparber's (2008) racial, ethnic, social, and economic art of diversification of American schools. On one hand, Iceland et al. (2010) make a good point in the portrayal of affluent whites' endeavor to safeguard suburban school standards in light of economic factors, which determine their residential settlement. What is troubling however, is the fact that when other races, especially the minority African American who can afford to, move into their neighborhoods for a variety of reasons, whites move further away into more homogeneous neighborhoods, citing crime and inferior public schools (Iceland et al., 2010). This then becomes a racial matter under the umbrella of crime and inferiority of public school standards. However, on the other hand, Sparber (2008) makes a sound argument that instead of seeing this as a racial struggle, America should seize the opportunity to promote racial togetherness, rather than tolerance, emphasizing racial economic inter-dependence.

Iceland et al. (2010) use two terms (spatial and acculturation) in their arguments, which seem intriguing and supportive. The word spatial has to do with the space that everyone needs. Iceland and colleagues say structural discrimination comes with spatial assimilation, implying suburban neighborhoods are shaped by interests of those who

desire quiet, larger residential housing. Acculturation is a term that is used by Sparber (2008) along with Iceland et al. (2010), which in its application makes a sensible argument. Acculturation is a social process in which members of one cultural group adopt the beliefs of another group. Although it is in the direction of a minority group adopting the habits and language patterns of the dominant group, acculturation can be reciprocal, that is, the dominant group adopts patterns typical of the minority group. In agreement with this view, in spite of *Brown's* endeavor, and while there may never be total school integration, members of society can live as "survivors of the fittest" if all allow themselves to work together, encouraging one another devoid of racial or cultural demarcations. Sadly, this has not been the case in American society. American society can embrace acculturation in the suburban and urban residential neighborhoods as racially diversified enclaves. Therefore, one viable conclusion is social-economic statuses may easily shape the way of life in a community free of ethnic discrimination and biases.

Most blacks are not in the economic categories that shape suburban America, and school districts tend to follow boundary lines dictated by those economic characteristics (Frankensberg, 2009). Due to these economic conditions, black families are sometimes left out because they cannot afford those suburban conditions. Frankensberg's view supports the theory that even during periods of active desegregation, racial composition was a major factor in the decision-making process about one's residential settlement. The motive behind desegregation following the *Brown* decision was good, but society was not prepared to make those changes (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Frankensberg, (2009), Iceland et al. (2010), and Sparber (2008) portray

scenarios that determine the make-up of school districts. One then would argue the overrepresentation of African American students in special education would not be an issue if strict racial divisions were observed; a move that could be considered racist.

Desegregation endeavors created deep racism. For example, in southern states, White American's fear and resentment toward the *Brown* decision made the implementation of desegregation even more difficult. In fact, violence by white supremacists slowed this movement so much that it became a new cultural model in the South. Additionally, several African American teachers responsible for educating thousands of African American students suffered demotions and job losses (Ladson-Billings, 2004).

School boards throughout the South began implementing economic reprisals and using intimidation tactics against black educators, causing many of them to walk away from the profession, leaving many African American children vulnerable to biased education school policies manned by perceived racist white administrators. In Alabama for example, the legislature introduced a bill that would have allowed school boards to dismiss black educators for no reason whatsoever (Ladson-Billings, 2004). The economic reprisal movement paralleled sectional tensions mounted during the Civil War era. Southerners were alarmed by federal policies which gave economic advantages to the North (Fogel, 1989). The South vowed to continue savage treatment of blacks. The southern proponents of slavery also vented anger towards state governments for doing little to prevent abolition from becoming a reality (Fogel, 1989).

Fogel's work shows even with serious determination of the South to keep slavery much longer, foes of slavery toiled to transform a moral movement to end

slavery and turn the movement into a winning political battle without compromising their moral integrity. Why did the supporters of slavery in the South find it difficult to cobble a political coalition with the North to end the evil of slavery? Fogel (1989) gave different reasons in answer to this question. First, the North had economic advantage over the South industrially instead of slave labor. Second, the slaves lacked the moral code existed in Africa, forcing them to live like their European masters and conform to the rules and conduct allowed by their white masters (Fogel, 1989; Goff, 2010). The white masters lacked moral sanctity. This lack of moral sanctity left the white masters vulnerable to the attitudes and behaviors that resisted measures of intact cultural norms and customs of any kind promoted African heritage. The only cultural heritage that could make sense to slaves was that of African roots. But to their dismay the slaves were no longer allowed to practice anything known to them as cultural cement. These idiosyncrasies, Fogel (1989) argued, caused African slaves to abandon local customs and laws they came with, hence accepting various elements of Christianity and thus accepting "degrees of independence from their ubiquitous and powerful oppressors" (p. 168).

Forcing Christianity and codes of behavior on slaves made them believe that a common culture was not possible among them. In a new world where language, demographics, conditions of labor, household organization, and social structures were so different in various slave colonies, it was nearly impossible to organize slave resistance. This missing moral code, according to Fogel (1989), was an important element that helped the slave masters fortuitously reject any move to end slavery. From house servitude to the field plantations, slave masters lacked any understanding

whatsoever about life beyond the realms of slavery. The white slave masters toiled hard to create differential structures of slave connections between slaves and whites, and between slaves and others slaves, creating a phenomenological make up of psychological ideologies aimed at creating a culture without an African heritage foundation. As stated, the Southern states existed based on social hierarchies in which white slave owners were on top and slaves were on the bottom in which a large portion of this oppression focused on destroying the heritage of people of color.

Fanon argues in *Black Skin White Masks* (1952) that for a black man to rise beyond the stigma of his skin color, he has to dissociate himself from the fate reserved for him by his colonial masters. Colonial racism, according to Fanon (1952), offered a psychological advantage for white imperialists who wanted people of color to believe they were intellectually inferior. Fanon (1952) says that besides economic factors, white masters morally exploited black slaves in so many different ways that it is not possible to fully discuss them in this review. One simple example is the slave family structure. White masters essentially destroyed any structure that had existed, which caused slaves to rely even more on their owners than they would otherwise. Back in Africa, the white man was a welcomed stranger, treated like a waited master (Fanon, 1952). This hospitality attitude was hijacked by white people who used it to enslave their hosts and humiliated native cultural structures, treating them without value, honor, or originality. White people, however, abused the hospitality and instead enslaved African Americans. This resulted in the destruction of cultural structures and the fabric of family structure fell apart.

Slaves came from different regions with different languages, religious beliefs, and social lives. It required them to overcome these obstacles in order to form a union, but the conditions made such a union impossible. White masters knew that any organized slave family life was a threat to their farming industry and way of life (Fanon, 1952; Fogel, 1989). Family structure existed only as much as masters allowed it to under their terms. Even after emancipation, many descendants of slaves were hopeless, self-pitying, and with low moral character. Implementing the *Brown* decision had the effect of helping the black students discover themselves in an unwanted environment, especially in the South where they were brought up to believe in the intellectual domination of the white race (Fogel, 1989).

Some scholars dismiss this historical background of black youth as mere conjecture with no linkage to the present behaviors and issues facing African Americans and particularly male youths (Sagini, 1996). However, disregarding the historical backdrop ignores the facts and dismisses unique cultural characteristics that reject traditional Eurocentric conceptions of personality (Sagini, 1996). Sagini's work explicitly portrays an Afrocentric psychological orientation whose emphasis on family, a value of wisdom, mental creativity, and spirituality was thwarted by slavery. Thus, African American males have yet to fully accept Americanism, which in essence is still in conflict with Africanism (Sagini, 1996).

The purpose of this study has been to investigate the cultural mismatch among African American students with regards to overrepresentation in special education. Therefore, it was necessary to establish a brief history of the African American people

with regard to their culture to highlight the preexisting gap between their culture and the Eurocentrism on which the American educational system is founded.

Perceptions of School Personnel and School Policy

The personnel perception is two-fold: black students' perceptions of school personnel and the school personnel's perceptions of the black students. Major traditional education activities happen at school. I looked into the how literature of school personnel and policy contributed to my theory of cultural misunderstanding. Studies found that school personnel use special education as a removal instrument for black male youths with behavior issues (Smith, 2002), or hard to teach students (Thorius et al., 2014) from regular class settings into isolated non-intellectual settings which does not provide educational growth. In fact, teachers have been implicated as part of the problem, because they typically make the initial special education referrals. Issues happen, Smith (2002) argues, when there is a lack of sufficient resources to deliver adequate instruction and poor handling of behavior problems in the classroom. Other studies argue that behavior issues exist due to lack of support, training, and/or proper instrumentation screening tools for teachers (Skiba, Polini-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz, & Chung, 2005). Research shows that students with emotional and behavior disorders (EBD) demonstrate lower levels of social competence and higher levels of problem behaviors than students with learning disabilities (Caldarella, Young, Richardson, Young, & Young, 2008; Gable, Bullock & Evans, 2006). A study was conducted by Caldarella et al. (2008) about validation of Systemic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD) in middle and junior high schools in one of the school districts in Utah. The goal of this study was to examine evidence of reliability and

validity for the use of the SSBD in middle and junior high schools. Middle and junior high students were used because these students typically meet with several teachers each day. In this investigation, 123 students were nominated and then ranked by their teachers using three stages of the SSBD. Stage 1 consisted of nominating and ranking students who have internalizing and externalizing behavior problems, such as being shy, timid, and/or nonassertive, manifested in playing alone or spending time alone, acting in a fearful manner, displaying aggression toward objects or persons, and defying the teacher. Stage 2 scales consisted of a Critical Events Index (CEI) and Combined Frequency Index (CFI) for Adaptive and Maladaptive Behavior. Students under CEI exhibit painful shyness, are teased, neglected and/or avoided by peers. Students under CFI scale have a combination of adaptive behaviors, like following rules and initiating peer interaction, and maladaptive behaviors, like refusing to follow classroom rules and using coercive tactics to force submission of peer relations. Stage 3 contained independent classroom observations by trained observers of behavior that meet or exceed normative criteria on the SSBD Stage 2.

The results of this study provided primary empirical support for using SSBD as an emotional and behavioral screening tool for early adolescent students (Caldarella et al., 2008). Although SSBD appears to be an interesting screening tool for EBD, little is known about its use in special education services given its intensity. Similarly, there were relatively low numbers of minorities in this study, leaving little evidence to the benefits of SSBD for African American students. In his book *Critical Lessons in Schooling Community and Power*, Hopkins (1997) argues that lack of adequate training of teachers, cultural insensitivity, and biased thinking account for automatic referrals of

African American children into special education. Black males in particular reject the idea of exclusion and marginalization. Hopkin's argument contends that mainstream society misinteprets and misunderstands African American males, making their survival difficult in American public schools. Purpose and value of education for African American students is being questioned. Public institutions should show genuine compassion and concern through specific strategies and pedagogies that accommodate African American culture (Hopkins 1997). Hopkins cited an African American all male institution (Malcom X Centered Academy) in Detroit where unique schooling opportunities and power relations in the classroom and the community were realized. This institution created awareness of the African American male plight and a philosophy of "I am my Brother's Keeper." African American males struggle to express their cultural values in public schools thwarted by policies insensitive to African American culture.

This process evidently creates simulated associations within school culture of those who fully integrate into the social system and those who vehemently reject it. Hopkins (1997) contends that African American males consist of two groups. Those who obey and respect authority and conform to existing societal norms that govern the community and structure of schools, and those who are extremely resistant to school and mainstream authority. The latter group experiences a system of practices and ways of life different from the dominant culture. Sadly, subject to societal interpretations of deviant behavior, the resulting 'nomalcy' is the conflict demonstrated by black males (Hopkins, 1997). In school systems, therefore, exclusionary measures applied to these behaviors add more harm than good to the recipients (black males). School systems

31

manned by predominantly white teachers position young black males in conflict, alienation, and cultural misunderstanding (Hopkins, 1997; Smith, 2002; Wright, Weekes, McGlaughlin & Webb, 1998).

School personnel and school policy are perceived by African American young males as enemy combatants whose purpose is to make their lives even more miserable. Any perceived actions that will attempt to justify different reasons other than those that look for more reasons to chastise, reprimand, and admonish African American young males are dismissed as mere conjecture.

According to Mendler and Curwin (1999), rules and regulations exist in order to ensure safety, eliminate fear, and maintain respect between one another. It is the duty of professional educators to promote these rules among the youth and to empower their decision making development process and freedom. However, Payne (1996) argues that some children live in environments that are too controlled, too unsupervised, or too unpredictable. Too much control imposed by others leads to a push for independence (Payne, 1996), which is often expressed by breaking rules. This notion is echoed by Mendler & Curwin (1999) who add that children have difficulties following rules or directions because they have had too little supervision and too little structure.

The idea is that too little supervision and structure lead the young people to believe that they are not lovable. The not lovable children's fear and anxiety often make them misbehave. Martin, Martin, Gibson, and Wilkins (2007) concur with the view that this confusion and uncertainty emanating from unstructured environments are grounds for breaking any existing rules and a good source of rebellion among children. In the end, according to Mendler and Curwin (1999), the educators are left with children who

are not only willing to argue, but also to engage in a power struggle in an environment meant for learning.

One of the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2001) is appropriate and effective discipline policies and procedures in every school. The mandate states the purpose of discipline is not only to ensure the safety of the entire school, but also that learning should not be disrupted by breaking school rules and regulations.

In the absence of sound guidance, our students fail to master skills they need in order to live a better social life. In the end, these failures manifest in their behaviors and hurt the educators and continue hurting others (Mendler & Curwin, 1999). School rules are used as a mirror to exemplify discipline in schools, but some of the measures that schools use to curb growing discipline problems tend to reinforce them.

The administration of these rules conceals the behavior of some school principals and teachers who have furnished the general view of the researchers' conclusion that discipline in some schools relates to philosophies of these practitioners themselves and how the district code of conduct is applied (Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). One of the fundamental goals of school rules is to teach responsibility and obedience. The concepts of responsibility and obedience are embedded in teaching good behavior and respect for one another. When humans are presumed to be defiant to social norms of society, or a given institution for that matter, the responsible people are charged with researching the cause of the phenomenological aspect of the impending force behind this defiance (Worcester, Nesman, Raffaela, Mendez & Keller, 2008). In schools, for instance, this is assumed to be the case. It is nevertheless rarely true that the

schools can go this far. In light of this contention by Worcester et al. (2008), many cases remain unresolved. That is, cases of students' behavior are caused by phenomenological activities beyond the school's control. As Worcester et al. (2008) put it these behaviors are left at the mercy of the school disciplinary team that exploits the only legalistic tools at its disposal, which are the school rules.

Commonly used immediate disciplinary actions include verbal reprimands, discipline referrals (Abebe S., & Haile-Mariam, 2007), In-School Suspensions (ISS), Out-of-School Suspensions (OSS), time outs, and verbal warnings (Mendez et. al., 2002), which normally yield immediate results. Research shows that this short-term process of discipline focuses on the very behavior that is limited to classroom disruption, or generally aimed at ensuring the normal process of learning (Cloud & Kritsonis, 2005; Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Swinson & Knight, 2007). Many students end up suffering disciplinary actions that do little if anything to help them solve the real problem in their lives - thus avoiding the genesis of the behavior problems (Worcester et al., 2008).

According to Sprague, Walker, Stieber, Simonsen, and Nishioka (2001), school discipline referrals are used to process case-by-case analysis for disciplinary actions. This data collection process has helped to unfold some interesting findings, such as seen in Sprague and colleagues' (2001) account that there is a significant relation between school failure and the number of referrals a student gets in a year.

We also find supporting evidence for prevalence in the analysis of school discipline problems and referrals. Analysis of discipline referral patterns in elementary and middle schools indicates that 6–9% of children account for more

34

than 50% of office discipline referrals and virtually all serious behaviors (e.g.,

fighting, assault, weapons, property destruction)…Not surprisingly, early

discipline problems in school predict later adjustment problems quite accurately.

A student with 10 or more documented disciplinary referrals to the principal's

office, within a given school year, is seriously at risk for school failure,

delinquency, drug and alcohol use, and a host of other negative outcomes

(Sprague et al., 2001, p. 198).

Sprague et al. (2001) cite aggression, non-compliance, bullying, sexual harassment,

assault, and alcohol crimes as some of the major discipline referrals related to this

outcome in high school.

Zhang, Katsiyannis, and Herbst (2004) argue that the purpose of the disciplinary

referrals is "that students are sent from class for what would appear to be relatively

mild, and indeed common, forms of classroom misbehavior" (p. 104). However, not all

referrals end with suspension (Breunlin, Cimmarusti, Edwards-Bryant, & Hetherington,

2002). Referrals are good for data collection through which researchers are able to

reveal that the minor infractions they are intended to punish end up being recycled

around (Breunlin et al., 2002).

Besides general disciplinary measures, minority students suffer repeated

suspensions, which eventually pave the way for dropout. Suspension is defined as "the

removal of a student from the school environment for a period, which does not exceed

10 days" (Mendez et al., 2002, p. 259). But, sometimes minority students are suspended

for prolonged periods of time for minor infractions without services, putting them

further behind in academics. There are two types of suspensions that are widely

practiced by many schools, out-of-school suspension (OSS), and the more lenient in-school suspension (ISS).

The genesis of suspension is zero tolerance (Kajs, 2006; Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004). The risk for suspension may be greater in urban schools in part due to a higher concentration of poverty and resource-poor schools in inner cities (Achiles, McLaughlin, & Croninger, 2007; Wu et al., 1982). Suspensions are used to punish the negative behavior, the idea being that in the broader context the student who suffers a suspension will rethink his or her position and avoid committing the same offense in the future (Achiles et al., 2007).

African American students suffer from high rates of suspensions and expulsions. This, according to research, is partly due to lower rates of parental involvement in school and family related problems (Achiles et al., 2007). Students who have low parental involvement in their school activities also have low teacher expectations. This in part is due to a lack of discipline structure that extends from missing parental intervention. Research supports the notion that teacher perceptions of students of color with disciplinary behaviors is low on student competence, supported by rigid school policies, and racially and academically biased school personnel (Achiles et al., 2007). This behavior on the part of the educators ignores the capacity to a broader context, as suggested by Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, and Martin (2000), of the students to learn to make decisions guided in the relationship developed between them and teachers without the teachers being the final authority. In the absence of good relationships, suspensions do not actually eliminate major issues like violence, but subject the victims to feelings of unfair treatment and resentment of school authority (Breunlin et al., 2002)

Suspension punishment is meant to do just that - to underscore the fact that if the person repeats the offence, the authority has no option but to carry out this exclusionary measure, which is necessary to cut down the major issues. Suspensions and expulsions are counter-productive disciplinary measures that are predetermined and "prearranged results for specific offences" (Kajs, 2006, p. 21). Research indicates these actions prevent teachers and school administrators from using creative and fair alternative common sense approaches that focus more on rehabilitation rather than punishment (Kajs, 2006; Morrison, Anthony, Storino, & Dillon, 2001; Zhang et al., 2004). In-school suspension (ISS) is a better example of rehabilitative measure that gives the victims the opportunity to stay in touch with peers who are more interested in academic activities that might promote behavior (Morrison et al., 2001).

Artiles et al. (2010) also noted that African American students are an "underserved group" and one of the culturally, socially, and economically disadvantaged minorities. In addition, regarding the concept of alienation, Wilson (1992) showed that much of what is perceived as a learning 'disability' in black students is reflective of the conflict between African oral tradition and Eurocentric literary conventions and standards. Artiles et al. (2010) found that with the existing economic, social, and cultural policies, African American students are increasingly misrepresented in virtually all education institutions, and subjected to disciplinary or intervention measures meant to correct their "irregularities". According to Watkins and Kurtz (2001), teachers rate African American students as difficult to teach, are likely to bear different perceptions of African American males than Caucasian males, and have lower expectations of males than of females of color (Cockley, McClain, Jones, &

Johnson, 2011). When students are labeled 'difficult to teach' conceptually, teachers feel excused from failure and ineffectiveness when conducting exclusionary measures against these difficult students. Research indicates that school psychologists and social workers often refer students for psychological testing, which frequently results in placement in special education classes (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Watkins & Kurtz, 2001).

Intensive intervention programs provided by the school without placement into special education yielded positive outcomes, and prevented placement stigma for students with special needs (Hopkins, 1997). Artiles and Terent (1994) described a model of intervention without identification and placement where cultural differences play a positive role in providing avenues for success. The study recommended a solution-focused intervention rather than placement into special education programs. Patton (1998) observed,

> The fact that disproportionately large numbers of African Americans are being persistently diagnosed as disabled and placed in special education programs constitutes a problem-for many of these students are inappropriately placed. The consequences, however, of such misidentification, classification, and placement are often deleterious. As an example, this problem is exacerbated by the fact that many African American youth today fail to receive a quality and life-enhancing education in precisely those special education programs in which they are often inappropriately placed. (p. 25)

Once placed in special education, most African American students show progress and get dismissed from the special education classes in significantly lower rates that Caucasian students (Patton, 1998). In addition, they suffer the stigma due to

the label that comes with these placements, producing negative effects, such as missing the essential socio-educational programs in the general education (Patton, 1998). Indeed, research shows a systemic school system failure resulting from cultural incompatibility of the schooling environment, such as structure, content, curriculum, teaching practices, materials, and organizational skills, which consequently ignore African American social norms (West-Olatunji & Baker, 2006).

According to Martin and colleagues (2007), African American male youths have poor self-evaluation due to the failure by the insttitutional systems to accentuate their character and inadequate family support regarding their education. In addition, they face systemic factors that disregard their cultural backgrounds (Fierros & Conroy, 2001; National Research Council (NRC), 2002). Therefore, the disproportionate placement of African American youths in special education programs has a lasting impact that reverberates throughout the lifespan, which manifests in lower college attendance, higher incarceration rates, limited employment opportunities, lower socio-economic well-being, and lower life expectancies (Garibaldi, 1992). Several authors have pointed to the mismatch between the school culture and the home culture of African Americans, particularly those living in impoverished conditions (Alexander, 2010; Zionts et al., 2003).

Zionts, Zionts, Harrison, and Bellinger (2003) conducted a study of urban African American families' perceptions of cultural sensitivity within the special education system and found that lack of understanding is evident mainly among white educators. In this qualitative study, several African American families were interviewed in an effort to investigate their perceptions about cultural sensitivity within special

39

education and the role culture played in teaching a child with exceptionalities. All adults

involved had children in special education. These findings support the claims that

teachers need to identify the boundaries between culture and disability. When teachers

become aware of the student's background, the relationship will improve to the extent

suggested by some researchers, "…teachers could distinguish between behaviors or

learning problems that resulted from the child's disability and culture-based

behaviors…" (Zionts et al., 2003, p. 46). With this understanding, the magnitude of the

crisis becomes clear. The overrepresentation of African Americans is not merely an

educational dilemma. Some scholars assert that it is a civil rights violation and major

culprit in the "school to prison pipeline." Lack of cultural sensitivity is one of the main

sources of preemptive measures resulting in numerous referrals of African American

males into special programs (Zionts et al., 2003).

Zionts et al. (2003) argued that due to the teachers' limited, positive dimmed

interactions with African American male youths, the problem behavior is caused by

cultural conflicts. Zionts et al. (2003) say, "A lot of the time the teacher is unaware of

the culture and thinks it is a matter of discipline when in reality the child is practicing

his culture" (p. 46). For this very reason, many parents are concerned that school

administrators and teachers demonstrate their biased stereotypical measures in order to

alienate and label African American males as "emotionally disturbed" (Oswald,

Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999; Zionts et al., 2003). Oswold et al. (1999) say that

special education overrepresentation is linked to "(a) poverty, (b) discrimination or

cultural bias in referral and assessment, (c) unique factors related directly to ethnicity

and (d) school based factors" (p. 197). The circle of disciplinary behaviors and

disciplinary removal (Kennedy & Jolivette, 2008) lead to more frustration, in addition to poor classroom management and more removal of black male youths from regular education programs into segregated settings.

Characterized by dynamic principles of modern art, music, and literature in relation to other social practices, postmodernism can also be a folly and a new sociopolitical reality (Crotty, 1998). Artiles et al. (2010) say that a lack of cultural specificity or acceptable norms in one group or lack of confluence between policies of the larger society and those of smaller ethnic groups can create social, cultural, and educational inequalities. These interpretations accentuate African American male interactions with the mainstream society in mannerisms or behavior unique to African American culture. White teachers then see a medley of activities deemed to reflect their unique popular culture in African American school-age males. By itself this is increasingly misconstrued to mean anything from a misdirected reaction to the inability to attain masculine specificities to match white masculinities (Wright et al., 1998).

Wright et al. (1998) concluded that this behavior is seen as representing a defiant culture with negative stereotypes and a paradox of liveliness, activities, and behaviors abusive to a learning environment (Artiles et al., 2010; Hosp & Reschly, 2004). Therefore, the result is the critical intervention sought by those left to decide the learning processes of these innocent 'culprits' in order to streamline these challenging factors, hence special education. Alexander (2010) said in her work that special education has been a holding place for black youth the same way prisons are holding places for black men. With resentment from the black males towards a system replete with academic failure and poor social development led by predominantly white female

41

teachers the circle continues through second and third generations of families with the history of special education placements (Grant & Dieker, 2011; Zionts et al., 2003).

A recent study conducted by Owens, Simmons, Bryant, and Henfield (2011) in which youths were interviewed to investigate urban African American male perceptions of school counseling revealed that African American male youths feel misguided by school systems that do not understand their real problems. The participants aged 14 to 17 years said that the counseling services provided by schools lacked a comprehensive view of their background issues that could not be resolved by simply providing assistance on school related issues, such as staying out of trouble and making good grades. Although the youths appreciated the school counselors for their efforts, they said that they needed to do more about the burdens they carried from their homes to a school environment.

Studies show that young people of color have yet to see a system that accepts their values, a system that does not confuse disability and free execution of one's rightful values. For example, Annamma (2014) observed,

Pipeline statistics establish that disproportionate representation exists; however, they tell little about processes that contribute to the phenomenon … Even less is known about incarcerated students' education experiences once they are firmly established in the Pipeline…This empirical qualitative study describes the juvenile incarceration education of girls of color with disabilities through exploring (a) What processes and practices impact juvenile incarceration education for students with historically marginalized identities (e.g., disability,

gender, race, and culture)? (b) How is the education of young women of color with disabilities impacted by these processes and practices? (p. 214)

The concept of the pipeline is an interesting phenomenon. The Annamma (2014) study found that schools ignore race and all the factors associated with it. The teachers failed to address racial and gender inequalities or cultural practices, which made the students of the minority group feel they had to relinquish practices of their own communities in order to learn the ways of the dominant culture. Educators who focus on addressing the emotional needs of their students through pedagogy instead of punishing them will afford the child of color a relationship that will cause a transformative learning of behaviors conducive to societal mandates instead of those norms that warrant a pipeline to prison.

Schools need to assess how policies and pedagogy may lack support for positive academic outcomes for African American male students. A good example is recognizing their image, rapport, and 'demeanor' with respect to African American cultural values that discern discrimination and other institutional practices (Stewart, 2008). This, in turn, will desensitize educators who by virtue of interacting and helping African American students, are imposing and adapting Eurocentric societal norms and values, which may lead to negative stereotypes (Owens et al., 2011). African American males tend to internalize these stereotypes coupled with factors such as exposure to poor living conditions, community issues (e.g., crime), lack of motivational factors such as employment, or successful role models of school success (Owens et al., 2011). Therefore, given these circumstances, a view of significant healthy academic self-efficacy to an African American male student is virtually impossible. Several scholars

43

of school personnel perceptions concluded that poor academic systems coupled with negative peer pressure tend to diminish African American propensity to succeed (Garibaldi, 1992). Academic success should be rewarded verbally and materially the same way society extols and/or acknowledges athletic performance. When we publicly recognize the successful academic experiences of African American men, we simultaneously raise self-concept, self-esteem, and academic confidence (Garibaldi, 1992).

No matter how systems operate, imbalances caused by the conventional practices of the school personnel policies and procedures, and cultural or racial and linguistic overtones shaped by lack of awareness have made school reforms rare and hard to initiate and implement at many levels. Thorius et al. (2014) had this to say about Response To Intervention (RTI) in what their study termed Zone Of Mediation (ZOM):

Applying structural theory to analysis of disproportionality patterns, special education research considers ZOM as a theoretical tool to analyze how local policy appropriation may actually produce *inequitable* outcomes out of equity-minded policy (e.g., RTI), because such policies stimulate intensely rooted issues of power, privilege, status, and difference on the basis of race, language, and class…Intersecting forces create a ZOM shaping reform in local schools: (a) *Inertial* forces refer to cultural practices of schooling in local contexts, including understandings and routine practices developed over time; (b) *Technical* forces reflect operational functions and organization of schooling, including resource (e.g., time, personnel) allocation; (c) *Normative* forces reflect engrained beliefs about people, including "such matters as conventional conceptions of

44

intelligence and deep-seated racist and classist attitudes and prejudices" (p. 93);

and (d) *Political* forces stem from actors' concerns as affected by power

imbalances across educational systems. Our analysis highlights inertial,

technical, normative, and political factors shaping the ZOM in and through

which RTI was carried out in an urban elementary school. (p. 288)

It remains to be studied if educators will be questioned as theories unfold in educational

and even social science studies.

Parental and Family Perceptions

The goal for this inquiry was to investigate the cultural mismatch of African

American students in special education. This section of the review explored the parental

and family perceptions. The goal was to establish how these perceptions contributed to

my theoretical framework of cultural misunderstanding. Parents are normally not

supportive of any label that implies their children are different from the dominant

culture (Mitylene & Marie, 2003). African American parents and grandparents who

were educated in segregated schools did not have good experiences with public schools

so they may not be willing participants in a system they are suspicious of, and school

processes that do not support their ideals. Moreover, young black men come from

communities where great athletes, placed in special education have graduated from high

schools with minimal reading skills and yet they are told to support the very system

with the notion that it will provide a successful future (Mitylene & Marie, 2003).

A recent study conducted by McDonnall, Cavenaugh and Giesen (2012) on the

relation between parental involvement and mathematics achievement for students with

disabilities leaves a lot to be desired. The study investigated parental involvement at

45

home and at school. The study involved more than 300 participants in 1ˢᵗ to 9ᵗʰ grade. All students had disabilities where they controlled for cognitive impairments. Achievements were collected over a period of four years. The focus was performance in mathematics and showed that students who had parental involvement at home and school had significant improvement in mathematics progress. Studies show parental involvement decreased with increase of grade level, however, the more parental involvement the greater the achievement. McDonnall et al. (2012) concluded that parental involvement at school or home play a key factor in a child's academic achievement, a view that was supported by Stewart (2008). McDonnall et al. (2012) asserted that teachers' concerted efforts play a huge role in encouraging parental involvement, not only for children with disabilities but for typical children as well.

Often parents of children with disabilities lack adequate understanding as to the amount of support they can offer their children or to what extent. Teachers' coordinated efforts with parental involvement are paramount. Parental involvement (McDonnall et al., 2012) seems more apparent with regular education students than for children with disabilities in spite of the mandate by Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Although more empirical research is needed to support the claims about effects of parental involvement on achievement of children with disabilities, this example is one of many that cannot be disputed.

A child with developmental disabilities can be a challenge to families with limited resources and knowledge on how to assist the child to grow to become successful through school and transition into the community. These challenges are even more profound in cases of children with severe disabilities. "Despite a lack of specific

mandates for family-centered planning beyond the early childhood years, the home environment and family involvement in the education of children with disabilities have a significant effect on students' development" (Edwards & Da Fonte, 2012, p. 6). Indeed, in impoverished African American families, parental support is minimal and has brought criticisms even from some African American leaders themselves (Harry & Hart, 2005). Harry and Hart (2005) indicated that family structure, life styles, language, and child rearing practices of African American families are a cause for their children's learning difficulties and low academic achievement (Brandon & Brown, 2009). Although these claims may not sound to be critical cultural paradigm of African American culture, understanding this aspect of African American parental and family background will help readers and or educators of this review better connect to issues African American students face before they are processed for special education services.

Another aspect of parental involvement is discipline in the earlier stages of a child's life. Little difference exists between parental beliefs about discipline across racial lines, but more so in the way these beliefs are represented across socioeconomic lines (Horn, Cheng, & Joseph, 2004). This is due to limited empirical studies available about other races apart from the European middle to upper class families (Horn et al., 2004). Horn et al.'s work emphasizes the significance of discipline in a structured family in spite of the economic status. Horn et al.'s (2004) study included 91% mothers and 7% fathers with less than 2% grandmothers. This study was conducted among African American parents in which a cross-section survey was conducted among self-identified parents with children less than two years old. The survey was centered along

disciplinary measures, including spanking and time out, and the severity of the disciplinary measures.

Although this study was conducted mainly among African American parents, confounding results were the same about discipline beliefs across racial constructs. However, other studies indicate that African American families use harsher disciplinary practices than European American families (Horn et al., 2004). More studies are needed to see if harsher earlier disciplinary measures correlate with behaviors seen among school age African American children. Studies show however, that when it comes to discipline at the school level, there are no differences between African American and Caucasian students in the effect of family involvement (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). Moreover, depending on the severity of the problem and presence of behavioral issues, restrictiveness of placement was negatively related to family involvement (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Hosp & Reschly, 2002). For example, parents with more behaviorally challenged children were less likely to be involved in such meetings as to determine the nature of placement in special education.

Family poverty is not sufficiently linked to minority disparities in special education, yet a large proportion of children from poor families are consistently overrepresented in special education. Indeed, the consistent overlap of race and poverty in American community has led some scholars to suggest that race is simply a 'proxy' for poverty (Skiba et al., 2005). Skiba et al. (2005) argued upon four assumptions linking poverty and disproportionality. First; Minority students are disproportionately poor and hence are more likely to be exposed to a variety of socio-demographic stressors associated with poverty. Second; Factors associated with living in poverty

leave children less developmentally ready for schooling and ultimately yield negative

academic and behavioral outcomes. Third; Students who are low achievers or at risk for

negative behavioral outcomes are more likely to be referred to, and ultimately found

eligible for special education services. And fourth; Poverty is an important contributing

factor that increases the risk, presumably in a linear fashion, of special education

placement for students.

Skiba et al.'s (2005) study was guided by two major questions: a) To what

extent do poverty (as measured by free-lunch status), district resources, and academic–

behavioral measures account for ethnic disproportionality in special education? b) What

are the relative contributions of race, poverty, school resources, and academic

behavioral outcomes to the probability of diagnosis in special education? In particular,

how do race and poverty influence that prediction? The study looked at mild mental

retardation (MMR), emotional disturbance (ED), learning disability (LD), and speech

and language (SL) as the dependent variables. Poverty level, district resources, and

academic and behavioral outcomes as independent variables were applied for this study.

To answer the first question they looked at poverty as a predictor of free lunch

enrollment compared with enrollment in special education. Results indicated the more

socioeconomically disadvantaged a child is, the more likely he or she is to be enrolled

in free lunch and special education. For the second question, the researchers looked at

poverty as a predictor of the nature of school resources, learning environment, and

academic behavioral outcomes. Findings show that both academic and behavioral

deficits played a key role in referral to special education and could well contribute to

disproportionality. To emphasize, more than 290 students were studied between the

ages of 6-21 from data drawn from uniform ethnic and racial questionnaires and the Uniform Federal Placement Questionnaire.

Findings indicated that poverty proved to be a weak predictor of disproportionality. Poverty level does not significantly predict overall enrollment into special education categories of emotional disturbance (ED), or mild mental retardation (MMR). As for speech and language (SL) and learning disability (LD), the inverse relationship between free lunch status and disproportionality was apparent. On one hand as the proportion of free lunch enrollment increases, disproportionality in the disability categories decreases. On the other hand, suspension and expulsion rates were consistently associated with rates of ethnic disproportionality in special education across disability categories. This study also found that districts with higher student-teacher ratio tended to have higher rates of African American disproportionality in mild mental retardation.

Skiba et al.'s (2005) argument about the four constructs mentioned above does not resonate, however, in a broader sense or link to a body of literature that has succeeded to establish a reliable relation between rates of poverty and disproportionate placement of special education. The culture of the poor is not deficient, but instead different and unique. Skiba et al. (2005) found the rate of poverty "school suspension and expulsion proved to be most robust predicator of special education disproportionality" (Skiba et al. 2005, p.141). Skiba et al.'s work led researchers to believe that more than poverty causes disproportionality.

Other literature studies related to African American parental involvement showed that parents of African American female students were more likely to be

involved with their children's activities at home than those with male students, leaving male youths vulnerable to street smart activities detrimental to school success (Graves, 2010). The Graves (2010) study investigated the efficacy of parental involvement in their children's education from kindergarten through 5th grade though a theoretical framework of questions about parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, and decision-making. The purpose was to determine the differences in parent involvement in elementary school when comparing African American males and females. The study found that parents of African American male students have lower academic level of expectations than parents of their counterpart female students. These academic discrepancies are notable even as early as in kindergarten and 1st grade levels (Graves, 2010). It is interesting that parental expectations for their male children decrease as they progress through elementary school while female expectations remained consistent throughout the school career (Graves, 2010). This concept may contribute to the facts that explain African American male overrepresentation in special education. Graves (2010) concludes,

> The understanding of factors that contribute to the positive academic
> development of young African American males deserves further attention than
> thus far received. By documenting the extent of the problem and by examining
> the factors associated with the lives of young African American men who avoid
> problems and lead successful lives, policymakers will be better equipped to
> develop and implement solutions. The results from this study suggest that we are
> indeed failing African American males in the area of parent expectations.
> Specifically, as African American males progress through early elementary

school, less is expected of them academically in comparison to their female

peers. (p. 274)

Reynolds (2010) contends that black males find their experiences largely shaped

by issues of race and gender. Some of these experiences are passed on to them by their

parents' experiences actively played out on school campuses. Other factors that shape

the special education system are those related to induction of the professionals into the

system and growing biases toward African American parents (Boyd & Correa, 2005).

The induction process, as Boyd and Correa (2005) put it, is commonly covert and

unconscious to the needs of low-income African American parents. African American

parents' perceptions towards professionals within the special education system are

influenced by acculturation and sociocultural experiences. Acculturation, as was said

earlier in this review, is an interesting phenomenon that immensely impacts low income

minority parents in their relationships and interaction with middle class professionals

(Boyd & Correa, 2005). Low-income parents are likely to hold different cultural values

than the middle class professionals with whom they interact. They represent the very

values that have shaped the cultural perspectives of African American students. Low-

income parents are unlikely to call teachers to talk about their child's progress and more

likely to resent or may feel uncomfortable talking about the negative behaviors of their

children. On the other hand, middle class African American parents will do quite the

opposite. Levels of acculturation embedded in one's education and socioeconomic

status strongly influence the development of parental biases towards the middle class

professionals with whom they interact (Boyd & Correa, 2005), causing perpetual

cultural clash. These biases are also influenced by other factors such as negative

interaction with and first-hand experience of special education services (Boyd &

Correa, 2005) that are also replicated by special education students. Sociocultural

experiences include extrinsically motivated factors, such as extended families, absence

of one parent in the family, and labeling, that have shaped African American culture

since slavery.

Perceptions about Evaluation Procedures

Perceptions about evaluation procedures were also examined how they may

have contributed to my theoretical framework of this study. The purpose was to see how

these perceptions played a role in cultural factors of misunderstanding that caused the

disproportionality phenomenon. I began this section by identifying the unintentional

effects of *Brown v. Board of Education* which was to identify students of color with

exceptionalities. This outcome was significant because the goal was to end segregated

schools and to provide equal services and advocacy to all students of color. Today, the

equitable education programs are becoming farfetched (Katisyannis, Yell, & Bradley,

2001). Despite the perceived equitable services, the extent to which this has been

perpetuated has forced some parents to seek more expensive means to meet their

children's needs. For African American families, this move is out of question, leaving

them the sagging public education system to provide these supplementary services to

cater to their children with special needs. Subject to the process through which students

are identified, the assessment process is so generic that it does not support impoverished

African American students. Harris, Brown, Ford, and Richardson (2004) say,

> Arguments against using standardized tests have proliferated in recent years on
>
> the grounds that minority students are consistently assessed by tests that do not

indicate the value of the reliability coefficient for their particular group. The tests only indicate how reliable the results are according to sample groups on which reliability was first established. In essence, high reliability coefficients are only high for the reference group and those groups that approximate it. To illustrate, if a test is normed on a sample of predominantly White and middle or upper SES students, it will be less reliable for African American or low SES students. Specifically, because the life experiences and educational opportunities between African American and European American students vary considerably, the reliability of the test may be questionable for African American students, including middle and high SES African American students. (p. 216)

Indeed, special education is clearly an essential component of public schools for delivering opportunities to achieve meaningful academic outcomes (Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010). African American families see deficiencies in these outcomes. Before a student is classified, he or she has to be suspected of or identified as having special needs or a disability (Obiakor et al., 2010). However, African American students from urban areas face the majority of white teachers, some of whom are inexperienced in working with black students (Obiakor et al., 2010). Black students view the teachers negatively. They claim that the teachers misidentify them stereotypically, hold inaccurate views of their behavior, have low expectations, frequently apply unrealistic teaching methods, and use misguided discipline strategies with limited resources that do little to improve their academic objectives (Gable et al., 2006; Skiba et al., 2005; & Smith, 2002).

The relationship between white teachers and African American students is perceived to be merely ideological, conjectural, and a catastrophic phenomenon (Sagini, 1996). In light of Sagini's work, the presence of white educators in the predominantly black institutions is a practice perpetuated by the notion that the black community is still unproductive, which poses a challenge to the African American community. This challenge is a historic false accusation (Sagini, 1996). African American children can be as productive as any person in society given the right tools and guidance. Nevertheless, the controversy leads to a larger issue on black campuses where traditional cultural behaviors continue to clash with the culture of the minority elite. The minority elite are deemed to be conforming to the white majority extant behavior aimed at alienating their own people. A standard culture, Obiakor et al. (2010) argued, that leads to African American cultural misrepresentation leading to "misidentification, mis-assessment, mis-categorization, misplacement, and mis-instruction, or mis-intervention" (Obiakor et al., 2010, p. 426.)

Teachers' beliefs about the capabilities of children from low socioeconomic backgrounds may affect how they are referred for special education services (Obiakor et al., 2010). While test administrators may not be necessarily biased, the tests themselves are equipped with tools that do not accommodate minority group's values as in this Obiakor excerpt:

> There are a variety of tests used when assessing the student. In MPS, the psychologist administers the intelligence quotient (IQ) tests; the choices of assessment tools include the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-IV), Stanford-Binet, and the Woodcock Johnson. For younger children between

birth to age 5, the psychologist may elect to use the Wechsler Preschool and

Primary Scale of Intelligence III since the WISC-V is normed on older children.

Although test-makers have endeavored to accommodate diversity, there is still a

very strong expectation of linguistic and cultural uniformity in test development,

validation, and norming. Rather than measuring what they claim to measure, test

items instead measure knowledge of standard forms of the language. This means

that standardized tests contain biases against various groups of students in the

test population, resulting in fairly lower scores for those groups. Based on this

unfortunate reality, many African American students are placed into special

education programs, even though the tests have been proven to be culturally,

socially, and racially biased, and to reflect White middle class values. (Obiakor,

2007, p. 427)

Early Intervention

I looked at early intervention in this review to establish if early intervention was

a possible effort among African American families. The purpose was to establish if

early intervention aspect has anything to do with cultural misunderstanding theory that

advance my study. Indeed, there is an increasing number of children with challenging

behaviors who are between the ages of 0-3 years who could benefit from early

intervention (Worcester, Nesman, Raffaela, Mendez, & Keller, 2008). This growth

means that much needs to be done at the Pre-K level to help struggling parents deal with

this situation. Worcester et al. (2008) reported that if intervention is applied in time,

some of the problems seen in schools will be alleviated. However, parental concerns are

that there is not much information given to them at this level which they can apply to take appropriate action (Worcester et al., 2008).

Worcester et al. (2008) believe parental voices are often not heard when it comes to applying behavior intervention in schools for their children. Parents tend to play absentee roles in the initiation of services when it comes to schools deciding the destiny of their troubled children. This view is echoed by Fox, Vaughn, Wyatte, and Dunlap (2002) who argue that a broader functional assessment should be encouraged in home and school environments to address the needs of the students.

Students with poor social skills will grow to be harmful adults unless intervention was sought. As children grow, they develop their own moral circle (Mendler & Curwin, 1999). They may protect this circle so much that anyone who crosses it is subject to confrontation. Their emotional behaviors are guided by this innate propensity; and in light of this notion, a child will continue to guard this moral philosophical position as long as he feels that he has the ability to do so (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feiberg, 2005).

Hawken, MacLeod, and Rawlings (2007) suggest the use of the Behavior Education Program (BEP) at the elementary level to reduce the number of disciplinary referrals and issues in classroom management. Hawken et al.'s (2007) argument underscores the fact that this intervention has proved to be significant at the middle and secondary school levels and can be useful at the elementary level.

Despite the theoretical family support of earlier childhood behavior syndrome reported by the health care system (Worcester et. al., 2008), more comprehensive qualitative studies in early childhood are needed to support special education behavior

intervention practices, partly because of the health care professionals' beliefs that are limited in their prediction in the future effects of the child. Some misconceptions are that earlier behavioral issues will go away with time (Worcester et al., 2008). Therefore, high level national intervention has not received enough attention, since not many parents receive the services necessary to support earlier childhood efforts.

Worcester et al. (2008) reveals that some pediatricians are often unwilling to give information and to refer very young children for testing for special services, asserting that the children will improve when they mature. Based on this argument, many young children skip services that would have helped their behavior before they are school age. The key factor here is lack of knowledge on the side of the medical practitioners, which creates fear and feelings of helplessness in the parents who are seeking help or earlier intervention.

According to Florsheim, Tolan, and Gorman-Smith (1998), another family aspect that adds to the behavior problems we see in schools is single parenthood, lack of male figure, and family maladaptiveness, which seem to hinder normal child development. Children with these factors are prone to truancy and aggressive behavior in school environments (Martin et al., 2007). In addition, they subject themselves to disciplinary actions that lead to them disliking school and eventually dropping out before they complete high school. Most children of color fall into the category described here by Martin et al. (2007).

African American male youths are subject to low teacher expectations and likely to be placed in special education classes. Moreover, they do not have many resources for their educational needs and often end up being placed in alternative schools if

special education in regular schools does not provide the disciplinary support in alleviating their behaviors (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). Most youths with emotional disturbance (ED) are from poor and or low social economic status and are served in special education. These youths are likely to suffer low academic achievements due to suspensions and/or disciplinary measures they are likely to face (Howarth, 2008).

Ervin, Schaunghency, Matthews, Goodman, and Mcglinchey (2007) state that it is fundamental to understand the behaviors and experiences of the youths with emotional disturbance (ED). Research supports the phenomenon that "Little is known about the complex array of factors that contribute to the poor outcomes of this group" (Ervin et al., 2007, p. 79). However, most of the behaviors of this kind are noted among children from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, despite the fact that poverty is not directly linked to the causes of the behaviors seen in those youths (Martin et al., 2007; Wagner et al., 2005). Suspension, which was discussed earlier in this chapter as a means of punishment to these inappropriate behaviors, strongly correlates with SES and there is clear bias towards minorities in that regard (Howarth, 2008).

Payne (1996) says that many of the behaviors we see in school are necessary for survival outside of school and they are common with children in poverty. Children of poverty learn different voices: an adult voice, a parent voice, and a child voice. It is important, according to Payne, that teachers know these voices. Children in poverty are dependent as well as independent (Payne, 1996).

"Some research suggests that when African American males enter school their educational path is altered by situational variables" (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake,

2010, p. 197). These variables include experiencing harsher disciplinary measures,

being taught by unprepared teachers, being referred to special education, and constant

feelings of preconceived detachment from school altogether (Darensbourg et al., 2010).

According to US Department of Education (2010), more than 2.2 million children of

color are receiving special education services (Green, 2008). Green's work says that

> According to the National Research Council (NRC), more than 14% of African
>
> American students are in special education, compared to 13% of American
>
> Indian students, 12% of white students, 11% of Hispanic students and 5% Asian
>
> American students… African American students are almost three times as likely
>
> as White students to be labeled as mentally retarded, two times as likely to be
>
> labeled emotionally disturbed, and 1.3 times as likely to be labeled as having
>
> learning disability. (p. 33)

According to Green (2008), early identification of African American students is

paramount. Green presented suggestions that would make early identification possible

and noted that most African American parents do not take the initiative and their voice

is absent in this process, either because of lack of awareness of the services available or

because they simply do not trust the system or do not feel it is significant. Among the

suggestions Green proposed are strategies for improving school practices for African

American learners to include those that are relevant for African American learners,

relevant for cultural responsive practices, and school professionals, community liaisons

as well as parents as cultural brokers. African American parents are needed as cultural

brokers embedded within the school systems. Schools can also use closely related

professionals or members of the cultural group represented, such as African American

counselors, psychologists, and teachers. If cultural construct brokers are not available, early intervention will still suffer, making it virtually impossible to prevent entry into special education for African American students.

Understanding cultural constructs as a means for comprehending the need for education promotes positive school climate, and cultural and school-community relationships (Green, 2008). Early childhood special education can have significant impact on child development (Morgan, Farks, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2012). Morgan et al. (2012) conducted a research study using Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth (ECLS) of 2001. The purpose was to estimate whether and to what degree children who are minorities are disproportionately represented in Early Intervention (EI) or Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) and results indicated that African American children were disproportionately represented in early intervention and early childhood special education programs by the age of 48 months. The study showed that earlier intervention would help alleviate problems that result in placement into special education if it was practiced regularly among African American families.

The numerical data showed that 56% were white children 48 months old, but 70% of them received early intervention and/or childhood special education services whereas children in the minority groups such as black, Hispanic, and Asian constituted 15%, 23% and 3%, respectively, of the general population, but only 7%, 17% and 1% of those received early intervention or early childhood special education. This study showed that minority students do not receive early intervention services.

Graduation and School Dropout for African American Students

I looked at graduation and dropout as one of the clinical issues among African American youth. The purpose was to see any linkage with cultural misunderstanding aspect that leads to disproportionality which in turn lead to excessive high school dropouts. Studies show that African American students experience academic challenges leading to school failure, truancy, over-identification for special needs, lower self-esteem, and poor coping skills (Ford, 2012). These challenges, coupled with other factors such as poor coping skills, peer group pressure, family issues, and socioeconomic problems, create negative self-image and disengagement from school, which result in these students giving up and eventually dropping out of school (Gentle-Genity, 2009; Roberts, 2010). I looked at this piece of literature to find out if there is any study to support high rates of African American dropout and what this may have to do with overrepresentation. I reiterate that the purpose of this dissertation study was to investigate disproportionality of African American students in special education.

Almost one-third of public school students and nearly one-half of youth of color do not graduate from high school (Laura, 2011). One review found that 15% of African American students below 18 years do not graduate with their peers, 14% of this population drop out of high school altogether, while 26% of African American youths who do not graduate are arrested—46% are detained in juvenile jails and 58% sent to adult prisons (Laura, 2011).

Table 1 below represents Laura's (2011) account of African American discipline and graduation record.

Table 1

African American Youths Discipline and Graduation Rates

Category	Percent
Do not graduate with peers	15
Students who drop out of school	14
Students who do not graduate and are arrested	26
Detained in juvenile jails	46
Sent to adult prisons	58

NOTE: Source is Laura (2011), *Reflections on the Racial Web of Discipline.*

According to Sinclair, Christenson and Thurlow (2005), 55% of youth classified as emotionally disturbed drop out of school, compared to 36% of all students with disabilities, compared to 24% of general education students across the country. The prison system sucks black males out of the mainstream educational environment due to inappropriate discipline (Laura, 2011). Laura says that black males grades K-12 lag behind their peers academically and are underrepresented in strong academic progress, sufficient achievement, advanced placement programs, enrichment courses, and gifted programs, while overrepresented in failure and distress, discipline referrals, grade retention, and dropout rates. Laura's work demonstrates that black males are more likely to be punished under zero tolerance measures (Kajs, 2006) on the basis of disrespect, excessive noise, threats, and loitering, and more likely to be classified as students with special needs (Maholmes & Brown, 2002; Patton, 1998).

Mothers, grandmothers, and other female relatives raise most African American children (Harry, Klingner & Hart, 2005). Children raised by single, never-married mothers are more likely to repeat a grade or be expelled or suspended from school than are children living with both biological parents (Finlay & Neumark, 2010). Finlay and

Neumark's study concluded that children may be better off living with a never-married mother if incarceration was the causal factor. In general, their study is evidence that children raised by both parents are likely to achieve better academic progress than those who are not living with both parents.

According to the US Department of Education (2010), half of students from diverse backgrounds do not graduate from high school. Whiting (2009) cited a variety of reasons why this was true among black males; among them were black males' limited scholar identity courted by dynamics such as classes not being interesting, doubts about meeting the requirements for graduation, required to repeat a class, had to get a job because he/she needed money, missing classes often, and too much freedom. In addition, research indicates that many African American males lack connection with the academic world because they have an image to protect. For example, Whiting (2009) says,

> Recently, a colleague shared the following story with me. School personnel were transporting black students to an awards event in which students were to be honored for outstanding academic achievement. One black male, a junior named Keith, approached the school van dressed in baggy pants, an overly large sweatshirt, and headband. Upon entering the van, he proceeded to pull off the outer layers of his outfit to expose a crisp dress shirt and creased khaki pants. He swapped tennis shoes for casual shoes. Before anyone could question him, the young man asserted: "I have an image to maintain." Being smart isn't part of that image. Not surprisingly, after the event and before returning to school, Keith changed back into what his peers would accept him in, the original

"urban" outfit. The story is reminiscent of the DuBoisian notion of two warring

souls. How does he make compromises in negotiating the need for achievement

and the need for affiliation or social acceptance? How does one reconcile being

Black and being an American, namely, in a society where racial injustices

continue to exist? (p. 225)

In light of Keith's account above, Whiting (2009) cited the following

characteristics as paramount to an African American male scholar identity: self-

efficacy, willingness to make sacrifices, internal locus of control, future orientation,

self-awareness, need for achievement, academic self-confidence, racial identity, and

masculinity. To achieve progress, Whiting suggests implementation of a series of

strategies: Empowerment strategies should be developmental. Empowerment strategies

should provide for competent adult black male leaders. Recruit and retain qualified

black males as leaders and teachers in schools. Empowerment strategies should be

culturally responsive. Empowerment strategies (e.g., rites-of-passage ceremony) should

be acknowledged and implemented. Therefore, according to the claims presented by

Whiting, educators of black males are encouraged to support efforts such as culturally

sensitive attitudes and behaviors, culturally responsive content and methods of

instruction, and male role model presence.

This view is supported by Aarons (2010), who said that black males lacked

effort to increase scholar identity. These efforts, according to Aarons, leave a lot to be

desired by educators poised to develop, nurture, and enhance strong positive

relationships with African American youths and school success. Most black males have

yet to see themselves as scholars (Sagini, 1996). Lack of scholar identity reduces most

black male youths to mere school clowns and trouble-maker identities, low grades, poor attitudes, and poor decision making about school and achievement (Whiting, 2009). Academically identifiable diverse males believe in their ability to succeed, have high self-efficacy and self-awareness, are willing to make sacrifices, focus on future orientation, and defy conflict of what promotes sense of masculinity in African American community which a sense of intelligence does not take away (Whiting, 2009).

Black males are linked to poor academic achievement beginning at adolescence by this academic de-identification phenomenon. Cockley et al. (2011) claim African American males view school as a hostile environment where experience does not reflect their real ability. For example, they perceive their lowered grades are related to their conduct and behavior, not their actual ability. In an effort to dispel academic excellence, African American students face challenges from peers, which include invectives that African American children are acting white (Garibaldi, 1992; Goff, Martin, & Thomas, 2007). These external influences affect their dispositions towards higher level learning challenges amid ostracism, ridicule, intimidation, and physical assault by their peers.

Indeed, coupled with negative views that African American males are a monolithic group with little hope of surviving and being successful, educators who ascribe to such beliefs make the lives of African American students even more difficult (Garibaldi, 1992; Maholmes and Brown, 2002). This makes African American male youths withdraw into their own comfortable moral zones and circles that embrace defiance and rejection of school altogether. Reasons for this psychological perspective are indeed due to lack of motivation, academic de-identification, dissonance between home and school, poverty, and substandard schools (Cockley et al., 2011).

Black male youths view the educational environment as a voluntary prison where reprimand and admonishment is akin to attacks on African American identity and discrimination (Cockley et al. 2011; Finkel, 2010). Finkel's (2010) work showed that under the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) , African American male youths are not only left behind but pushed out of the system, causing perceived alienation and hostility from both school personnel and the students. African American males feel that not only is their academic ability under attack; but also their masculinity, cultural code of conduct, and disposition, culminating in their lives of being black as admonishment (Davis, 2006).

African American students often disengage from vigorous high level academics in an attempt to gain acceptance from peers, making their giftedness go unnoticed (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008). Henfield et al. (2008) noted that researchers rarely address unique experiences of African American students. Studies have indicated African American students frequently lack access to, drop out of, or choose not to participate in gifted education programs for reasons ranging from low teacher expectations, lack of motivation, and fear of alienation from their peers sending perceived notions that gifted education environment is not the right place (Henfield et al., 2008).

Academic disengagement may be one factor in causing the downfall in African American education programs. For example, rigorous or high level academics are viewed as having a less important role in the African American community due to low expectations and lack of role models that demonstrate same with yet other activities such as seen in the views of Sagini (1996), who said "With the tripartite absence of

domestic role models, resources, and the black middle class, the results of such isolation have been compounded in terms of high levels of crime, sexual promiscuity, erratic employment histories, and such forms of behavior as the widespread use of drugs and dropping out of school" (p. 221).

Maholmes and Brown (2002) support Sagini's (1996) view and say the following in regard to African American children:

In many cases, these children have developed adaptive behaviors that enable them to survive in difficult circumstances. However, these behaviors may be in direct conflict with the expectations of mainstream behaviors in school. Moreover, many children who come from low-income, single-parent homes are least likely to have developed the fundamental academic skills, such as pre-reading and questioning, needed to be successful in school. Over time, these children lag further behind in school than their peers. As a result, they exhibit behaviors that may mask their inability to read, speak well or think critically. Taken together, these factors may lead a teacher to view an African-American child's behavior through a deficit lens and to regard the child as needing special services. (p. 47)

This leaves a huge challenge for educators and researchers alike in the educational research community. Finally, Davis, Jenkins, Hunt, and Draper (2005) wrote about their struggles through school. They say young people need positive role models and guidance in their lives; a phenomenon which is largely missing in the African American families.

Discipline in General

In general, discipline is linked to some measures that lead to disproportionality of African American students in special education. Discipline mostly affects students of color. Disciplinary measures that are sought against African American students are deemed severe, discriminatory demeaning to their cultural values (Bal et al., 2014). I was poised to look at this aspect as I sought to advance my cultural misunderstanding theory. In general, discipline problems prevent instruction and student learning. Teachers often resort to written disciplinary referrals that remove students from the educational setting (Cartledge & Talbert-Johnson, 1996; Clonan, McDougal, & Clark, 2007). Punishments commonly used for rule infractions include verbal reprimands, disciplinary referrals (Abebe & Haile-Mariam, 2007; Nelson, 1996; Nelson, Martella, & Galand, 1998), in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, time-outs, and verbal warnings (Mendez et. al., 2002).

These methods are assumed to yield immediate results; but may only provide a short-term resolution. Many students, therefore, end up suffering disciplinary actions that do little, if anything, to help them solve the real problems in their lives, which are often the genesis of the behavior problems seen in schools (Worcester et al., 2008). Methods of dealing with behavioral offenses must be revised and improved at every school disciplinary level, beginning with the classroom.

Some of the empirical suggestions, such as school-wide positive behavior support systems, are widely recommended discipline procedures to classroom management, but sometimes end in mixed results (Abebe et al., 2007; Ervin et al., 2007; Lassen, Steel, & Sailor, 2006; Luiselli, Putnam, Hander, & Feinberg, 2005; Todd,

Campbell, Meyer, & Horner, 2008). The Council for Children with Behavioral

Disorders (2002) issued a policy statement strongly encouraging school districts to

"move beyond traditional "punishment" types of discipline, and focus on a much

broader view that emphasizes supporting and increasing appropriate behavior" (p. 5).

Discipline procedures used within the schools should teach students about both

desirable and undesirable behaviors and must also be connected with what students

learn about classroom rules and regulations (Pass, 2007).

　　　　Effective classroom management is key to successful academic success and

relationship building between educators and students, as suggested Trussell, Lewis, and

Stichter: "Research on effective classrooms demonstrates a clear relationship between

the ecology of the classroom and students' academic and social behaviors" (2008, p.

153). Environmental factors, such as the types of tasks and the manner in which tasks

are presented, and instructional factors, such as teacher behaviors, praise, specific

instructions, delivery of content, and reprimands, may jointly impact functional

behavior (Trussell, Lewis, & Stichter, 2008). Educators who use precise questions and

instruction, and develop a positive relationship with the students often become

successful classroom managers (Cohen, Kincaid, & Childs, 2007).

　　　　 Children who have behavioral disabilities generally cannot differentiate their

emotions in response to changing situations, which results in off-task engagement and

non-compliance (Singer & Singer, 1996). They generally have poor self-esteem, which

can severely impact their academic and behavioral performances (Margerison, 1996).

Goal setting appears to be an effective strategy to increase both task engagement and

compliance for students with disabilities. When implemented properly, increasing

70

students' positive self-concept, promoting goal-setting activities, and effective teaching strategies may reduce minor disruptions that lead to more serious behaviors.

Female students have a higher rate of internalizing emotional problems and lower aggression problems, whereas male students might have a higher prevalence of aggression and distractibility problems and lower internalizing emotional problems (Lambert, Epstein, Ingram, Simpson, & Bernstein, 2014). When applying discipline to these students, caution is needed or it may appear that male students get a bigger share than female students due to this perceived aggressive nature of the male students. Research shows that earlier identification and treatment of these behaviors do prevent greater challenges, which might continue into adulthood and become mental health issues (Lambert et al., 2014).

Students with EBD exhibit aggressive or externalizing behaviors that occur as a result of low self-confidence or damaged self-esteem (Margerison, 1996). Poor self-concept may stem from prolonged negative interactions between students with EBD and their teachers or their peers (Cartledge & Talbert-Johnson, 1996; Montague & Rinaldi, 2001). Henricsson and Rydell (2004) found in their study of 95 elementary students who had either externalizing, internalizing, or non-problematic behaviors, that students who exhibited externalizing behaviors had more difficulty developing both positive relationships with teachers and positive perceptions of themselves. For students with EBD, positive perceptions of themselves and how their teachers perceive them is closely associated with success in school (Margerison, 1996; Montague & Rinaldi, 2001).

The process of goal setting and goal attainment is key among suggestions that are critical skills for students with disabilities (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007). Goal setting has become one of the main components of self-determination and secondary special education (Campbell-Whatley, 2006; Carter, Lane, Pierson, & Glasear, 2006; Field & Hoffman, 1994; Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000; Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, Garner, & Lawrence, 2007). Flexer, Simmons, Luft, and Baer (2005) stated that allowing students to enage in goal-setting activities and choose their educational courses is one of the most effective approaches for students with disabilities.

Goal setting is motivational, but to be truly effective, students must choose short-term goals that are achievable along the path to attaining their long-term goals. IEP meetings provide a promising opportunity for goal setting when students state their annual goals, but this meeting occurs only once a year (Kortering, Braziel, & Tompkins, 2002; Ward, 2009). Benz, Lindstrom, and Yovanoff (2000) found when students sought to identify personally meaningful goals, the process would serve to increase the perceived relevance of school and decrease student apathy. Clearly written plans that state goals and objectives and identify methods to attain the goals are vital to all students, but especially those with emotional and behavioral disorders (Bateman, 1996).

During adolescence, students are searching for role models with whom they may identify and imitate behaviors; therefore, teachers should model the behaviors they would like to see in the classroom (Cartledge & Talbert-Johnson, 1996; Field & Hoffman, 2002). Instructional behaviors of teachers can significantly impact the occurrence of problem behaviors (Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2008;

Trussell et al., 2008). Teachers set the tone for the classroom environment by demonstrating positive behaviors in the way teachers treat students when dealing with anger, frustrating situations, or crises (Trussell et al., 2008; Ward, 2009). Cartledge and Talbert-Johnson (1996) recommend that teachers equip themselves with "realistic management skills" to reduce the need for punishment, assist in avoiding power struggles, help anticipate and prevent problem behaviors, and engage students in every step of the educational process (p. 54). Little empirical evidence exists on effective interventions to manage the classroom behavior of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Carter et al., 2006; Sutherland et al., 2008).

Athough each inquiry has the abilty to add its own information to existing literature, further study is needed to advance more comprehensive perceptions about African American culture and how this culture affects acquisition of education for African American students. Indeed, teachers are a rich source of information and the lack of educational studies on instructional strategies provides weak support for claims on which those strategies were founded. Futhermore, there are limited school-based inquiries about African American disproportionality issues.

Utilizing qualitative research to close the gap between African American teachers' participation and education researchers can provide greater depth to current insights about disproportionality in special education. Further, the strength of qualitative methods lies in their ability to describe the diverse needs that must be addressed to facilitate outcomes for unique constituencies (Trainor & Leko, 2014). As teachers read qualitative narratives, they gain a more intimate understanding of the participants' perspectives as they construct meaning from the text (Trainor & Graue, 2014).

Moreover, teachers stand to gain a deeper understanding of the participation preferences 'authored' by themselves and by hearing the voices of their students; research components which have been customarily ignored.

Summary

This review formed a strong base for my study. My research was about perceptions about disproportionality of African American students in special education. This review then helped me to better understand the previous author's work and how their work depicted factors that surrounded the overrepresentation phenomena. Indeed, the factors described in this review created a misunderstanding about African American culture. Although none of the studies reviewed looked at cultural misunderstanding aspect of African American culture, nevertheless, they paved the way for my study. Therefore, by examining African American special education teachers' perceptions about cultural misunderstanding, I was able to execute this inquiry that will be the fabric of disproportionality studies about African American students in special education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

I chose qualitative case study methodology (Creswell, 2007) to conduct this study, because narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study scholarly works inspired me (Brannon, 1992; Creswell, 2007; Gephart, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2006; Yin, 1994).

Students from poor ethnic minority backgrounds have been disproportionately represented in special education (Oswald et al., 1999). Public awareness of over-representation of African American students date back to *Brown vs. Board of Education* (Ladson-Billings, 2004). This measure allowed desegregation of public schools, which led to mass identification of students with special needs caused by social, cultural, and economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Artiles et al. 2010). This study is typically different from others about disproportionate representation of African American students in special education since it looks at the same phenomenon in light of perceptions from ethnic African American special education teachers.

Statement of Subjectivity

I was born and raised in Kenya. I am a highly qualified special education teacher in the states of Oklahoma and New Jersey with more than 18 years of experience, in addition to four years as a primary school teacher in Kenya. Most of my teaching experiences in the United States are in predominantly African American schools. In addition to my teaching tenure, I have more than 18 years of experience working with people with disabilities. I consider myself African American, although I prefer to be called Kenyan American. African American is a broad term. It is like calling people of Eurocentric descent, European American rather than Irish American or, Italian

75

American, which I think some would prefer to be called. Although my children are the first generation Kenyan Americans in my family, they prefer to be called African Americans. This is a paradigm shift from my beliefs. Nevertheless, my epistemological stance is embedded in my beliefs and experience guided by Crotty's (1998) symbolic interactionism paradigm. Derived from American pragmatism, people's selves are social products. These selves are also purposive and creative.

I am a symbolic interactionist. I used this stance to the fullest extent possible to produce the best research aimed at full exploitation of the opportunity granted to me as an American pragmatist. The study I proposed to pursue was a complex phenomenon intended to direct educational research to practical issues through a qualitative paradigm. I am privileged to have had a team of qualified professors behind me. Guided by their expertise, I produced this dissertation study in an attempt to identify new findings to solve very real human and societal problems associated with educating African American children.

I chose to pursue this study for a variety of reasons. First, I have witnessed disproportionate representation of African American students in special education in the schools where I have thought. Second, I have seen students with special education labels who are intellectually capable and do not understand how they were identified as needing special education services. Third, in my co-teaching situations, I have witnessed students struggling with academics who would benefit from smaller special education classes and do not know how they progressed through middle school and high school grades without being identified in need of special education services.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was guided by qualitative research methods. I chose qualitative

methods because they start with a clear conceptual framework of phenomena leading to

different kinds of knowledge claims than those found in quantitative guidelines

(Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Morrow, 2005). I also seized this opportunity because

qualitative studies can help provide research results to address critical special education

issues. Pugach, Mukhopadhyay, and Gomez-Najarro (2014) indicate, in response to the

low frequency of special education qualitative studies published in special education

journals, that

> We recognize that increasing the frequency with which more conventional high-
>
> quality qualitative work is published in the traditional special education
>
> literature would in and of itself represent tremendous progress … Perhaps it may
>
> be premature, especially in an era of scientifically-based research and evidence-
>
> based practice, to ask even more of the field. But once the door is open to
>
> research that is anchored in making meaning of the experience of individuals
>
> with disabilities and the institutional structures that limit their learning and
>
> success, why not deliberately avail ourselves of all the ways qualitative research
>
> can be enacted, both more and less conventional—to enable the broadest
>
> interpretation of the meaning of disability and special education as we seek
>
> effective solutions? (p. 341).

Thus, I completed humanistic qualitative study to hopefully understand how

educators' perceptions contribute to the disproportional numbers of African American

77

students in special education (Goowin & Goodwin, 1996; Shields & Twycross, 2003).

My study, like all qualitative studies, begins with a clear conceptual framework and well-described procedures. I followed Goodwin and Goodwin"s (1996) guidelines to build this methods section.

1. Data collection methods are detailed.

2. Analyses are detailed, appropriate, and inductive.

3. Concepts and constructs are logically generated.

4. Methods and findings are unbiased.

5. Conceptual and theoretical findings are significant.

As suggested by Creswell (2007), before I settled on case study paradigm, I examined the following qualitative designs to determine the best method to answer my research questions.

Narrative. The narrative approach uses "a variety of analytic practices, and is rooted in different social and humanities disciplines" (Creswell, 2007, p. 53). A narrative approach is ideal for capturing the details of life experiences of subjects, analyzing, and rearranging the key elements of the story.

Phenomenological. The phenomenological approach depicts the meanings of subjects' lived experiences of phenomena and tries to find the commonalities thereof (Creswell, 2007). Two types of the phenomenological approach are hermeneutic phenomenology and empirical, transcendental, or psychological phenomenology.

Grounded theory. Grounded theory is closely related to phenomenological approach in that they both describe individual experiences. However, grounded theory study goes beyond the description of experiences of subjects to generate a theory. This

process helps to provide a framework for further inquiry. Although grounded theory examines individuals' experiences, it does not prescribe to the location of the individuals.

Ethnography. Ethnography uses direct observation to unfold a culture while it preserves the integrity and inherent properties of cultural phenomena (Gephart, 1988). An ethnographic research study examines 20 or more individuals who share patterns of behavior, values, beliefs, and language. Therefore, the work of ethnographers is to examine individuals in grounded theory study, and this we do on the basis of shared patterns of behaviors caused by specific cultural background.

Case study. The case study approach is an inquiry about an intensive analysis of a single unit or issue within a bounded system. Although ethnography deals with how the culture works, it does not pinpoint specific issues within the culture. Ethnography defines the cultural pattern of behavior without understanding the issues that come with the behavioral pattern in the culture. On the other hand, case study's interest is in processes rather than outcomes, in context rather than specific variables (Merriam, 1998). "Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice and future research" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). "Case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin, 1994, p. 1) Case study inquiry looks at specific issues in depth through the repertoire of direct observation and systematic interviewing, which concludes the data collection process (Stake, 2006).

In qualitative research study, the instrument is the researcher (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative studies are idealistic, rejecting any possibility of representing reality (Brannon, 1992). The purpose of a qualitative researcher is to document the world from the point of view of the individuals studied. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering various forms of inquiry, usually involving field work, in order to collect data and observe behavior in its natural setting. It also involves inductive strategies and it does not test existing theory but, it is richly descriptive because it focuses on process, meaning, and understanding. Qualitative study builds abstractions, concepts, and hypotheses (Merriam, 1998).

Case study paradigm is interesting because it leads the researcher into a process rather than outcomes, in context rather than specific variables (Merriam, 1998). I chose a case study design, because "Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). "Case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin, 1994, p. 1). Case study inquiry looks at specific issues in depth through the repertoire of direct observation and systematic interviewing concludes data collection process (Stake, 2006).

The purpose of a qualitative researcher is to document the world from the point of view of the individuals studied. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering various forms of inquiry, usually involving fieldwork, in order to collect data and observe behavior in its natural setting; a conceptual paradigm may not be achieved by quantitative methodological means. By using qualitative case

study methods, I was able to tap into inductive strategies, which do not test existing theory, but focus on process, meaning, and understanding. Qualitative research builds abstractions, concepts, and hypotheses (Merriam, 1998), reality (Brannon, 1992), and is aimed at producing explicit, comprehensive, quality, and trustworthy scholarly work (Morrow, 2005). Therefore, it is my belief as the instrument of this inquiry qualitative case study paradigm enabled me to attain the intended results of this study without allowing entry of my personal values into the research.

Data Sources

Participants. I followed IRB guidelines from the University of Oklahoma in my recruitment for data collection. Participants were six African American special education teachers drawn from different schools in an urban and surrounding districts in a southwestern state. The districts served a variety of students from different ethnic backgrounds as well as various socioeconomic backgrounds. Between 35% and 84% of students in the urban district received free or reduced price lunches in urban environment and about the same in the surrounding district from where at least two participants were recruited.

The six participating African American special education teachers were born and raised in the United States and I assumed because they were African Americans, these teachers were familiar with African American culture. The six teachers provided "ample opportunity to identify themes of the cases as well as conduct sufficient cross-case theme analysis" (Creswell, 2007, p. 128). The three female and three male African American special education teachers had at least three years teaching experience in urban and surrounding schools districts. Two teachers were drawn from elementary

schools, two from middle schools, and two from high schools. I recruited the teachers

using non-random (criterion) semi-structured sampling procedures that consisted of

emails, phone calls, and school visits. This selection process strengthened the integrity

and validity of this study. I contacted the six teachers by calling to the schools and

establishing there were African American teachers in the schools. I then visited the

schools and sought to meet the teachers and obtain the personal contacts. Following the

personal visit, I contacted the teachers through phone calls and e-mail to schedule the

day, time and location of their preference where the interviews took place.

I interviewed the teachers individually and used follow-up phone calls to clarify

transcription statements. Two of the interviews took place at public libraries and four

the schools there the participants taught. All my participants were very kind, available,

and willing to be contacted at any time. All interviews took between 45 and 90 minutes

and were done using open-ended questioning and probing questions for clarification.

Participant demographics.

Table 2 depicts the participants' age, gender, ethnicity, grade taught at the time

of the interviews, and years of service. Following the table is a summary description of

each participant.

Table 2

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Grade	Years of Service
Emily	52	F	AA	Elem	15
Elijah	55	M	AA	High	18
Robina	57	F	AA	Middle	18
Mwango	44	F	AA	Elem	17
Armand	57	M	AA	Middle	19
Eddy	52	M	AA	High	22

Participant Demographic Information

Emily. Emily was an African American female elementary special education teacher, 52 years old with a total of 15 years of teaching experience, with the last four years being a special education teacher. Emily stated she liked being a special education teacher. She stated African Americans and Caucasians had about the same population in the school she taught. Born and raised in a large traditional African American family in a Midwest state, Emily was enthusiastic and willing to participate in this voluntary study. As a youth, Emily attended predominantly African American schools. She stated she had excellent teachers who made learning fun. Emily stated her teachers encouraged her to become a teacher. During this interview, Emily was teaching in a school located in a low-income community with a large Hispanic and African American population. She taught inclusion classes and pull-out lab classes for English and Math.

Elijah. He was a 55 years old African American male teacher who taught in a predominantly Caucasian alternative academy middle/high school. Elijah was born and

raised in an African American family. His step-father was in the Air Force, and thus he lived in many places, including Japan. Elijah stated he grew up in a very strict home where "things" were taken seriously and tasks completed in timely manner. Elijah attributed his success to the structure of the home where he grew up and the parents who raised him. During his school years, education was taken very seriously and he found himself competing with everybody in all his classes. Elijah attended predominantly Caucasian schools and most of his teachers were Caucasian.

Elijah indicated he became so smart his teachers sometimes doubted his skills. He told a story where he was made to redo a spelling test to prove he actually got the correct score. He stated his grandmother ran a salon and most of her customers were teachers. So, he happened to be at the salon with his grandmother and as the teachers came and went, he completed his homework with their help. His times were hard and even after he had demonstrated brilliance, his teachers' expectations of him were still low, which lowered his morale. If not for his strong parents, he may have dropped out of school. In high school, Elijah stated peer tutoring "became his scoop." He had many friends whom he helped with homework. He saw many prejudices while growing up, but his strong family helped him succeed. He was inspired to be a special education teacher by getting involved with students with multiple disabilities when he was in the 10th grade. Back then, he stated, only multiple handicap was considered special education. As he helped these students, he developed the passion to become a special education teacher.

Robina. She was a 57-year old female high school African American teacher with 18 years experience in special education. She was born of African American

parents in Germany in a military camp. She grew up in the United States in a southwest state, and became a U.S. citizen when in the 8th grade. She was raised in a traditional African American family. After finishing high school, she became a teacher's assistant in a special education class. During this time, she developed a passion for teaching children with special needs, so she decided to go to college to obtain a degree and became a full-time special education teacher. Robina did not dwell much on her family, but mentioned she was divorced, remarried, and had two children from her previous marriage. The school she taught at had predominantly African American students.

Mwango. She was a 44-year old African American female teacher born on the East coast of the United States, then raised in a southwestern state. She was adopted and raised by her aunt and uncle. Mwango was the last of seven children who became a teacher after being raised in a family of teachers. She was in her 11th year as a special education teacher at the time of my interview. Mwango's passion for teaching began as a child while playing teacher all day long. She would dress up many times and become teacher to an empty room. Mwango was fascinated by this interview and was enthusiastic to participate. She now teaches in a predominantly African American school, but had taught in a predominantly Caucasian district during her previous years of teaching.

Armand. He was a 57-year old male African American middle school teacher in an inner city school. Born and raised in a large, traditional African American family in a Midwest state, Armand described himself as one who beat the odds. Armand had a religious background and had developed a natural propensity for religious teaching and

language. He also liked to write, and these skills became well known throughout his teaching career.

Armand stated a sibling with a disability sparked his interest in becoming a special educator. He described looking at students who had disabilities as looking into a mirror and seeing himself as an anchor for them. He thought himself a lucky person because he was blessed with good education and decided to use it to help others who were not equally lucky. Because of his good educational background, Armand became a Catholic Charities tutor when in 10th grade and helped 12 and 13 year old students learn to read. For more than 18 years, Armand had been a strong advocate for good education and overhauling special education for all students regardless of color and creed. Armand described himself as a man who had worn many hats. Armand said he had been involved in designing many strategies, including ways to identify gifted and talented students and strategies to teach students with disabilities. Armand enthusiastically participated in this interview with me and offered much needed information. He had experiences teaching at many schools with students from a variety of ethnicities.

Eddy. He was a 52-year old high school African American male teacher born and raised in a southwestern state. Eddy was born and raised in a big African American traditional family. At age 16, he started tutoring at summer programs where he helped youths under 14 years with reading and other extra-curricular activities. This experience inspired him to become a special education teacher. Eddy first taught 14 years at a middle school as a special educator, and has taught for the last 14 years as a high school special education teacher. At the time of interview, Eddy taught at a high school with mostly low-income African American and Hispanic students. Like the other

participants, Eddy was willing to participate and was instrumental in providing information needed for this study.

Researcher as Instrument

"The quality of qualitative research is judged in part by the researcher's credibility. Credibility in this sense refers to the accuracy with which the researcher is able to represent the perceptions of the participants, which is necessarily impacted by the researcher's personal background" (Trainor, 2003, p. 91). My identity as a black male phenomenon may have inspired me to conduct this research. As a special education teacher, I know what happens. I have worked in many schools with different ethnic groups, and have witnessed disproportionality of African Americans among special education students.

My endeavor to carry out this study should not be misconstrued to mean emotional attachment to the disproportionality phenomenon, but instead needs to be seen as a scholarly quest on my part, to seek underlying reasons why things happen the way they do with African American students, and to record the findings linked to my epistemological perspectives. These perspectives are informed by my identities as a human being (e.g. my race, gender, class) and as a scholar in the context of resources and power which I have accessed and have been bestowed upon me by the University of Oklahoma and entrusted to me by a powerful team of professors who are overseeing my study. Furthermore, the perspectives of researchers have essential value, which ought not to be taken for granted.

My foremost concern, however, was to avoid making errors of bias and emotional causality due to the fact that I am an African American special education

teacher studying African American disproportionality through the perceptions of African American special education teachers. Another concern was to avoid making replicated errors of other scholars who may have been perceived as being out of touch with the reality of behaviors of people of color, and people who have limited access to political and economic powers that affect society (Trainor, 2003). Another concern was blind implication of the system perceived as racially biased to African Americans. I attempted to avoid these concerns by being as objective as possible, and transparent by showing explicit qualitative data and how those concerns influenced the methodological process by which the participants and I developed the results, and then how I alone interpreted it (Trainor, 2003).

I was born and raised in a different country from the United States. My parents raised me in a different society and culture. My mother was a devout Seventh Day Adventist (ADA). My father was a traditional healer commonly known as a witch doctor in African terms. This term emerged due to the general misconception that the healers caused the illness to the people they healed. My father, who believed in ancestral powers not related to any western system of religion, was very powerful in using healing 'magic'. I used to go with him to some of the events where he was called to treat people, and did indeed cure people. After they got healed, his patients arrived at my village months later with cows, sheep, and goats as payments for the treatments they received. My mother used to tell us my father did not know how to care for his wealth, because he would have been richer than he was.

He was married to three wives. The first wife died before he immediately married my mother and, later on, my step-mother, whom he kept together with my

mother. He had different pieces of land far from each other where he had housed both my mother and my step-mother. As a traditional healer, my father was generally considered middle class, and placed himself in a leadership position based essentially on polygamy. If one was polygamous, he was considered rich enough, and therefore, respected based on that positional aspect of 'leadership,' which in my father's case never came to pass in terms of real community leadership. My father portrayed himself as a rich man with leadership skills, but he never really pursued being a leader because drinking and traveling kept our family and him in no condition to be a leader.

Although he did not contribute to our education financially, my father wanted us to have a good education and always made his voice heard beyond the gates. His presence made a significant impact whenever he met with teachers. Teachers were highly respected and considered to know many things. I always thought the reason my father wanted to hang out with them was because of the knowledge he wanted to gain from them, although he himself was not educated. I always thought the reason my father did not want to enforce consistent education upon us was because he could not handle the financial burden across his two families. So, he left that responsibility to my mother and step-mother. However, my mother told me my father did not really care about education and he often mocked education and criticized my mother for wanting us to become educated. I remember him occasionally saying education was for the white man.

Schools were not free in Kenya and this made decisions about school hard to make for my mother. My father who was mostly away spending time with his other family, healing people, and drinking was not at home to make educational decisions for

me and my other siblings. Thus, school decisions were made my by mother who was never educated and could not write. My decisions to stay in school were mainly influenced by my mother who wanted us to live a better life. Little did she know it was going to be costly. But, she strived to keep us going through school as much as she was able to afford. She was forced to make drastic decisions in order for us to receive formal education. Because of this, she had very high expectations for our quarterly progress reports.

My mother made school a top priority. We were made to walk bare foot as long we had school uniform, a pencil, and a notebook to write on, and paid tuition. We relied on subsistence farming and domesticated animals to pay for tuition and daily life needs. Sometimes we were made to stay out of school for a prolonged period of time in order for my older brother to keep his secondary classes going. Then my sister and I were allowed to skip classes upon returning in order to be among our age group and peers in the grades. My brother then taught us as pay back. He taught me and my younger brother how to read and write during our school absence so we were not left behind. He also taught us math. He used to do this on a portable blackboard my mother bought for us to use to write and erase to preserve note books for school work.

Those were the early days of my school. My first school years (nursery, 1st grade) took place under a tree for there was not a classroom to accommodate us. During second through seventh grade, I attended class in a mud-walled building with iron sheets on the roof, and small windows with no shutters to prevent cold morning winds and rains. There were no doors at the entrances into the classrooms. There was not a school library and therefore no books to read. A few British-edition school textbooks,

90

which were kept in the principal's office, were allowed to be used and shared among us only during class sessions. The books were read to us by the teachers and a few lucky students. I happened to be one of the lucky readers among 1st graders who were allowed to read the books, because my older brother and uncles had taught me to read and respect books.

As I researched overrepresentation literature, I reflected back to my own experiences and wondered how children who did not have a parent who cared like mine or who did not have an older brother who taught them how to read and write could learn reading and math. School in Kenya was very competitive and national examinations had to be passed to continue. I marveled at students with whom I went to school who were not able to read and write. To this day, I look back at those moments with pride and concern when I was to read in class to the rest of my peers, some who were older than me but could not read. I passed all my national exams and each time I was among the top 10 and often among the top three. As was the case then, students were ranked numerically according to performance. If I had not done well on the exams, I would probably not have been able to conduct this research study. There is no way imaginable I would have kept the morale to pursue education to the extent I have if I had not passed the national exams. Moreover, no one would have wasted money on me to keep me in school, as it would not have been cost effective.

Although I do not consider myself African American male, I happen to be characterized as one of them. Yet, my African American experience gives me a sense of equitable eventualities that have defined my life. My life experience in America has given me knowledge about people of color and by reading about the history of African

American people through slavery and the Civil Rights movement, I am able to inherently comprehend some of the upheavals facing the African American people. As I entered the plane coming to the United States for the first time, I knew it was the beginning of a long journey, but it was also an exciting journey. I knew I was coming into a complex society and I did not know what to expect. However, I had a goal of gaining my education and becoming a good teacher in my own country. I thought in my mind if one is thirsty, and goes to an ocean, he or she should never come out thirsty.

I also come from a culture different from most in the U.S. and I knew I would face challenges that would cause cultural mismatches requiring different perspectives, compromises, and approaches or problem solving skills. As I learned more about how African American culture impacts students to build my study, I realized we are all human beings from different cultures requiring torelance. We are all defined by different values and beliefs that are embedded in our own culture.

As a special education teacher in this society, I reflected on my experience over time and examined my homogeneity and relinquished inapplicable values while I acknowledged and embraced American culture. In the end, I became a valued, successful teacher who has very much enjoyed working with children with disabilities. One may, and wrongly so, think I am one middle class lucky black male who was raised with middle class values by middle class parents, but the opposite is true. Nevertheless, I have enjoyed working with high school and middle school children with disabilities, most of whom have been African American I evidently have some things in common with besides skin color. Although my interaction, comments, actions, and behavior with African American students may not cause racial issues, this lack of racial strife could be

92

viewed as being caused by my skin color. But, this is not so, because it is due to my willingness to learn about my students by tapping into my innate humanistic beliefs and values.

My success as a researcher will be judged by how well I gathered and then analyzed data from African American special education teachers to answer critical research questions matched to the findings of other high quality qualitative work found in the special education literature (Pugach et al., 2014). It is my belief, therefore, this work will be a significant contribution to the studies prior to this one that have been of help even in building my literature review and without which I could not have built a case to pave the way for this study material.

Data Analysis

Data were collected through interviews (Denzin, 2000). The interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed. I studied my data over and over. Themes were identified for better understanding of the cases (Creswell, 2007), and done in line with empirical data collection process (Ezzy, 2002) as well as Shank's (2002) thematic analysis process to account for all data collected to allow the theory to emerge. In essence, the authenticity of qualitative strategies took precedence; as Trainor and Graue (2014) put it, it is in the analysis where the core research questions are answered:

> The justification for the use of qualitative methodologies in special education
> research is inextricably linked to the types of questions qualitative research best
> answers. Research questions that attempt to answer *how* or *why* a process or
> phenomenon occurs within complex contexts, where variables are difficult to
> control and measure, are particularly well-suited to qualitative methods of

investigation. Qualitative methods are also useful in the examination of processes and phenomena where the perspectives of multiple stakeholders are, or are thought to be, central to our understanding and practice (p. 268).

I used Morse's (1994) step-by-step theorizing process aimed at signifying the study in order to allow the themes to emerge through coding, data management (Denzin, 2000), and the analysis of themes (Ezzy, 2002). I applied LeCompte and Preissle's (1993) qualitative repertoire to analyze the data into causal comparative, effective, and conceivable comparisons and contrasts of formed categories, then into a formal structured code (see Table 3).

I relied heavily on the direct, verbatim quotes of the participants to support my interpretation. Although the final product, contained in Chapter Four of this study, is representative of my interpretations of the data, I chose to include many of the actual text units themselves, rather than paraphrasing participants' words, because I wanted the reader to hear what the teachers said. In the presentation of results, however, I did not make many exceptions to this rule, except where I wanted clarity of the teachers' perceptions while maintaining the actual thought of their perceptions.

As themes began to emerge, it became imperative to revisit the data and determine the relationship among the themes and the ways those relationships would contribute to disproportionality while paying attention to what was said in the conversations, and observing my theoretical framework as it guided my analyses in this study.

I sparingly edited extraneous comments of the participants as I saw fit and omitted interview questions. I used brackets to signify clarification of the actual words

used by the participants and indicated the page and lines of the original transcribed data

containing the information of the participants. The actual words were indented before

the brackets and the lines with the names of the participants as shown. All participants'

words were used as spoken with their grammar intact without any attempt to correct the

errors in order to maintain the original meaning intended by the participants.

It should be noted the comments preceding the direct quotations of the

participants in Chapter Four should not be taken to be attempted links to the

discussions, but rather to make the reader understand the perceptions of the direct

quotations and to provide the rationale for my usage of the quotations.

Finally, in order to check for validity and integrity, one other independent

rater/researcher coded the data and then we compared the findings. I used this

triangulation process (Creswell, 2003) to authenticate the process I used to cluster

meaning and themes put together for conclusions from the material, in order to verify

repeatability of an observation, and to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the

phenomenon was being compounded (Denzin, 2000). I used the powerful research tool

of triangulation to facilitate and validate interpretations through a cross section of

various verification sources by combining and applying research methodologies of the

same phenomena. As Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) indicate, triangulation

is not limited to methodological paradigm, it can be data triangulation, investigator

triangulation, as well as theory triangulation. The independent rater looked and

analyzed the six transcribed data, designed themes and categories and we then

compared the themes before settling on the ones I used. Before I finally settled on the

themes and subthemes I used, I discussed them with a third rater with whom we analyzed the data before I proceeded to use them.

Data were also analyzed as well as underwent a horizonalization process where data have the same weight and work to develop non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements. The horizonalization process takes significant statements and/or quotes and treats them as having equal worth. This is a never ending process that provides unlimited possibility to data analysis and discovery. As a researcher therefore, I treated all information provided by my participants with equal worth and condensed it to the themes I used. I should emphasize in this respect that I read each data more than three times before I rested on the themes while periodically revisiting the transcripts for clarity as well as visiting with the participants themselves to confirm information. The study ended with results and finally discussions of the findings with implications, and future recommendations or direction.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions about disproportionality of African American students in special education and if cultural misunderstanding cause disproportionate representation of the African American students in special education. The results show the participants in agreement with the existence cultural misunderstanding. African American culture does not merely comprise communication and behavioral constructs as it is comprised by many other factors. Although the results showed what may deem obvious to other cultures, participants were convinced they are what defines African American culture and contended the failure to recognize these factors by educators of other cultures has resulted to a cultural misunderstanding about African American students. Data were collected using non-random criterion. The following research questions guided the collection and hence this study.

1. What is cultural misunderstanding?

2. Is disproportionate representation of African American students in special education caused by cultural misunderstanding?

3 Does cultural misunderstanding impact more upon African American male students or female students? If so, why or why not?

Research Question 1. What is Cultural Misunderstanding?

Three themes emerged to define cultural misunderstanding. First, educational authority misunderstands the cultural of black students. Second, cultural acceptance is needed to open educational opportunities. Third, the cultural mismatch results in different education and fewer opportunities.

I sought to answer this research question by asking the participants to explain cultural misunderstanding. I used their understanding together with my scholar definition depicted in my theoretical framework. As I was working on building this results section I contacted the participants through phone calls and e-mails to gain clarity as to what their understanding was about cultural misunderstanding. Emily, for example, said cultural misunderstanding between African American people and other cultures happen when they perceive other people are showing disrespect. She said African American young males are taught to be strong and so they are expected to show that strength in social places, which extend to the school environment. Therefore, when showing this strength they may be perceived as aggressive and mean. This then makes the African American student fight back because if they do not, the student will be perceived as weak. The participants acknowledged cultural misunderstanding exists. One theme and two sub-categories were used to deliver this question. They were centered on school authority under cultural acceptance and cultural mismatch as the supporting sub-categories.

Educational Authority Misunderstands Culture of African American Students

Educational authorities are responsible for planning education of school age children. Therefore, this theme emerged in answer to this question because the participants linked the authority to this cultural misunderstanding issue. According to Armand, cultural misunderstanding is when media or persons misrepresent African American culture in any manner possible. School authority uses the same stereotype against African American young peoples' cultural values to demean their intellectual abilities.

98

. . . this is unfortunate but due a large segment of our ethnicity the cultural

values are bent towards music rappers, pimps, illegal drug use and flashy or

socially clothing styles. Many of those homes are single parent homes where

dysfunctionality exist with lack of the proper nutrition, health care, educational

resources, structure and lack of male role models. Media often depicts African

Americans in a demeaning manner. Therefore, there is both a temptation and

practice of those in educational authority to engage or prefer less to the African

American than those who have experienced a more socially accepted lifestyle

and behavior of of standards set by Corporate America. This two-edged sword

causes perception to be skewed against abilities and potentials that

may otherwise exist in the African American student. (Armand, June 5, 2014).

Cultural Acceptance Needed to Open Educational Opportunities

Educational systems should not use the stereotypical media frenzy to punish

African American youths. Armand noted African American cultural acceptance is what

is needed to open opportunities for learning.

Therefore, what may be socio-typically true of this segment of our population

should need not be contrived as a stereotypical belief about what one can or

cannot do when afforded the same resources, expectations and opportunities of

all other cultures. (Armand, June 5, 2014).

Emily noted African American youths perceive they are being rejected

when denied freedom of expression of their culture.

African American especially male youths feel rejected when they are perceived

as aggressive and mean when they are in fact practicing their own culture in

school environment. (Emily, June 11, 2014).

Cultural Mismatch Results in Different Education and Fewer Opportunities

I used Cultural mismatch define further what cultural misunderstanding means

from the participants perspective and if the mismatch paved way to limited

opportunities for African American students. People from the same culture are unlikely

to have a cultural misunderstanding. When asked if she felt she was in a better position

as an African American teacher to understand African American students, Mwango said

she understood what the difference is to be treated differently which would minimize

misunderstanding. In reference to this, Mwango implied when one is different, the

application is you will find someone with whom you can compare.

I know what it's like to be treated different. Although somebody says are you

are a good child or that child acts good in my class, when it comes to academics

they get talked about. I never…level. When I was younger in elementary school

we went to lab as a class. You had ED pulled out to go to self-contained, but we

never got pulled out individually and if they did nobody knew about it. But, we

all went to reading lab together. We all learned to read together. That's how I

run my class. We are all on the ship together and we all sink or we all sail and

in order to sail we have to help each other. (Mwango, June 9, 2014)

What Mwango meant was she perceived as an African American teacher, she is

better placed to pilot a 'ship' carrying African American 'sailors'. Although Mwango

reported she knew what it is like to be treated differently, on the other hand she

contended there is not always going to be a cultural connection just by virtue of being an African American teacher to an African American child. My perception of Mwango's response when I conducted this interview is, it is a matter of mutuality. It will be up to the teacher to create the connection as well as the student to create that connection.

There is not always a connection. Just because a child is in with an African American teacher or a child is African American and is in an African American teacher's class, there is not always going to be a connection, not always. It's up to the teacher to earn the respect of the child. It's up to the child to earn the respect of the teacher and once that respect is lost or never earned there is going to be a problem with that child in that class for years to come. (Mwango, June 9, 2014)

Robina said she would understand African American students better because she is from the same cultural background. This underscores the cultural entity is a key factor in that those people who are not from the same culture may be considered outsiders to the events that define African American students. Thus cultural misunderstanding is more apparent with people of different cultural backgrounds.

Because I think we have the same culture so that really helps me to understand some of the things they may be going through, whereas somebody else that is not African American may not understand what they are doing versus we are going to understand because we did the same thing. (Robina, June 5, 2014)

Robina's perception is there is a cultural mismatch between races. Her claims are supported by Elijah, who also said even with the racial differences, we are all the

same. Elijah's historical argument was interesting in that, African American people were deprived of their culture for many years and with the geographical implication of the south allegedly not being part of the emancipation proclamation!

> Yes. Yes we have different cultures and one of the things that I think is we also have is bicultural. You are American and then you are whatever nationality you are. All right, whatever one and then this part in the middle, education, it's all American all right and I tell kids about stuff that's not in there and they are like what and you know I will tell them about the Emancipation Proclamation and they say well I know what that is it freed the slaves and I say, no it didn't free anybody. And they look at me and I say technically there was no slaves in the North. The Emancipation Proclamation freed all the people, but the south wasn't part of the United States at that time so it didn't technically free anyone because those people weren't part of the United States you see, so those little things like that. (Elijah, personal communication, June 9, 2014)

Even with biculturalism, African American people still have a culture that stands out as African American culture. As Elijah said above African American people have the same culture but contended they are also bicultural (Ogbu, 2004). During my interview with him, the biculturalism came up as in the meaning of homogeneity as well as heterogeneity. Elijah's position was although African American people have a different culture, they should not allow themselves to be judged by those cultural measures. No one culture is above the other, implying differences in culture have nothing to do with the way humans acquire education. It depends on the emphasis laid upon education by parents in the family, implying two parenthood is the piece that is

lacking in many African American families. Here is what he said in response to my question about the impact of culture on education acquisition.

> Yes very much so and it has a lot to do with that part about the two parents being at home and the parents stressing that education because they got educated or they had seen the importance of it and they don't want their child to have to work three jobs like they do and regardless of the situation and I have worked in different nationalities, different school districts. [Elijah, June 9, 2014).

African American students who are faced with the burden of "no one like me" as will be seen in research question 2, pose challenges to the teachers. The no one like me thinkers face challenges as well, both in school and within the community. Eddy said African American students feel they have to protect themselves in a way and this in and of itself is challenging for the teachers to deal with, the protected character and behavior of these students' cultural values.

> I think there are challenges that a lot of teachers have to deal with. In the African American culture, I think a lot of the African American kids, they feel like they have to protect themselves in a way, and sometimes that may manifest itself in a certain behavior, and, you have to know how to adjust and continue to respect that individual and then help them to continue to learn. (Eddy, June 9, 2014)

Sometimes it is imperative on the side of the educational practitioner to understand the cultural bias that might interfere with the practice.

…I think there are a lot of elements, but I think that, um, I think that maybe

there are other things involved, too. I think cultural understanding may be a

cause. (Eddy, June 9, 2014)

In this protection process, African American students, especially males, act out

these hidden behaviors mentioned by Eddy and may be called more aggressive and

attention seeking than females if they feel their cultural rights are violated.

African American boys compared to African American girls are a bit more

aggressive or loud or, you know, a bit more, sometimes attention…wanting

attention…and I think that may play a factor in why they are maybe thought as

maybe having special problems. (Eddy, June 9, 2014)

Culture may have something to do with the fact that African American males are

generally loud. Whenever this loud behavior occurs, people from other cultures think

there needs to be something done clinically, causing cultural misunderstanding.

If you're quiet…you can have a problem, but if you're quiet and you're a good

boy or girl, as some teachers would say, then you may pass through the cracks.

(laughs) But, if you're loud, which a lot of African American boys are, then

you'll be looked at as, ok, we need to do something with him, because he's

messing up the whole atmosphere of the whole program, so…yeah, so that, as

far as culture, that could be a big part of it. (Eddy, June 9, 2014)

In some situations where aggressive behaviors are exhibited, African American

students take the blame.

Anything that went wrong he got blamed for you know. Any type of trouble

that happened on the playground he got blamed for and things like that.

(Mwango, June 9, 2014)

Teachers who are indifferent may not know how to help students with this

behavior in their classrooms and may not be a good match with this kind of behavior on

a personal level. They need a culturally conducive methods to reach out to African

American students.

Sometimes, teachers may just see them as a number, and this is a goal, this is

what I have to do. There is so much pressure put on all teachers with their

deadlines they have to meet, and they…so they feel like, you know, I don't have

time to help you with your personal needs, you know…you can go to the

counselor for that, I'm just here to educate you… (Eddy, June 9, 2014)

Sometimes teachers don't want to be bothered so they rush into judgment by

giving a student a label. By giving them a label, Robina says, teachers may think in

their subconscious mind the problem has been solved. But, this makes it even worse for

African American students.

They are misunderstood and I think sometimes it is easiest for us not to have to

deal with that kid. We can put some kind of label on him so we have some

excuse for why they are acting the way they are acting instead of finding out the

real reason why they are acting that way… (Robina, June 5, 2014)

Robina adds that sometimes the behaviors the student exhibits may be treatable

without placement in special education.

105

Not put him in special ed. to treat the behavior, but treat the behavior and find

out what the behavior is and then treat that behavior. (Robina, June 5, 2014)

Oftentimes, African American males may experience bad treatment if there is no

one there to stand up for them and many of these cases end up in special education.

Most participants perceived African American educators were culturally in a better

position to stand up for African American students who were at risk for these

circumstances.

The number of students being placed on the special ed. program, I didn't like

that because most of them were African American males and they are kids and

I'm an adult so I pretty much went from being a teacher to being their lawyer.

Any time they got in trouble or an incident happened and they became involved,

I would step in as their lawyer. (Mwango, June 9, 2014)

Mwango perceives African American students may need African American

teachers to protect them.

They know who I am so, therefore, that will help them understand better what

my job is in protecting them. (Mwango, June 9, 2014)

Emily also shared similar conception of advocacy and protection towards

African American students by educators when they come across African American

students.

There was a time, a few times this year where I needed to be an advocate,

especially for one little boy who came to school, an African American little boy

a first grader. When he got to our school this year he had already missed a lot of

school. He could not even write the letters in his name. He could not identify

106

any of the letters. I felt like I really should have fought a little harder for that kid. Like I shouldn't have let the mom excuses and all of this stuff happen where the kid did not get his proper, he was not put on an IEP. He was eight, almost eight years old and still in first grade and barely knew the letters in his name or he didn't know the letters in his name. So I should have tried harder.

Armand indicted due to historical background, African American students may have a vested interest in people of their own color, because they share the same history and culture and will eliminate cultural misunderstanding. They, therefore, feel hopeful and may reckon with individuals from the same culture because of the "historical friction" that exist between them and other cultures.

I believe that when African American students can identify with a familiar face that gives them hope and unfortunately because of the historical friction between ethnic groups, African American students do not always acquiesce to members of other cultures, not all the time. Sometimes yes, but what I hear communicated with some African American students to those who are not of their same color. (Armand, June 5, 2014)

African American students perceive no one really understands them because they don't undergo the same circumstances and experiences surrounding their lives on the question about identity. Armand said that an African American educator stands a better chance of getting attention from African American students than a teacher from another race.

Or cultural background, they may say you are just a racist, but when they see me that eliminates that roadblock. So, therefore, they are placed in a position where they have maybe a bigger ear to listen to what I'm trying to tell them.

Armand's view underscores the fact that in order to be a better match, one has to come from the same background irrespective of whether the student is in elementary, middle, or high school. He was responding to the question about the level at which better cultural match will be observed.

I think that it can be a good match dependent upon the circumstances, dependent upon the background and experiences of that student, then certainly at times it may be made more favorable working with students who are in elementary, middle, or high school, if that is their neighborhood and that is their cultural background then you would have a better match.

On the question of the identification process, Armand indicated biases exist because African American students do not receive the same amount of services designed to deliver an unbiased identification label. For example, he indicated African Americans do not receive the proper labels given to other races. He said the reason why this happens is so the other races are spared the stereotype that comes with special education. Armand gave an example of Other Health Impairment (OHI) and 504, which are less detrimental.

The disparity I have seen is we use designations of what we are labeling. We label. What I have seen with African American students who have ADHD or ADD, they will be given a labeling of learning disability, but I have seen students of other cultures instead of giving that labeling of LD or ADD, not of

108

LD, they have the LD because they have ADD or ADHD then they are labeled

learning disabled, but I have seen students of other cultures, however, given

different labels such as OHI. (Armand, June 5, 2014)

Armand said there are different ways of looking at the labels designed for

special education purposes; but those more severe are given to African American

students, depending on who is handling the evaluation process.

So we have different ways of treating depending on who has the pencil, of

treating African Americans differently than other cultures…but because of

historical biases that still exist it is my belief that you have the mislabeling or

otherwise labeling that African Americans do not receive as those of other

cultures. So there you have it there.

According to Armand, labeling of special education has changed over time, but

he wondered why they applied more of those labels to African American students, as

seen in the continuation of the conversation from above. This is an indication of a

cultural stereotype.

So what they did there was labeling between they used to call them severe

profound and the score was 70, but what was decided is that these students if

they could no longer, if they did not reach a certain score they would have to be

identified as a slow learner.

Armand's response to the same question, if being an African American teacher

was a good match to an African American student, was astoundingly positive.

"Absolutely because the struggles that I went through as a child are common to other

students who are African American. The struggles are very similar." (Armand, June 5, 2014).

Elijah stated in sharp contrast with Armand's response when he was asked a similar question, if being an African American teacher was a better match for an African student.

No I don't and for the fact that… What I'm saying here is a lot of the kids now that are African American are from single parent homes. Now technically me growing up it would have been single parent, but my mother got remarried to a man in the military so you had that job security part right there. So I always had two parents.

Elijah's response was interesting and very detailed. He gave several reasons why he did not claim to be a good match just by virtue of the fact that he was African American. Although his claims may not be replicated among all African American teachers, there are many generalizable factors. Elijah's exclusionary reasons were not mainly centered on his ethnicity, but on how he was raised. He said poverty (which I will discuss later in this study) is the main reason why he can not be a good match as a teacher to African American students. Thus, he was not raised as a child of poverty.

A lot of the kids that I teach have a single parent. Either they live with mother or dad, but single parent and not just African American kids, but the ones that I do have they are single parents. And so even though my little joke to the kids is as a teacher I'm not poor, I'm po. I can't even afford to be poor. I'm just P.O. just po, po. But the kids they have a lot of other influences you know the internet, gangs, whatever the case may be and a lot of times they don't have that

motivation to go to college. I had that motivation to go to college because that

was something my parents wanted me to do, I always wanted to do and it was

just something I wanted to do to help out my life. I did not want to have

calluses on my hands. I didn't want to have to do manual labor and have

calluses, which I have lots of relatives like that.

Sometimes appearance can cause a cultural misunderstanding if the appearance

of the student in public may generally perpetuate the difficulties underlying his life

which are subject to portrayed in behaviors tantamount to cultural misconception.

Failure to recognize the behavior associated with the appearance, or linking the

behavior to the student's perceptual position may bring more harm than good. Robina

perceives in this conversation educators must understand children who are not cared for

and give them a chance to succeed.

Yeah and a lot of times I think people, other teachers of other cultures, when

they see the other students, they can even be a Caucasian student, they

automatically assume that you know that the kid is not cared about. But I think

an African American understands it better because we been down that path

where we have not always had everything. So when we look at a kid and we say

well their mom and dad is fine. Well my mom and dad was fine and I dress like

that!

Robina indicated the physical appearance does not really tell much about the

child's abilities like some researchers say. Often teachers miss the fundamental

academic skills masked by the behaviors demonstrated by children from low

socioeconomic backgrounds. They may lack the basic academic adeptness; albeit, they have the potential to succeed without special education services.

Research Question 2: Is Disproportionate Representation Of African American Students In Special Education Caused By Cultural Misunderstanding?

Two themes and five sub-themes, suggest disproportional representation of African American students in special education may be caused by cultural misunderstanding. First, the theme of "no people like me" (NPLM) with three sub-themes emerged as a cause leading to disproportional representation. School community challenges, differing expectations between educators and parents, and teacher/parent expectations emerged as supporting sub-themes. Second, "no talking school at home" and two supporting sub-themes emerged to describe the lack of conversation about school present in home of many African American families. Sub-themes of limited resources and parental educational role models contributed to families not talking about school at home.

Together these themes and sub-theses play a major role in cultural misunderstanding causing disproportionate representation of African American students in special education. The themes portrays what goes on in the community and families of African Americans that may effect cultural misunderstanding. African American students faced with these challenges, demonstrate behaviors subject to misconceived cultural image by which African American students are victimized.

No People Like Me

No people like me (NPLM) stood as one characteristic of African American youth. The notion about no people like me comes from the home into the community

and then the school environment. In answer to this research question, participants offered a variety of what they perceived constitutes cultural misunderstanding of African American people. Participants portrayed this image as a cultural difference in particular with Caucasian culture. I describe briefly what the participants said about this image and why they perceived this to be a cultural misunderstanding that may cause non-African American educators to misidentify African American students using one of the participants Armand as an example. I then used three sub categories about African American community which are, school community challenges, teacher/parent expectations and high expectations to further explore the participants' perceptions about disproportionality of African American students in special education.

I gathered from the participants African American students perceive they are different and if they (African American children) come to school with a "No people like me" attitude, according to participants, it then becomes the teacher's duty to bring this confused idea into play for the benefit of the child.

The concept of "No people like me" (NPLM) resulted from what participants described as challenges that exist in African American community educators need to make themselves aware of and use the opportunity to cultivate connection with African American students. Participants perceived it is important for educators to understand the structure of African American community in order to be competent, effective and caring teachers of African American students (Roberts, 2010).

The NPLM become even more apparent between African American students and Caucasian educators. But there are not many African American educators to whom African American students can relate. Armand described the trait of a role model I am

using for this study, needless to say he chose his own pseudonym 'Armand'. Armand said.

> Well yes the. I'm trying to think of, if we had more faces of educators that students could relate with then or relate to racially then student motivation may become higher or it may increase, but because of well there are some things the population of a town of course is. You look at the demographics. Okay the population of a town if you have more or if you have less African American professional educators then you don't have as great of a pool to pull from. But the second thing is that you are looking for those who are most qualified. Now the question is the ability to certify. (Armand, personal communication, June 5, 2014)

Armand also gave an explicit trajectory of what it means to beat the odds in an African American family. The views of Armand sound typical of any family in an affluent society. But, the truth of the matter is in an African American home, "beating the odds" is not a familiar phrase, because there are not many African American homes where the odds can be easily beaten. The perception about NPLM was brought about by different challenges as reported by the participants.

> Culturally, I would be identified as African American. Early on in life I began to discover that I had a good disposition or propensity with language. I also have some internal interests in the health fields and working with people who have difficulties. In fact, because of my familial background I have a sibling who has a disability. So these are some things that laid some early foundations of my interest in education. So being one who has grown up against growing up

having to beat the odds, I looked at other students that had disabilities as looking in a mirror somewhat, but because I was blessed with having the ability to do well in school, I saw that I would be able to be that anchor or be that rope of hope that would be able to help students that were struggling or just people in general that are struggling with life's issues. Because of my academics in school, I began tutoring as in junior high school and I was paid through a government program to be a tutor at a Catholic charity where I was able to assist young people and adults with their reading needs. So I have been involved in some sort of instruction, be it tutorial, pure tutoring, or in the employment of helping people learn from the age of about 12 or 13 years old. (Armand, June 5, 2014)

School/community challenges. The challenges African American youth face in the community and school environments cause certain behaviors. The participant said issues combating African American community are more than most educators are aware so much that the students from these communities will need teacher care. Teacher care will draw efforts from the community and school together (Bal, Kozleski, Schrader, Rodriguez, & Pelton 2014). The teacher in the classroom controls the environment and manages the critical activities to create an environment conducive for learning to control what may be perceived as a cultural misunderstanding behavior.

A parent can also to a large extent be in control of the events in a child's life that can affect academic outcome (McDonnall et al., 2012). If teacher, community, and parental efforts combined are non-existent, the students will not see the connection

115

between community and school and it condition does emerge as cultural behavior. For example, Eddy said,

> Yeah, I mean, that's a big part of it. I mean, my dad wasn't there for me and it made a big difference, because for the longest it was like I was trying to find out who I was, and I think it did hinder me a great deal, and you know, even in my adult life, but then, I thank God, because there are role models that we come in contact with that say, hey, you know, mentors… (Eddy, June 9, 2014)

Eddy's background as echoed here is as profound as other participants', like Armand, although he did not directly use the phrase 'beating the odds'. He said he had a mentor. The concept of 'No people like me' goes hand in hand with awareness on the part of the teacher who is in the position of teaching an African American child. For example, lack of awareness on the side of the educators about the student's background in order to design strategies not quick fixes lead to poor teaching that causes a student of color to have a poor academic foundation eventually and or potentially resulting in a child being classified as unable to succeed in the regular education environment unless intervention is sought. Special education is used as an option for those who are deemed unsuccessful. Eddy perceived schools have failed to create better connections with the community. Support should come from the schools and from the community. Schools should, if needed, link themselves to the community from where these students come.

> I mean, like, for instance, teachers…a lot of teachers encourage folks, yeah, teachers…ah, you know, many times you have uncles, a relative, distant…cousins, even next door neighbors. I mean, there are people in communities. I know, sometimes, people connect to different places, like, many

116

times people go to, like, recreation centers and stuff, but the whole community needs to be involved. (Eddy, June 9, 2014)

Often limited resources exist where African American students live. Armand argued due to unavailability of resources in the African American community, learning is not easily accessible, making the African American people, what he refers to as, "environmentally retarded!"

I think it is factual because of low socioeconomic background, limited resources, limited ability in their environment to access learning, some African Americans students have become environmentally retarded. Not that they didn't necessarily have the mind or what I would call the aptitude to do more, but because they did not have the resources, they were left behind. (Armand, June 5, 2014)

Community involvement makes a significant impact on a child's life. The well-known quote from an unknown author says it all: "It takes a village to raise a child." Emily expands on this concept as she stated in decades prior to today the whole community raised the children. "…and back then the whole community did literally help raise your kid. If you were doing something in a store or at the park or doing anything that was..." (Emily, June 11, 2014)

Some practices shared by participants may not be feasible in this time and age, but are nonetheless important cultural values, and help significantly to better understand how far some communities have come. What may be considered finking, or snitching in modern times, may have been seen as a practice of responsibility to the community in

general to take care of each other was held as a cultural value in African American community.

> Yeah so if you were doing something that was not acceptable and someone in
> your neighborhood saw it they could spank you or they would tell you to cut it
> out and when they would go tell your parents your parents would kind of take
> their side because they know they wouldn't come home telling fibs on you so
> you would get into trouble so you were held accountable. (Emily, June 11,
> 2014)

Emily contends awareness of the community affairs young people are involved in is paramount. Activities of all kinds should draw everyone's attention and adults should be used as watchdogs on the youths' activities.

> Being aware of what was going to happen because somebody was going to tell.
> They would tell so that made a big difference. In my school, in my elementary
> school, which I just absolutely loved, all of the kids were kept active. Like
> either you were on some type of a gymnastic team or sports team or debate team
> or some art team. (Emily, June 11, 2014)

Emily's community support liaison had a major impact, not just socially, but as well as routinely intellectual activities, such as playing computer games, which are essentially mind building.

> Yes a lot of support. Even we had a recreation center. At the recreation center
> we could go like, instead of going out and hanging out in the street, you would
> go to the recreation center where there was basketball courts and tennis courts

118

and pool tables and ping pong tables and computers or just games. (Emily, June 11, 2014)

The behavior Emily describes here is what creates awareness in the community and helps in civilizing a society. She said some discussions would be academically inclined, especially regarding keeping grades up so one could stay a head in school activities.

Yes and like your friends wanted you to be able to hang out with them so they would help you. They would be happy to give you extra help…They kept you very active and very involved. Yeah and your grades had to be up to be on those teams. (Emily, June 11, 2014)

Mwango stated sometimes two children, one Caucasian and the other African American, may be showing the same kind of behavior but an African American student will be singled out for special education process without looking at perceived weaknesses of both individual students. That means a student who had landed in a special education class due to some erroneous circumstances would face this teacher with this preconceived notion about their success causing a cultural misunderstanding.

If a Caucasian child is displaying the same behaviors or academic concern as an African American child, why is it that the African American child is chosen first? Why not pull them up together and see if they can help each other first and then go from there, but in today's society I have noticed that teachers automatically take the African American child, start assessing him and have already given him the pre label of special ED (Mwango, June 9, 2014)

Differing expectations between educators and parents. Participants stated sometimes the main issue lies between the relationship of the teachers and parents. Expectations of teachers and the African American parents are not the same. It is like they are sailing in different boats hoping to arrive at the same destination, like in the case of Emily who said.

> I'm very comfortable, but I see the problem not so much with the kids and the teachers, I see it more in the teachers and the parents. That's where the real, real issue and concern is, yeah.

> Parent teacher relationship is paramount in any child's education. Whenever the parent-teacher relationship is severed, the child is the one in the middle and is the one suffers most.

> That's right and really like the problem for me is if I have to say there is a problem it is more so of the parent and teachers relationship opposed to the teacher and the students relationship. (Emily, June 11, 2014)

> Sound progress of a child's education depends on the parent-teacher relationship. When parental participation is low in the child's education, the performance of the child will be low as well. Some children in African American homes grow up without any experience of seeing parental care or, rather, parental involvement in his or her education projecting the behaviors that cause cultural misunderstanding.

> Well as soon as the kid sees what the parent is interested in that's what they want to do good at or that's what they want to put forth their best effort at so when the parents show that they are really interested in how the kid is doing and sincerely working to help them to make progress, the kids put more effort, the

teachers are more happy, and then you start seeing growth. (Emily, June 11,

2014)

Parent-teacher relationships can yield up to 75% performance on the student's

academic growth. Whether or not this data is empirically supported, Emily's statement

carries a lot of weight.

Yeah and a lot of times you are right about the teachers will tend to water down

the curriculum or the expectation is not as high for this kid as it might be for

another kid, but the relationship between the parents and the teachers is like 75%

of how well the child is going to progress… (Emily, June 11, 2014)

Schools should not exist as a separate entity with its own set of rules and

standards, but these standards should be echoed and supported by the community with

high expectations; for example, in what Emily said, "I was raised in an environment

where expectations were very high." (Emily, June 11, 2014).

If a child perceives the one who is in control of his/her education does not hold

him/her to the highest regard, and if the teacher happens to be of another color or race,

the process only plays a role of perpetuating discriminatory education (Skiba et al.,

2005). Parents should also be in control of the child's best effort and progress: Emily

said neighborhood responsibility can play a role in a child's good and bad behavioral

efforts, such as to admonish bad behaviors and uphold good ones for the sake of the

community and the individuals.

Yeah so if you were doing something that was not acceptable and someone in

your neighborhood saw it they could spank you or they would tell you to cut it

out and when they would go tell your parents your parents would kind of take

121

their side because they know they wouldn't come home telling fibs on you so

you would get into trouble so you were held accountable. (Emily, June 11, 2014)

On the other hand Mwango asserted that she became a teacher, because she was

raised by teachers. This assertion could not be generalized, but serves as a good

argumentative example about "people like me." Mwango's experiences were anchored

in her parental efforts and she was inspired to become a teacher by those opportunities

provided to her by her family.

Well my uncle/dad he was a teacher. His uncle and four of his sisters were all

teachers so I grew up around nothing but teachers and I remember when I was

little I would wake up, get my clothes on and start teaching. I would play school

all day.

Sometimes teachers are not aware of what the students have on their back. In

some African American homes the children are their own parents. These children

perceive they are alone in those predicaments. Their expectations about school are their

own as well as other responsibilities, like in what Emily said, "Well one thing we

learned and it was about African American kids and we learned that it was true about

Hispanic kids too, that sometimes the kid is put in an adult situation" (Emily, June 11,

2014)

Emily's statement underscores the notion children who find themselves in adult

situations will find it difficult to apply those parental decisions as students in school.

Children who assume the responsibilities of safety and physical wellbeing of their

siblings expect to be treated with respect and the same amount of accountability and

reliability. She continued to say,

Yeah they are put in adult situations like they may have to go home and they

may have to prepare dinner and they may have to babysit. They may have to,

you know, something happened and they have got to be the one to make the

decision. They got to make the call to make sure that their siblings are safe and

okay so when those kids go to school and then all of a sudden the teachers are

treating them like some little kid that don't know anything.

Students from poverty function as their own parents. In many instances, they act

as parent to the adult in the household (Payne, 1996). We use different voices to

communicate, described here by Payne as the child voice, the adult voice, and the

parent voice. Children of poverty know only two voices: the child voice and the parent

voice. The adult voice that allows for the opportunity to negotiate situations is non-

existent. The dominant voice for a child who plays parent at home as Emily describes

here is the parent voice.

Yeah don't treat me like that and then the teachers look at when the kid's kind of

stand up for themselves that they are being disrespectful so it just creates kind of

like a vicious circle. So I really think that the teachers need to be a whole lot

more aware of that child's home life or situation or what their expectations are at

home so when they come to school they have a better understanding of well the

child didn't sleep last night because mom went to work or the mom wasn't home

so the child stayed up all night and had to get up in the morning and cook

breakfast and the child is tired.

High expectations not given African American students. Sometimes, high

expectations may be all that is needed to boost an African American child's education.

The issue of high expectations was shared by Emily. Emily shared the same views as Elijah in response to the question about racial match, only that hers were "no nonsense" reasons. She said teaching is about expectations. If the expectations of a teacher are high, the student will perform at that level. It they are low, is what the student will produce. That is what makes a difference. She indicated if a teacher raises expectations on the children they serve, it does not matter what race you are or what race the child you are serving is from.

> Especially not this year. Not this year for me it was not, because my expectation was extremely high for the kids. You know when I came back to school and I was really no nonsense and really firm and the kids were more just wanting to be kind of like I can just come in and I'll start working on my work just when I feel like it and whatever and then there was this new teacher there, young, Caucasian, pretty teacher who was much more relaxed okay you can have a few extra minutes on the iPad if you want. All of my kids, African American kids wanted to go there to be with her because it was just it was more easy, more light, expectations were a little less there where over here with me I'm like okay take out the books, turn to page this, we are going to study this and I was just really firm so really it's just the kids interest is what they are interested in and what they want to do. Like learning has to be. (Emily, 11, 2014)
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> Indeed, in some instances, schools generally put more emphasis on skills and

efforts in a high concentration of African American students. According to Emily, this is generally true if high performance is expected on high stake tests.

I was telling you earlier today that because of the subgroups that we have that the state of Oklahoma said look you have this many African American kids in your school building. Because of that number you shouldn't have so many that is falling below. Yeah the level of progress. You need to do something to change that and when they gave us money and they told us they were watching us we started focusing in on those kids, deliberately focusing in on those kids, making sure they were getting extra tutoring, making sure they brought their homework back, making sure the communications were strong with the parents. The next year our test results came back with a 20% increase. (Emily, June 11, 2014)

Some participants argued since most children start school in a regular environment, everything should be tried before a child is classified. Armand, for example, cited some educators' work may look good on paper, but are not diligent enough to support their results, which do not come from high expectation efforts.

The educators are the ones, those are the teachers and the regular education environment see because prior to going in special ed. everyone is in a regular education environment, but unless the educator is willing to put forth the effort. Now they just may be put down on paper well they did this, they did that, I tried this and that. Yes, but did you try the thing that worked and were you diligent? Did you with all fidelity do those things that were necessary to avoid over-identification of students needing special ed? (Armand, June 5, 2014)

Instead of raising the expectations of the African American students and holding them accountable to those expectations, some educators are not informed of the behaviors typical to African American students so they can use them to their advantage.

> Yes those are the cultural behaviors, those teachers need to become better informed. Those educators who are informed of those behavioral issues and inappropriate language and practices by African American students should use that as a teaching moment to correct those behaviors. Right and, therefore, they would not overreact towards the student who has special needs or they can use what we call teaching moments. If they say things that are inappropriate that is within their background, that is a teaching moment to retrain that student's vocabulary so that they can become better adjusted and not just throw the baby out with the bathwater is what we call it. (Armand, June 5, 2014)

A good teachable moment of excellence can last a long time of a student's life. Emily said she can recall her school had excellent teachers.

> We had excellent teachers and excellent principals then and just the way we were the expectations of the school and just how interesting and fun the teachers made learning that is what encouraged me… (Emily, June 11, 2014)

Emily said better teaching must be maximized when having a large proportion of African American students in a school due to this general notion that African American students need more work to move up academic ladder. All the participants said there is an increased risk of African American students being held at a lower standard and that the risk increases with non-African American educators.

Often there is this perceived notion the more African American students there are in a school, the more likely the majority are falling behind on the academic ladder. "…look you have this many African American kids in your school building. Because of that number you shouldn't have so many that is falling below." (Emily, June 11, 2014)

Mwango, on the other hand, noted African American students were not given the same opportunities as their Caucasian counterparts. When probed about if and why she perceived African American students were not given the same opportunity, Mwango indicated with an African American together with a student of a different race, the acts that come out of the two races are weighted differently because of the discriminatory level of expectations placed on African American students. Thus, they are more likely than not to be singled out for evaluation for special services even in a situation where both the African American and the Caucasian student were expressing the same act or behavior in the same manner.

> Yes, I do because you heard the Proverbs you can't choose a book by its cover. You cannot base a child's academic performance on the first three weeks of school. I mean it's just not possible. They are in a new environment, they are with new teachers. We don't know as teachers if you don't follow that child all day, you don't know what they are going through during the course of time when they are away from you. There are certain criteria that a student must show in order for there to be a concern about that child's academic [...] If a Caucasian child is displaying the same behaviors or academic concern as an African American child, why is it that the African American child is chosen

first? Why not pull them up together and see if they can help each other first

and then go from there, but in today's society I have noticed that teachers

automatically take the African American child, start assessing him and have

already given him the pre label of special ed. before the child that's going

through the three tiers. That's not fair. (Mwango, June 9, 2014)

Mwango's perception is if African American students were viewed and held at

the same level of expectations as their peers of different races, they would be less likely

to be processed to enter special education and this, she said, would cut down

disproportionate representation of African American students in special education.

That will cut down on the disproportionate number of African Americans

because the level of expectation in life in general is nowhere as high as the peer

groups in other nationalities. It's not. (Mwango, June 9, 2014)

Every educator should hold all students on the same level of expectation of

academic success without discrimination based on race, nationality, gender and sex.

We as educators need to take the time to understand each and every child and

expect the same level of academic success from each and every child regardless

of the nationality, race, economic status or gender. (Mwango, June 9, 2014)

Mwango's perceived beliefs are that, every child can learn given the same

opportunity and tools.

If you read the literature textbooks they have written that it plays a high

standard. In my opinion, it doesn't because I believe any child can learn

regardless of what side of town they come from. Their parents economic

situation they have placed … McDonalds versus Chesapeake, I just … on the

child because mom chooses to go to a job she enjoys versus a job that is going to be stressful. Once you start bringing stress into the home, it affects the child's academics. I'm sorry; I have seen it for years.

No Talking School at Home

As the participants told their stories from an African American stand –point, talking about school became a more feasible theme. If talking about school does not happen often at the home, the African American students would not see the importance of school and hence there will be school failure and when school failure occurs, what we then see is the cultural behavior of African American students which in the end causes cultural misunderstanding and finally placement into special education. One would expect when children return home from school, conversations about school, homework, the school day and even following up from on the previous day at school will take place.

These conversations occur in typical modern American homes. It is encouraging to the students for a parent or guardian to show concern for and interest in their work daily. In fact, conversations at homes are important, but, how often does this conversation happen in a family? Because of busy schedules, it is not always possible even in an affluent family. Talking of school at home might sound ideal but not in every situation at all times. During my interviews, with the participants, I gathered many events that happen in an African American family occupy most of their conversations and trump education.

Limited resources make talking of school at home non-existent. Armand stated because of limited resources, and a limited number of educators in an African

129

American community, school motivation takes the 'back seat'. Among the front line events in African American homes, education certainly does not punctuate the daily lives of African American students. Limited resources ranging from materialistic and humanistic affect a home where school and other related conversations would be apparent, and a lack thereof, makes the conversation obscure.

> […]limited resources, limited ability of in their environment not to access learning, some students African Americans have become environmentally retarded…if we had more faces of educators that students could relate with then or relate to racially then student motivation may become higher or it may increase, but because of well there are some things the population of a town of course is… (Armand, June 5, 2014)

Matters of performance about school or discussion of what happens at school are mere conjecture. Armand indicated due to limited resources, accessing other public facilities for education opportunities is a challenge. For example, the means to get to a public library and read is in most cases unavailable, and there is often not literature at home. "[…] because without the resources and income to access let's just say getting to the library to read. Your parents don't have a car to get you there". (Armand, June 5, 2014).

Talking about school at home will cause realization there will be literature required to make such conversations a reality. School conversations should focus on academic achievement or struggles and what will be done to improve. Literature at home as a source to enhance schoolwork is an integral part of making productive conversations. Education accessibility at home is generally affected by limitations

130

caused by economic conditions that prevent acquisition of education materials. For example, most families do not have computers, and as Armand said above, many do not have the means to access them in public facilities.

> That puts you at a disadvantage. Buying materials from stores. Owning a computer at home so those who are economically impoverished don't have the same means to accessing education. Literature at home, as well as those who are middle class or upper classes. (Armand, June 5, 2014)

Factors for advancing a pro school atmosphere in the homes such as interest groups, availability of literature, and accessibility to facilities to create an environment where African American children will see the importance of education were largely lacking at home. Another example is, what Armand indicated, the failure of the system for African American families of poverty. Children living in poverty are made to understand they need to behave in such a manner that does not jeopardize monetary resources available to them. This is sadly true according to Armand even if the alleged disability is not legitimately verifiable.

> Yeah, and the reason why I say they are imprisoned is because when you have a disability, that allows your family to receive funds for you financially. Now if the student is intellectually able to track along with the regular education environment this is the issue here. Yes so that is an unfortunate factor because of poverty. And sometimes unfortunately students from poverty backgrounds have been imprisoned in the system by their own families. (Armand, June 5, 2014)

When students are put in adult situation at the home, they have the choices and school activities may not one of them.

Yeah they are put in adult situations like they may have to go home and they may have to prepare dinner and they may have to babysit. They may have to you know, something happened and they have got to be the one to make the decision. They got to make the call to make sure that their siblings are safe and okay so when those kids go to school and then all of a sudden the teachers are treating them like some little kid that don't know anything. (Emily, June 11, 2014).

Parental/educational role models affect how school is viewed. Another aspect of discussion that came up was parental contribution toward school efforts. As stated previously Armand indicated the system has created a conditional failure in African American families. A child of poverty is faced with parenting that does not favor the child's educational efforts. Economic needs of the family are protected even if they violate the child's rights to educational needs. It is unfortunate, therefore, for a child to be conditioned to perform poorly as Armand indicated: "Are parents trying to push students to not perform as well or are they begging the system to keep their child in the system because they are getting money".

Poor parenthood is a danger to child development. Poor parenting from young, uneducated mothers can be even greater issue. According to Robina, young African American women who are growing up with their children, have other influences. Like Armand, Robina said simple monetary influences would cause young women to make decisions that do not benefit their school-aged children. Some teachers may ask parents to make those decisions based on economic needs not the child's educational future. As Robina indicated

132

We don't have a lot of mothers that are not like when I had my kids I was older. We have a lot of mothers that are having kids at 13 and 14 so they are actually growing up with them. So when their kids start acting up and they go and say we need to put them in special ed. and they say well yeah and the teacher will throw out you can get a check, because I have heard teachers say that, you will get a check. Yeah the mother is going to grasp that for the money. I'm going to get some money for my kid being special ed.

Family school talk can be affected by having a father at home. Like other participants, Robina said a father in the home makes a huge difference. Most behavior issues young African American men are attributable to the absence of their fathers from home. She said that the main reason for the absence is either the father was killed or is in prison. In a home where a father is in prison or killed for whatever reasons, education may not be the main object of discussion as Robina described:

Because you have to understand, if you really look at the statistics and you look at it and you look at a lot of these African American young men or boys that are placed in special ED, I bet you their father is not around, they have either been killed or are in prison or they just don't come around.

Elijah on the other hand said indicated he had dealt with children from single parent homes and argued he focuses on the current conditions of here and now; however, single parenthood can easily make a child display certain behaviors which may be misunderstood. Elijah said:

What I'm saying here is a lot of the kids now that are African American are from single parent homes. Now technically me growing up it would have been

133

single parent, but my mother got remarried to a man in the military so you had that job security part right there. So I always had two parents. A lot of the kids that I have single parent. Either they live with mother or dad, but single parent and not just African American kids, but the ones that I do have they are single parents.

Elijah said his family talked about school, and without his two parents, he could not imagine how he would have made it. Faced with challenges from children without two parents at home and who are exposed to elements that interfere with education in their lives, Elijah stated teachers are faced with the task of making changes in a child's life. Elijah indicated that motivation for school in a home with only one parent is not easily achievable as in a home without both parents,

But the kids they have a lot of other influences you know the internet, gangs, whatever the case may be and a lot of times they don't have that motivation to go to college. I had that motivation to go to college because that was something my parents wanted me to do, I always wanted to do and it was just something I wanted to do to help out my life. I did not want to have calluses on my hands. I didn't want to have to do manual labor and have calluses, which I have lots of relatives like that.

Elijah said noted sometimes in African American families, parents do not see the benefits of education, so they are not instrumental in their own children's education, and this same attitude continues across generations. He said the focus would shift into efforts that never come to fruition. For example, sports and music have often negatively shaped African American families into thinking that each young man can become a star.

The few African American people that have become successful in those industries have really changed the dynamics and sense of belonging into a different culture centered on sports and music.

> For whatever reason, they didn't see the benefits of an education, which leads to the children not seeing the benefit. It makes a cycle that continues on then their kids can't. That's the first important thing and that they don't see, for most minorities African Americans especially, the importance all right. They think everybody can be Michael Jordan everybody can. You know be an athlete. (Elijah, June 9, 2014)

In the end, we find millions of young African American male youths chasing a dream that will be almost impossible to achieve and without realizing there is more to success than being in sports or music. Elijah gave an estimate of one out of ten million people to make the professional sports teams. This means that one in ten million children hope to have fulfilling lives by joining professional sports. "But what we find is that 1 in 10 million people make it to the NBA". (Elijah, June 9, 2014)

Young African American males may be subjected to special education interventions due to conditions such as failure to have proper direction and the absence of both parents. In addition, Robina said it might also be due to their aggressive nature emanating from not having a father in the home. Thus, they are more likely than African American females to be placed in special education.

> I think that's why a lot of African American boys are put in. Because you have to understand, if you really look at the statistics and you look at it and you look

at a lot of these African American young men or boys that are placed in special

ED, I bet you their father is not around… (Robina, June 5, 2014)

Eddy said that he could equate himself with other African American children who are poor, living in conditions such as having only one meal a day. That did not stop him from excelling. However, he also indicated had his older sister, who not only talked about school but also graduated from college. Eddy noted even concerned neighbors- and church members can be of help in shaping struggling young people.

So…but that didn't stop me from excelling. You know, I had an older sister that

had gone to college and stuff and she really majored in making sure that we

studied. Now, all my siblings didn't excel as well as I did, but I desired to do

better and so, um, I think… I had a sibling that said, "You know, you can make

it, you can do it", and I think that encouraged me. It's important to have

some…someone, if it's someone at your church or some family member or a

next door neighbor to just say, "I have faith in you, you can do it", and I think

no matter what your poverty level is, just that, and hard work and determination,

any student can make it.

Eddy indicated community would be involved in a child's education in many ways. Talking about school with people besides close family members can help one build connections with other people in the neighborhood or in the community who interact with daily lives of youths and who care about school. However, this often is not the case with African American students and the result is cultural misunderstanding that leads to special education placement.

I mean, like, for instance, teachers…a lot of teachers encourage folks, yeah,

teachers…ah, you know, many times you have uncles, a relative,

distant…cousins, even next door neighbors. I mean, there are people in

communities. (Eddy, June 9, 2014)

Eddy implied involvement in children's educational lives this days is largely

lacking in the African American communities.

I know, sometimes, people connect to different places, like, many times people

go to, like, recreation centers and stuff, but the whole community needs to be

involved. You know, business leaders, or, you know…take a time when you see

a child anywhere, you know, just say, "hey young man, how are you doing in

school?" I know, there's a video place, not…right down the street from where I

am, but they give free videos to students that are making A's, so, you know, it's

always so many things the community can do to get involved.

That's the way it was.

Elijah also emphasized the importance of school without reservations. He said

later there is always a way out of circumstances that seem to be an obstacle to good

education. "I don't care how hard it is, it's important for you to get that education."

(Elijah, June 9, 2014)

Elijah's illustration indicated his parents' intervention was very instrumental to

his success. He believes very strongly that having two parents in a home, makes a

child's school life more than just an eventual reality.

Well, that double-parent thing helps, but what also helps is a lot of is, is there a

way out? Some of them never get to that point to even think that there is a way

137

out of their circumstance. You know, I live mother working all of the time doing all of this, how I can get out of this circumstance so I won't live it and I don't think a lot of kids realize, black, white whatever that a parent wants better for their child. Until they become parents and then it's very late. I'm a parent now and I didn't break that cycle. You know, I didn't break that cycle. I'm getting into trouble. I'm having to work extra, extra hard, calluses on my hands; I had to do manual labor. You know I can't use my brain at all. Use your brain. Do something that you don't have to go out and sweat every day. I can go to work every day in an air conditioned place. A lot of them don't see that. They see the struggle that their parents had and they don't think that they can get any better and education helps you get better.

Emily stated many African American homes are headed by grandparents who may not be instrumental in promoting academic success, let alone being aware of what happens in school. Emily pointed out children's interaction with grandparents might not be helpful education; implying grand parenting is exhaustive when applied to grandchildren. Some grandparents and even mothers, leave their children alone, eliminating the chances of talking about school at home hence cultural behaviors that lead to misunderstanding.

Yeah a lot of them are raised by grandparents. A lot of kids might have both parents, both parents might work and the kid might just be on the computer all of the time or doing things that are not where they are not learning things that are going to help them in school. (Emily, June 11, 2014)

Sometimes, parents and children have to deal with extraordinary or life-threatening circumstances. Parents fail to protect their children from predators to whom they are related. Thus making it difficult for the child to function normally. "They have not eaten any food. He or she may have been raped by the mother's boyfriend. So that the momma can get some crack or some drugs". (Armand, June 5, 2014).

Although some of the issues are not African American family mores, Armand's perception is African American students lack the necessary interventions prior to receiving educational measures or evaluations. These interventions should focus on understanding the child's background to eliminate cultural misunderstanding. He said focusing on the African American students' current issues without understanding prior causes, and giving them arbitrary labels deemed to warrant reception of benevolent education without thought of underlying reasons, do more harm than good. Armand makes a compelling case. That is, education systems fail to recognize the moral etiquette of African American students.

> So you have children that are going through these kinds of things so do they need help, yes. But does that say that intellectually they need to be labeled as someone that needs special ED? Is that what we do to individuals of other populations that have needs? No, there are other places out there that they have counseling agencies that they are referred to, but they don't start testing these kids to see if they have learning disabilities necessarily, but they get them psychological help. (Armand, June 5, 2014)

Without a father in the home, a male African American child like any other, will take a while to find himself. Eddy stated with a father figure in one's life, one can be successful and chances of cultural misunderstanding would be abated.

I mean, my dad wasn't there for me and it made a big difference, because for the longest it was like I was trying to find out who I was, and I think it did hinder me a great deal, and you know, even in my adult life, but then, I thank God, because there are role models that we come in contact with that say, hey, you know, mentors. (Eddy, June 9, 2014)

Research Question 3: Does Cultural Misunderstanding Impact More Upon African American Male Students Or Female Students? If So, Why Or Why Not?

One theme and two sub-themes suggest cultural misunderstanding impacts African American males more than females. First, the theme I Will Protect My Image is supported by the sub-these of family image and personal image. Together they interact with the results that cultural misunderstanding impacts African American males more than females. I sought to answer this research question by examining the participants' responses about their perceptions on disproportionality issues about African American male youths. The results show consistency with earlier studies about African American youths and special education (Cockley, 2011; Hopkins, 1997 & Smith, 2002).

I Will Protect My Image

The idea of image protection was hatched from the participants' views about how much educators know about African American students. All participants indicated there is so much one can know, depending on the relationship he or she has as an educator develop with the African American student. I looked at family image and

individual image of the students. The image issue affected African American male students more than it did female students. African American male image protection is a norm in African American community. The result showed African American males have a cultural duty which immensely affect their behavior. Cultural misunderstanding of this behavior is the root cause of why we have more of them in special education than their female counterparts as shared in the following examples by the participants in the two categories that will be discussed.

Family image. A good number of African American families are matriarchal (Minkler & Fuller-Thomas, 205). A matriarchal home in an African American family has different dynamic structures. For example, African American males from these homes are more outspoken and more vocal resulting to cultural misunderstanding which in turn causes disproportionality in special education. I need to reiterate that participants perceived being aggressive and vocal characteristics are cultural behaviors of African American males. As Emily stated

> Well I guess you have got to kind of really look into the family dynamics of that kid like are they at home with a single parent because usually if it is a boy at home with a single parent he is going to be more outspoken, more vocal.

Educators need to be aware these dynamic structures come into play in a classroom and the way they can tell is by asking the students themselves, as Emily indicated:

"You have to ask them you know just ask them."

Sometimes educators may not get all the answers depending on the relationship they have with their students. Emily stated many African American families will not

want what is going on in the home to be passed on to other people, and in these cases, professional repertoire or educational needs have no influence whatsoever. The child is told not to trust anybody, as noted in what Mwango said "It's none of your business. A lot of the parents will tell them, you don't go out of this house and tell them people what's going on here."

This finds educators in circumstances that will not be resolved unless connection and a good relationship is created to have a breakthrough into the lives of these youths, as Emily indicated:

> But when it comes to the kids you know you just have to establish a relationship or understanding of what they are going through. The teachers need to know and find out. Is the child at home with the grandparent? Is it two parents at home or is it one parent at home or are there parents of the same sexuality at home?

Students from single families have less motivation for school and lots of other influences. They have less motivation to go to college. Elijah stated his parents gave him the motivation to go to college. Most single-parent families lack this kind of effort. Elijah implies the function of a home has to do with both parents. Strong parenting by educated parents is what a child needs to be successful. However, teachers can fill the gaps as well playing a double-edged sword, not to allow other influences in their lives to get in the way of learning.

> A lot of the kids have a single parent. Either they live with mother or dad, but a single parent and not just African American kids, but the ones that I do have they are single parents. And so even though my little joke to the kids is as a

teacher I'm not poor, I'm po. I can't even afford to be poor. I'm just P.O. just po, po. But the kids they have a lot of other influences you know the internet, gangs, whatever the case may be and a lot of times they don't have that motivation to go to college. I had that motivation to go to college because that was something my parents wanted me to do, I always wanted to do and it was just something I wanted to do to help out my life. (Elijah, June 9, 2014)

Oftentimes, situations that happen in learning environments may not start at the classroom. Mwango contended most acts we see in schools among African American students have a cultural baseline, which is linked to the homes. "…understanding of the culture relates to the home environment. It always starts at home and if the home is not solid the child comes to school and is not ready to learn." (Mwango, June 9, 2014)

If the mother and father are not educated, the student is going to struggle in the academic areas. Mwango brought this discussion as a key factor for educators to note in their intervention with students that are struggling. The indication here is that the parents who are educated will have the will, desire, and the ability to help their children in order to minimize the signs of academic struggle; although, the generalizability of this theory remains obscure. "Once again, it comes from the home and mom and dad are not well educated then the child is going to struggle. They may need a little bit of extra help, but that child is going to struggle." (Mwango, June 9, 2014)

Asked if there are some misidentifications that come with certain behaviors that are far from academic or not perceptual, Armand indicated there are some non-academic behaviors that he has noted during his teaching tenure that should not be considered at all when seeking special services for needy students.

143

Yes that should not justify a person being identified in special … That could

just have to do with a dysfunctional home where you have an absence of

parenting. I know many young African American men are very bitter because of

no father in the home.

In some cases, there is a major underlying issue a student may not know how to

relate to, but may act out. Impatient school educators may never know what the reasons

are for the student to behave in such ways. A lot of times, said Robina, they may not

need special education to fix whatever is going on in the child's life, but they put them

there anyway.

And a lot of times they don't need to be put in special ed. because if a kid's

mother died of course they are going to act out for maybe a year or two because

their mother died! They don't have their mother anymore, but that doesn't mean

they are ED, they are emotionally disturbed because they are acting out.

In another point of view, Robina argues there is yet another image in a young

family and that is, for instance, a young mother who does not understand the rules of

education may think some special education classifications come with monetary

benefits in the form of Social Security or otherwise. In a case like this, the young parent

will choose to go with this incentive, which does not benefit the educational needs of

the child.

I think not all of them. I'm not saying all of them. Just because you come from

low economical background does not mean, but I think a lot of them, I think in

today's society because we have a lot of young mothers. We don't have a lot of

mothers that are not like when I had my kids I was older. We have a lot of

mothers that are having kids at 13 and 14 so they are actually growing up with them. So when their kids start acting up and they go and say we need to put them in special ed. and they say well yeah and the teacher will throw out you can get a check, because I have heard teachers say that, you will get a check. Yeah the mother is going to grasp that for the money. I'm going to get some money for my kid being special ed. Yep, I want him in special ed. (Robina, June 5, 2014)

This monetary idea was shared by Armand, who cited this as a big problematic influence, which indeed does not serve the educational needs of the child. He said some parents may help push the children towards the opposite direction, begging the system to pave the way into staying their course so that they can get the money leaving the children entangled as they are caught in between. He said although these students are intellectually able to handle the regular education environment, they are apprehensive of the fact that they are not getting anything else besides education.

Yeah and the reason why I say they are imprisoned is because when you have a disability that allows your family to receive funds for you financially. Now if the student is intellectually able to track along with the regular education environment this is the issue here. Are parents trying to push students to not perform as well or are they begging the system to keep their child in the system because they are getting money. Yes, yes or Social Security funds through disability income. (Armand, June 5, 2014)

Parents in most impoverished homes come with a number of stresses that manifest in their school age children. These stresses build up in different forms, as the

parents try to work more than one job in order to make a better living. In most single families, the situation is even dire, because it is mired by missing structure, and freedom, especially on young males and behavior issues caused by missing direction and leadership. Thus, cultural misunderstanding, which causes behaviors that result to special education services.

> They are acting out or if their mother is working late. …we don't want anybody to mess with our girls even though now a days you have got to watch the boys too and so we are most likely going to let our boys venture out more than we are going to let our girls and so they are out there. They are venturing out! If you have a mother that is working two jobs she doesn't really have time to be, you know what I'm saying? (Robina, personal communication, June 5, 2014) McDonalds versus Chesapeake, I just…on the child because mom chooses to go to a job she enjoys versus a job that is going to be stressful. Once you start bringing stress into the home, it affects the child's academics. I'm sorry; I have seen it for years. (Mwango,Jun e 9, 2014)

In addition to missing structure and direction, Robina indicated there is also rampant use of profanity, which some participants acknowledged as acceptable in some black families. This image does not rest well in a learning environment where there should be spelled out rules of respect for one another.

> We use profanity at our kids. That is an African American culture. I'm sorry it is. My daddy cursed at me, well he didn't curse a lot but you know what I'm saying and they think that is, well you shouldn't talk to them like that. Well I'm sorry that's how I talk to my kids. I'm not abusing them. I'm not beating them.

146

With use profanity comes with augmented tone of voice, which generally characterizes African American families as loud, more vocal, and aggressive. All these require educators with piety, benevolence and self-sacrifice that is culturally sensitive.

"Yeah because we talk loud." (Robina, June 5, 2014)

Right, right. And, some people…some people don't realize, but you have to realize that just because they're loud, just because they're active, (laughs) just because they express themselves, which is a really good thing, that it's not a bad thing. (Eddy, June 9, 2014)

Personal image. Personal image is established before a child enters school. The African American youth is aware of the issues and the history of their culture. The participants said trust is one thing African American youth is told to remember; not to trust anybody. If one doesn't trust the surrounding, then the behavior he or she projects is that of rejection, insecurity and in some cases aggression in an effort to protect their own image. For example, Armand indicated that African American male students are more represented than their female counterparts subject to this behavior of cultural misunderstanding due to aggression. "[…] because boys tend to act out more aggressively than were the aggression by the female student then they are going to be more over identified".

When asked about implications of the behavior schools experience from African American students, Armand indicated they are typical of African American culture and that the more aggressive these African American males are the more they are identified with special needs. Armand implied these behaviors are embedded in African American culture and should not be mistaken. "I think it is, much of it is African American".

147

Therefore, cultural misunderstanding with the African American male youths causes them to be identified for special needs services which makes them to be more represented than females.

Armand also indicated there are certain African American behaviors that people can't relate to unless they are from similar backgrounds. "Yes well certainly. If you have that background then you can relate. To that behavior".

Armand said African American students face behavior challenges that are not related to perceptual skills or inability to relate to intellectual endeavors. Some of the behaviors can be alleviated by certain 'measures' if properly sought by the schools.

> Yeah academically. No it has nothing to do with academic. It has to do with just emotional things. It may just be something that you need to seek a counselor for, for help dealing with that and not necessarily anything to do with academics.

In general, Elijah's notion was that an African American home is essentially defined by single parenthood. He indicated in spite of what goes on in the single parent family or home, a child who walks through his door will receive the maximum attention that will warrant him the education he needs to be successful. This underscores his theory that good teaching skills are all that is needed to help the child of color, not acquaintance with cultural values. But, indirectly, good teaching is one that considers every child and educators cannot do so without considering the cultural differences and using them to the student's advantage. Elijah said

> How many think that I would help you regardless of the subject matter?

> Everybody raised their hand. Everyone did and then we went back in the

meeting. I just wanted you to know what he just said was not true. I helped

everyone. I help kids. I have kids who skip class and I have to send them out.

Why are you in my class? I had to get some help and my other teacher wouldn't

help me. When I had my daughter when I was at … she would be in her class

and then she would come and say, which I have had other kids do, explain to me

what they just said, what my teacher just said. That's where I can relate to the

single parent kid. I can explain to them what they don't understand. That's

what I think a lot of students want from a teacher. Explain to me stuff. I see

stuff in a book, I see that, I don't understand it; I don't even know how to ask

you a question so I can understand it. So my job I believe as a teacher is break it

down.

Armand noted the bitterness of a missing father figure at home is being

projected and manifested in the behavior seen in most African American male students

across the spectrum. This was in response to the question, why the male students of

African American descent were perceived as the most affected by the special education

programs. This concern was shared by most participants who concurred with Armand's

view about non-existence of African American fathers in most homes. This bitterness is

seen aligned with cultural misunderstanding that lead the youths to demonstrate

behaviors that lead to misidentification for special needs services. As Armand said "I

know many young African American men are very bitter because of no father in the

home." Due to many reasons Robina indicated,

Because you have to understand, if you really look at the statistics and you look

at it and you look at a lot of these African American young men or boys that are

placed in special ed, I bet you their father is not around, they have either been

killed or are in prison or they just don't come around. If you look at it I bet you

the majority of them that's what it is and I think they see that and they are like

okay.

On the other hand Elijah perceives that the duty of a good educator is to fill the

gaps of students of different backgrounds and give them a different image.

You might instead of like this, it might be like this and you have to step over and

make a big jump, but you can climb to the top of the ladder if you want to. If

you want to take the step and that's why I try to fill in those little gaps and that's

what I do. I fill in those little gaps for the kids.

In answer to the question why behaviors dominate special education

classifications and why African American students disproportionately attend special

education classes, Armand implied it is due to the failure of schools to manage the

behaviors of these students or they don't understand how, and so they use these special

education classes as dumping grounds for these behavior issues. "Correct so special ED

becomes a dumping ground because the educators have not been able to manage or they

don't understand how to help the student manage his or her behavior." (Armand, June

5, 2014)

African American male behaviors are linked to the image projected by the

young males' enigma to and expression of their identity as is remotely known to the

outside world and mystical to many educators who are not African Americans. Armand

said some educators from other cultures need to be informed of these behavioral

characteristics. Educators who are not aware of these behaviors, will remain agents of identifying and sending African American students to special needs they don't need.

> I think there are challenges that a lot of teachers have to deal with. In the African American culture, I think a lot of the African American kids, they feel like they have to protect themselves in a way, and sometimes that may manifest itself in a certain behavior, and, you have to know how to adjust and continue to respect that individual and then help them to continue to learn. (Eddy, June 9, 2014)

> "Yes, those are the cultural behaviors, those teachers need to become better informed." (Armand, June 5, 2014)

Eddy said it is important to have many African American teachers as role models. In my discussion with him on this matter after this interview, Eddy said that when many Caucasian teachers are seen in the predominantly African American schools, it gives a general sense of disconnect between education and the African American community altogether. The question posed to African American youths in these schools is: Where are our people? This gives the sense that education is not for African American people, but for whites. They are the ones who care about school and education, more or less giving it out to whoever needs it.

Eddy discussed how he entered into an outreach liaison with African American people who had encountered defeats, but had not been defeated. These people would serve as role models to high school youths in the same predicaments. He gives examples of difficulties he went through as a youth and said that there are several

examples of African American adults who have the same story about how they endured challenges.

Eddy noted the major obstacle is abject poverty. Poverty can cause people to give up on their lives, but he indicated successful people can be valuable role models in situations where they find young people struggling with the same challenges they went through.

> One thing we started here, me and a young lady, one of the African American teachers, we started four years ago, was we started the Black Student Union, and the thing it, it was so important and what…we didn't just limit it to blacks, we had every race come, but the thing is, every…at least twice a week we would have African American role models come in that had, had overcome obstacles of being poor, you know…of being raised this way, or eating out of a…from eating out of a trash can just to get food to being a multi-millionaire…and, so they talked about their struggles, which African American students, a lot, can relate to, but they also showed them where they are now. So, I think it's important for African Americans and not just African Americans, but all students to see that no matter where you are socially, you can go up, I mean, there's no limit. Whatever you put your mind to.

On the same issue about the absence of role model, Armand argued there are not many African American educators for the youths to identify themselves with due to the fact that there are not many of them qualified to take up the job or, maybe, the conditions are not favorable for them to take those professional positions. Armand

152

indicated that the availability of the positions are not equitably extended to African American educators or people in general.

> You look at the demographics. Okay the population of a town if you have more or if you have less African American professional educators then you don't have as great of a pool to pull from. But the second thing is that you are looking for those who are most qualified. Now the question is the ability to certify. Now there are, I believe there are African American teachers who would like to teach but they lack enough credentials to be certified to teach, but here is the issue. Are the routes created for African Americans to be are they made available to African American college graduates and is the recruitment out there for the African American as opposed to other educators?

Eddy indicated teachers are not just teachers, but also mentors and gave an account of a case of a child he had mentored.

> Yes. Mm-hm. Many times. I mean…and, you know, there is one young man, I can remember mentoring him. I mean, as teachers, you mentor so many kids… …many times we call them our children (laughs), but one thing I remember, he didn't have a ride and he turned 18 and he wanted to take his driver's license…to take his test, and so, you know, we took him to take the test and he failed the first time, he failed the second time. He was a special ed. student. The third time, he passed and he cried and he said, "you know what, I never did…I thought I was too stupid to pass the test". So, I mean, you can see, again, this is a young man, he's in special ed. He had been through…kicked out…in and out of school, but it just took someone to say, "hey, you can do it", and

"never give up", and he was so appreciative. So, now, he's a wonderful dad and he's raised a daughter on his own who's 6 years old and doing a great job.

Eddy's argument was that male mentorship is one element that is largely subtle in African American community due to many circumstances, for example the father is in jail and the mother who is single is on drugs, leaving the child homeless. "There are primary issues that they go through. […] father is in jail, mom is on drugs, he is homeless […]" (Eddy, June 9, 2014).

Eddy's views were shared by Emily who indicated African American students come with a cluster of issues that will need more patience than afforded to regular students. She said the relationship the teacher develops is what is needed because the children have the brains to deliver. "They got the brain they're smart. They can do it. The teacher has just got to establish the relationships with them and understand what their needs are and be a little patient." (Emily, June 11, 2014).

Eddy's interview demonstrated there are many things educators lack understanding about African American children that need precise accord of the intricate characteristics of the many African American families of the 21st century. He then indicated an African American child in a school environment is not just a number, but full of issues that require intense non-slumberous, moral cultural understanding and background knowledge on the side of the teacher. These views were also shared by other participants, like Emily.

> "[…] and things like that. And…and, so when they come to school, they really
> need to be nurtured. There are so many things they […] you need to go through.
> You need to understand them. First, you need to understand their background.

154

(Eddy, June 9, 2014)

Emily also said educators need to understand conditions of individual child's home life as well the whole child. Lack of experience and awareness of these conditions facing African American students make educators less effective in helping them.

"So I really think that the teachers need to be a whole lot more aware of that child's home life…Lack of experience. Unaware of certain things that a certain child might be going through." (Emily, June 11, 2014)

Eddy as well noted most educators are only concerned about educational needs of the student without thinking about emotional needs. He said if teachers bring into the equation the children's emotional needs and show that they care, the students they serve will do anything they ask them. In their mind, the students (and not just African Americans), will think they are working for you, but are learning.

If they feel like you do not care about them, then they won't even work. They feel like they're working for you if you like them. That's how most of the students in special ed. are, so, ah…also, they…they want to feel… What we try to do is we try to not only meet their educational need, but we try to have things in place to help their emotional needs.

Another image issue that came into discussion during my interview with Emily was about appearance. Emily indicated before the age of television, African American people were not out on the spotlight. Due to television exposure, many African American people were accepted and their beauty noticed as well as their kinky hair, making a breakthrough into the world of beauty and redefining beauty.

Well I think they are really misjudged. Fortunately over the years and because of television and things like that people, middle class or from different communities they see the way people dress. Like they will see like a person who have money look and act and dress a certain way so when they see our kids coming in looking and acting like that they are more receptive to it where if you didn't have access to it on TV, because they are not going to go into the communities and see it, but because they can see it on TV. They are a little bit more receptive to it, but before that you know they were not used to kinky hair or what's wrong with your hair or big designs on the clothes and things like that. They were almost afraid of it. They want to keep their distance from it. (Emily, June 11, 2014)

Emily's contention is African American children no longer have concealed beliefs about their physical image as it has now been widely accepted into the world as part of the mainstream beauty, thanks to the television industry. However, some participants may argue this may distract lower income African American children as they may resort to chase a dream, which may be far from achievable and take the attention away from education as does the world of sports.

I asked Emily if there is anything in the African American culture that plays into the mind of the people of other races that makes them think that African American children need special services but she said was not sure if it was so much of a cultural, issue but also said each child should be looked at individually. "I don't think it's so much of a cultural, well yeah the socioeconomic thing is there definitely, but I think it's

156

just that each individual child's issue. Like what is the child coming with". (Emily, June 11, 2014)

With this in mind, however, educators are challenged by the fact that there is still lack of understanding of individual and cultural issues about African American students. Emily's view was that educators are not informed of the existing conditions with African American communities citing reasons such as lack of college programs to prepare young educators to face these challenges.

Individual period because I mean you know I mean like we were just saying. Look at the news now. It's all the different races, all these different people are doing all these different things you know. It's just the packet that the kid is coming with and a lot of times unfortunately you know it is you have a bunch of African American kids coming with all this different baggage and if a teacher is not, especially those new ones fresh out of college. The university is not preparing them that when you go into these schools don't expect to go okay class everybody sit down we are going to learn because new teachers come and that's what they think. (Emily, June 11, 2014)

Teachers who are not prepared for these challenges, says Emily, will face turmoil and often inexperienced teachers will fail to handle these cases because they seek to use quick fixes, which often result in more drastic solutions such as suspensions. And the circle then goes on.

They think they can come in but no. The teacher is going to challenge you right away. I'm not sitting down today. I want to stand up. They want to see what you are made of and the teachers are like oh my God. I told you to sit down you

157

will sit down and you are a big problem and I'm going to send them to the office and at the same time you are scared because you can't send the kid to the office because the kid won't sit down. You look like a weak teacher so it becomes a power struggle here.

Although these anecdotal claims by Emily are not typical for just African American students, most participants cited these behavior issues as the main reasons most educators use to refer African American students for special education services. In an era in which teaching incentives include raising scores, teachers do not want to be bothered by students who do not want to sit and listen. Therefore, the quick fix is to send them to the special education and then focus their attention on the students whose behaviors and optimism will pave the way for better opportunities for educators to make more money in a profession in which promotion is not easy to come by. "Right, so the teacher better not be bothered by kids that misbehave. They fall behind and the quick fix is an IEP." (Emily, June 11, 2014)

Acting out a certain way may not necessarily be to protect one's personal, cultural, or family image; instead, it may be due to protection, or it may be due to other responses to certain circumstances, such as the loss of a family member. However, Robina said, African American students may not get the same reception whenever and wherever these behaviors occur on their perceived watch.

You can get another kid from another culture that will act out when their mother died and they say they are having problems because their mother died. You can get an African American kid and could act out because his mother died and they say he has some emotional problems.

158

Mwango shared the same claims about how African American students are treated in situations where certain behaviors, academic or otherwise, occur and they take the blame. "If a Caucasian child is displaying the same behaviors or academic concern as an African American child, why is it that the African American child is chosen first?" (Mwango, June 9, 2014).

Summary of Findings

To summarize, cultural misunderstanding means depriving African American students the opportunity to express their culture. Cultural misunderstanding, as represented by the results of this study does strongly contribute to disproportionate representation of African American students in special education. Cultural misunderstanding drastically impact male African American students more than females because they are more vocal and aggressive thereby putting these students in fast track avenues for special education services.

Unexpected findings

While collecting and analyzing the data for my dissertation study, two unexpected themes emerged that contribute to the behaviors seen with most African American youth. These unexpected findings are Failed System Awareness and the reality that Poverty Trumps Education. Below I describe each.

Failed System Awareness

Sometimes, other things happen in an African American child's life that preoccupy his or her mind. Unfortunately, these things can happen to any child of any race, and the results will be the same. Moreover, traumatic events prior to important educational activities, such as teaching or evaluating a child will yield negative results.

When the school system fails to recognize the preexisting conditions of African American students and rushes into giving a child education which he or she does not need at this time.

> Or ignorance of the situation that the child is coming from. A student comes to school preoccupied with things that have gone on the night before. They have not have got a wink of sleep because they don't even know where momma is. They have not eaten any food. He or she may have been raped by the mother's boyfriend. So that the momma can get some crack or some drugs. So you have children that are going through these kinds of things so do they need help, yes. But does that say that intellectually they need to be labeled as someone that needs special ED? (Armand, June 5, 2014)

Armand's case underscores the failed system awareness on the part of the schools' exclusionary decisions meant to affect African American students. Albeit, castigating the school systems of perpetuation of ignorance about the conditions of the students of color.

If a teacher cannot get through the child to understand what is going on in his or her life, then the teacher should contact an adult who is responsible for the child. Students may act in ways they may not understand.

> Now understanding of the culture relates to the home environment. It always starts at home and if the home is not solid the child comes to school and not ready to learn. I try to instill what I grew up on and if I don't know there is always the internet. I ask my mom, ask my dad, ask my aunt, other older African Americans. If I'm in doubt as to why a child is not performing or

160

misbehaving or acting in such as way, I will go ask somebody else to get

clarification. I don't believe every child should be hollered at. Sometimes that

child does not understand why they are acting the way they are. (Mwango, June

9, 2014).

Many things cause individual differences in how students conduct themselves.

Awareness on the part of the teacher will help in designing instructional strategies that

will serve individual children. Not taking the time to understand the children in their

classrooms causes issues for some teachers. Emily indicated by understanding that

children learn differently, teachers would be in a better position to consider certain

factors like childbirth and environmental issues that might have caused the differences

in the child's behavior.

I think just understanding that children learn differently and like there is a lot of

things that you have to consider, why they learn differently. Is it because just

issues at birth, is it environmental, is it just the lack of instruction.

Sometimes, a child may be homeless or be moved from home to home in search

of a proper living environment. Such instability makes a child lose direction and

structure and hinders the development of valuing education. Emily indicated that these

factors must be taken into consideration when teaching an African American child.

"Yeah well sometimes the kids come from environments that where maybe they are

from a single parent home or maybe sometime the child may be moved from home to

home often". (Emily, June 11, 2014). These are some of the issues most educators do

not recognize.

Poverty Trumps Education

Participating teachers were asked about their perceptions of poverty as it relates to special education classification of African American students. The purpose was to investigate their beliefs about whether African American students were more likely to be in special education classes if they were considered poor. This was unexpected discussion because it did not directly relate to the research questions sought.

Nevertheless, it is worthy of mentioning because poverty plays a role in acquisition and material possession of literature and appropriate instruments of education. Poor people are perceived differently (Shannon, 1998). Some participants said they were raised poor and yet they are now teachers. But each one of them said they had some kind of help from a family member or some kind of mentorship. First, I will look at the definition of poverty and poverty lines in the United States. I will then discuss the participants' perceptions of poverty. As I interviewed my participants, the responses they gave were in line with the definitions.

Poverty defined. For the purpose of this study I used the following sources downloaded from the website (see references) (Dictionary.com), to give a defined combined sense of poverty. Poverty is defined as a state where one lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possession (Dictionary.com). Poverty exists when people lack the means to satisfy their basic needs in the prevailing standard of living in the community. Poverty is general scarcity or dearth, or the state of one who lacks a certain amount of material possessions or money. Absolute poverty or destitution refers to the deprivation of basic human needs, which commonly includes food, water, sanitation, clothing, shelter, health care and education (Dictionary.com).

Poverty has also been associated, for example, with poor health, low levels of education or skills, an inability or an unwillingness, to work, high rates of disruptive or disorderly, behavior, and improvidence. While these attributes have often been found to exist with poverty, their inclusion in my definition of poverty would tend to obscure the relationship between them and the inability to provide for one's basic needs. However, whatever definition one uses, authorities, leaders and laypersons, alike commonly assume that the effects of poverty are harmful to both individuals and society. In this study, the attributes mentioned here played a major role in the interview as I collected this data from the participants in this research. I decided to provide this definition because of the fact that most responses I received from the participants went hand in hand with the definitions recorded herein. Most participants' perceptions tied these definitions into the sense that if a child is poor and lacks all the necessary resources to meet the basic needs, life is basically meaningless.

I also included a table showing the 2014 United States Federal Poverty guidelines according to all states including Alaska and Hawaii which have different guidelines according to the standard of living in those states. I used this data so as to demonstrate to the readers what poverty means to the general American standard of living. Although the teachers in this study may not have been aware of the exact numbers in the table below that shows poverty according to the United States Federal government, nevertheless, the data serves a significant purpose as I incorporate this item in this study. The table includes a statement at the end that mentions the US territories that are not included in this threshold definition.

Table 3

2014 Poverty Guidelines in the United States

Persons in Family/Household	48 Contiguous States and District of Columbia	Alaska	Hawaii
1	$ 11,670.00	$ 14,510.00	$ 13,420.00
2	$ 15,730.00	$ 19,660.00	$ 18,090.00
3	$ 19,790.00	$ 24,740.00	$ 22,760.00
4	$ 23,850.00	$ 29,820.00	$ 27,430.00
5	$ 27,910.00	$ 36,900.00	$ 32,100.00
6	$ 31,970.00	$ 39,980.00	$ 36,750.00
7	$ 36,030.00	$ 45,060.00	$ 41,440.00
8	$ 40,090.00	$ 50,140.00	$ 46,110.00

NOTE: Source is US Department of Health and Human Services (2014).

The poverty question was imperative and expected to come up in my interviews with the participants. They provided a compelling picture of poverty the effects of poverty on children in education. Participants' responses were analyzed to learn about the relationship between poverty and the levels of representation of African American students in special education.

Emily indicated that children of poverty are in "survival mode". They are more worried about what they are going to eat, what they will wear, if their clothes will be clean the next day, and if they will be able to sleep in a bed. Other worries include strangers in their houses because the adults allow them into the house in exchange for

temporally favors. She said that such worries put the children in a bind and these worries get in the way of learning, which causes them to be placed in special education.

> […] yeah in a lot of ways because a lot of times when the kids come from poverty like a lot of times they are in survival mode like they are more worried about what are they going to eat or are they going to have clean clothes to wear or do they sleep in the bed or who is that person that is in the room over there so they are worried about things that a child should not have to worry about so that gets in the way of learning and that causes kids in poverty to be put on IEPs for special ed. a lot of time. (Emily, June 11, 2014)

Armand echoed Emily's concerns, commonly tied to African American children living in poverty. Such concerns also include coming to school hungry, which would interfere with test results if school psychologist decided to test the child for special services at that time. "Right so sometimes when students are diagnosed they may fail a psychometrician's test because maybe the night before they were raped or came to school hungry. That's not a good time to test a child." (Armand, June 5, 2014)

Armand indicated that awareness of the situations surrounding poverty, would prompt studying the children's backgrounds and behaviors before processing them for special education. By doing so, Armand said, educators will eliminate some of the erroneous identifications processes that result into placements of African American children into special education programs. Armand contended African American students have their cases taken up arbitrarily and are evaluated for possible placements into special education without considering many factors. "So these are some factors of why we are going often through over identification because we have not done properly,

properly done background studies, social services, so forth…Yes it certainly can be."
(Armand, June 5, 2014)

He also said the families of children of poverty have been imprisoned in the system for so long that they see only the economic factor associated with screening their children for placement in special education.

> And sometimes unfortunately students from poverty backgrounds have been imprisoned in the system by their own families. Yeah and the reason why I say they are imprisoned is because when you have a disability that allows your family to receive funds for you financially. Yes so that is an unfortunate factor because of poverty.

Emily, on the other hand, said children who live in poverty come to school with fewer vocabulary words because they hear fewer words than children whose families are in the middle class. Some of the words that they hear according to Armand are inappropriate or those words that are of admonishment. Armand added, educators should use the opportunity to retrain African American students' vocabulary to help them adjust to a learning environment instead of perpetuating conflict in their lives. That is to say, if the students do not meet the standards of vocabulary acquisition and usage, then they will be eligible to be placed in special education. The limited scope in placing students in special education based on their vocabulary is tantamount to "throwing the baby out with the bathwater".

> Right, right and one thing that I have learned, and I'm sure you have heard of this before, is that like children that are in poverty they hear so many less words per day than a child that is in middle class. (Emily, June 11, 2014)

If they say things that are inappropriate that is within their background, that is a teaching moment to retrain that student's vocabulary so that they can become better adjusted and not just throw the baby out with the bathwater is what we call it. (Armand, June 5, 2014)

Emily indicated children of poverty are at a disadvantage but indicated that they mimic middle class students of modesty behaviors although they themselves are not in the middle class by watching television.

Yeah, they are. Fortunately over the years and because of television and things like that people, middle class or from different communities they see the way people dress. Like they will see like a person who have money look and act and dress a certain way so when they see our kids coming in looking and acting like that…

Emily also noted children of poverty perceive they will be accepted in the community if they look, and behave, in a certain way that conceals their economic struggles. This approach reinforces stereotypes of children who live in poverty and African American children in particular. She (Emily) indicated African American people try to keep their distance in society because they are not sure what they will encounter.

They are a little bit more receptive to it, but before that you know they were not used to kinky hair or what's wrong with your hair or big designs on the clothes and things like that. They were almost afraid of it. They want to keep their distance from it.

167

Robina said the appearance of children of poverty does not mean they do not have somebody in their lives who cares. Likewise, she noted the assumptions teachers make about students solely based on their appearance.

> Just because a kid comes to school with their hair half combed and they don't have the cleanest of clothes, doesn't mean their parents don't care about them. …other teachers of other culture, when they see the other students, they can even be a Caucasian student, they automatically assume that you know that the kid is not cared about.

She also said as an African American teacher, she understands the poverty African American children experience because she has been in poverty. The idea of having the same experience implied African American people in general live in poverty. She said by coming from the background that is similar to African American people, there are some things you may understand.

> But I think African American understands it better because we been down that path where we have not always had everything. So when we look at a kid and we say well their mom and dad is fine. Well my mom and dad was fine and I dress like that! …so you know that there are some things that you are aware of that the background is coming from. (Robina, June 5, 2014)

Armand on the other hand said the struggles he went through are similar to what most African American students go through. He said he did not have resources that would have helped him to be a better person, implying that the same struggles still exist today with African American children.

…because the struggles that I went through as a child are common to other students who are African American. The struggles are very similar. Very similar. Economic factors, not being able to have resources that mainstream populations may have or higher economic people may have. In that way, I am able to be more understanding and more patient with students who struggle just as I did.

As discussed earlier in the resources section, Armand noted factors that cause African American young people become less educationally competent, such as limited access to resources essential for creating a good educational environment. On such resource is literature, which Armand claimed is nonexistent in poor African American homes. The lack of literature linked to contributions of stereotyping African American students as less literate. Armand called this environmental retardation of African American students devoid not, of mental of moral aptitude, but devoid of routinely unavailable resources that allow them to be left behind.

…unfortunately, I think it is factual because of low socioeconomic background, limited resources, limited ability of in their environment not to access learning, some students African Americans have become environmentally retarded. Not that they didn't necessarily have the mind or what I would call the aptitude to do more, but because they did not have the resources they were left behind.

Armand's perception of resource free education success is an outdated belief which most African American people do not realize. "I think it has to do with old beliefs, expectations. There is a term called socio-type and stereotype…" (Armand, June 5, 2014)

169

The stereotypes that Armand describes here, mimic illiteracy on minority students that lead to what he perceives as mislabeling of African American students. This he said, comes with historical biases of African American students which does not exist with other cultures. "Right but because of historical biases that still exist it is my belief that you have the mislabeling or otherwise labeling that African Americans do not receive as those of other cultures." (Armand, June 5, 2014)

Limited access to resources, Armand said, prevents a child from reaching his of her academic potential. The resources Armand mentioned are not available through free community access. He argued that if one is not able to get to where community resources are available, then one should be able to obtain the resources in one's household which is not always possible in most African American households. For example, for school activities that require a computer, a child who cannot get to the public library to access the free computers, and does not have one at home, will be at a disadvantage in completing activities that require using a computer. Nevertheless, Armand conceded in implying some African American students are limited intellectually because of the upheavals that come with poverty, which leads to placement in special education.

> Yes of course poverty plays a role because without the resources and income to
> access let's just say getting to the library to read. Your parents don't have a car
> to get you there. That puts you at a disadvantage. Buying materials from stores.
> Owning a computer at home so those who are economically impoverished don't
> have the same means to accessing education. Literature at home, as well as those

who are middle class or upper classes. So that plays a, poverty certainly plays a huge role in students being identified in special education.

Eddy, on the other hand, said obstacles that come with poverty can be overcome. However, educators must be aware of circumstances surrounding poverty and do something to mitigate the effects of poverty. He said all students, not just African Americans go through certain struggles and they can be overcome through proper direction, mentorship by people who have been through the same path, and or relating one's experience of overcoming poverty. Children will benefit especially from having role models who have had similar experiences with poverty.

if "…you can go up, I mean, there's no limit. Whatever you put your mind to." …at least twice a week we would have African American role models come in that had, had overcome obstacles of being poor, you know…of being raised this way, or eating out of a…from eating out of a trash can just to get food to being a multi-millionaire…and, so they talked about their struggles, which African American students, a lot, can relate to, but they also showed them where they are now. So, I think it's important for African Americans and not just African Americans, but all students to see that no matter where you are socially, you can go up, I mean, there's no limit. Whatever you put your mind to. (Eddy, June 9, 2014)

Eddy indicated a good educator is one who looks at the physical needs of the child. He echoed what Armand said in that, a child of poverty must be fed before providing him or her education. It is effective for educators to focus only on giving the child education without being mindful of other things such as overall diet. Eddy said

that children would know a teacher cares when he or she looks at other aspects of their lives that most educators take for granted.

> One thing…and there are physical needs also, so one thing we started here was we started a food pantry, and one of the African American teachers here felt there was a need and everyone agreed with her, and so we have a food pantry and it's not just for African Americans…
>
> Right, right. And, we've had…you know, I usually keep some snacks in my classroom also, crackers, peanut butter and crackers, and you know, sometimes a kid will say, "Mr. _____, do you have any crackers?" and I'll say, "sure, sure, here", and bam, you know, here you go. I mean, and…and the thing is, and they'll take it and say thank you, and that's just a bond, that's just saying, you know, this teacher really cares about me. (Eddy, June 9, 2014)

The physical needs of a child matter as much as the mental and psychological needs. Eddy said to treat the whole child is the best clinical and pedagogical strategy.

> Yeah, so, I think it's important to treat the whole person and not just one part of them, and if you start treating the whole person, I think you'll…you'll see more of an advance even in the educational area.

Eddy analogously used himself as an example to emphasize this point of looking at the whole person. He said he was raised in abject poverty, in which there was little food to eat. He said these circumstances did not derail his success. Nevertheless, he owes this to a number of people, beginning with his older sibling. Eddy said one needs someone who can say: "I have faith in you; you can do it". One needs to have

somebody in his or her life who can lift him or her up. He indicated that this is lacking in African American students' lives.

> Well, again, um, I was raised in a family, and I use myself, I was raised in a family where we ate pretty much beans and rice every day, and then I grew up also where we, many times we would make what we called potato sandwiches, so we would take potatoes and put it between two slices of bread and put ketchup on it, and the only time we had meat was on Sunday, you know, so we looked forward to Sunday. So…but that didn't stop me from excelling. You know, I had an older sister that had gone to college and stuff and she really majored in making sure that we studied. Now, all my siblings didn't excel as well as I did, but I desired to do better and so, um, I think… I had a sibling that said, "you know, you can make it, you can do it", and I think that encouraged me. It's important to have some…someone, if it's someone at your church or some family member or a next door neighbor to just say, "I have faith in you, you can do it", and I think no matter what your poverty level is, just that, and hard work and determination, any student can make it.

Children living in poverty also lack other things that physiologically affect their development. One of them is nutrition. There is no doubt like the other participants what, Eddy said, people overlook the significance of nutrition for the child. He noted many children in special education lack a balanced diet arguing that poverty is a serious element in predicting the children who might be in special education. Eddy's view generally supports the idea that children of poverty are going to have issues which will manifest into academic performance and finally be marginalized into special education.

173

That is to say, the poorer the home, the more likely that the children from that home have poor nutrition.

> I think there's another factor that a lot of people overlook and that is nutrition. Nutrition is so very important. A lot of the African American students are ADHD, hyper, attention-deficit disorder, but what happens is there is nutrition that can take place and that… Abram Hoffer (sp?) was a man and he found out that a lot of kids in special ed., because their food balance is off, and he found out that vitamin B3 helps the attention deficit a great deal. Niacin is really great for that, and I wish there would be more research under that. My nephew, who was having attention-deficit disorder, he started taking niacin, vitamin B3, and all of the sudden he was able to focus, and he said, "Oh my God, all the…I'm remembering everything!" He said at first his mind was like racing all the time. (Eddy, June 9, 2014)

Mwango said in response to the question of poverty, that any child can learn regardless of their hometown or socioeconomic status. Her perception stood partly in contrast with those of other participants, said that children of poverty would not perform as well as those in the middle class. However, she believed in her argument that people choose where to work and forget that sometimes options are limited for those with insufficient education or skills. Mwango's argument underscored the fact that some jobs bring stress home. She said that when she said, if one brings the stress "into the home", then academics in that home will be compromised. She nevertheless, stopped short of linking stressful jobs to a proper cause while indicating that low paying jobs like McDonald for example, are a matter of choice because they are less stressful. In theory,

this might be true. But in practice; low paying jobs are a disgrace and key to advancement of poverty to many struggling families; the majority of whom are those of color where Mwango conceded she is from, and that she had "seen it for years"; in reference to the academic effects that come with stress.

> In my opinion, it doesn't because I believe any child can learn regardless of what side of town they come from. Their parents economic situation they have placed in …..McDonalds versus Chesapeake, I just …on the child because mom chooses to go to a job she enjoys versus a job that is going to be stressful. Once you start bringing stress into the home, it affects the child's academics. I'm sorry; I have seen it for years.

On the question about how poverty affects special education, Mwango generally was in agreement with other participants, when she said educators need to understand each and every child and then hold that child to the same level of academic expectations regardless of his or her economic status. Mwango stated it is the responsibility of the educators to fulfill the child's educational needs without discrimination based on his or her nationality, race, gender or economic background. "We as educators need to take the time to understand each and every child and expect the same level of academic success from each and every child regardless of the nationality, race, economic status or gender" (Mwango, June 9, 2014).

Elijah stated he does not allow the issue of poverty to affect his interaction with his students. In his conversation, he did not call himself poor. His influence and his inspiration to his students is that school will make them not call themselves 'Poor'. Using himself as an example, he said that college made him "not poor" and if his

students want the same title, then they should attend and graduate from college. He said he had strong parental support as a back bone for his success; something he said was lacking in most African American families. Elijah mentioned calluses as a motivating factor to work hard through college. Although calluses come with a lot of manual labor which may also be possible in modern society, they certainly can encourage young people to choose a different route.

> And so even though my little joke to the kids is as a teacher I'm not poor, I'm po. I can't even afford to be poor. I'm just P.O. just po, po. But the kids they have a lot of other influences you know the internet, gangs, whatever the case may be and a lot of times they don't have that motivation to go to college. I had that motivation to go to college because that was something my parents wanted me to do, I always wanted to do and it was just something I wanted to do to help out my life. I did not want to have calluses on my hands. I didn't want to have to do manual labor and have calluses, which I have lots of relatives like that. (Elijah, June 9, 2014)

Elijah understands the children of poverty come from homes where parents work hard to make ends meet. He said the parents from these homes worry about paying the bills instead of making sure that their children get good education. Elijah implied most parents from poor families do not realize that good education will help them work less and earn more. The parents, do not see the use of education.

> Well hey the emphasis for a lot of parents is I have got to pay the bills. I got to get a job to pay the bills not that getting an education will help me get a better job so I will I guess have more money to pay the bills, but then that comes at a

176

point about the more money you make you don't shop at Wal-Mart no more, you go to the mall and waste your money doing the same thing. So that's my big thing is that your parents and then we have a lot of kids who are parents who are working so hard.

Elijah's argument implied people who work hard and do not make good money then they did not finish high school. He indicated the parents who did not finish school cannot be a good model to their children and the children themselves would not see the reason to be different about their futures. This raises a question about parental responsibility for the child's education:- What would a parent who dropped out of high school tell his or her school-aged child? What is the benefit of working hard and making good grades? Elijah said most parents have fallen short in expressing to their children that they need education, which could perpetuate circles of poverty.

Now if your parents are working and they didn't finish high school, they had to do whatever the reason, mom had kids when she was a teenager and didn't move forward then you make it hard on your child, your child doesn't see the need to be different, the parent never explains to them I want more for you, I want better for you, I work hard for you so that you won't have to work as hard to go to school. A lot of parents don't express that to their kids that you need this education to be able to not have to work like me. Not have to struggle like me.

Beside the worries and struggles that children carry, understanding the students' needs to feel welcome and appreciated by school by school personnel is paramount. Elijah said by understanding children in poverty, it will help diffuse some of the potential behavior issues that may ruin the teacher's as day as well as the child's. Elijah

177

indicated that catching those potential cases and engaging children in dialogue might thwart some of the lasting issues teachers may encounter. Students need to be made to feel important even in situations when administrators may compromise a lesson.

> Well that's part of it, but then I have an understanding of just the people. I can see certain days, you know I have had it certain times in my teaching career where I had "B" time. That means you get to bitch. Tell me what you are upset about because you walk in my door, I can see when you walk in my door something is wrong with you. You know something is wrong with you now yes I'm going to be your teacher and you will do stuff that I ask, but my thing is you are more important than… I said finish, and they said well she is here and I said excuse me you are more important than she is. And the kid looked up and I said you are more important ask your question…(Elijah, June 9, 2014)

Elijah also indicated having both parents in his life made a significant contribution to his upbringing. However, he contended some students do not understand that there is always a way out of their circumstances. They do not understand their parents always want what is good for their children. It is important for the teachers to echo parental wishes about the importance of education.

> Well that double parent thing helps, but what also helps is a lot of is, is there a way out? Some of them never get to that point to even think that there is a way out of their circumstance. You know, I live mother working all of the time doing all of this, how I can get out of this circumstance so I won't live it and I don't think a lot of kids realize, black, white whatever that a parent wants better for their child. Now the ones that I have, that's one of the things we talk about. I

talk to them about that every day. Every day, every day we talk about

something. I understand you have got problems and stuff, solve their problems

and while you are solving their problems that's the part where education is.

(Elijah, June 9, 2014)

This problem issue was echoed by Robina, who said there are always underlying

reasons why a student acts in a manner that requires patience on the part of the teacher

to create a mutual relationship with the students.

I think they need to be patient. They have to have some empathy and sympathy

for parents. Know that when a student takes out something on you, they are not

always taking it out on you that there are other factors that are involved in it.

Teachers can create a good relationship that can enhance a student's life. Indeed,

some of those students may only have the teacher in their lives that they can forge that

relationship.

…it's because there is something else and you are the first person they see every

morning. A lot of them may really feel more close to talk to you than they

would talk to anybody else you know. Yeah, that relationship so I think those

are some of the characteristics you have to have and you have to be fair with

everybody. (Robina, June 5, 2014)

Elijah noted the parents who have a proper sense of education are educated or

have at least seen the importance of education, and so they do not want their children to

struggle the same way they did. This demonstrates that parents always want what is best

for their children, even if they themselves feel they have a better life.

…and it has a lot to do with that part about the two parent being at home and the parent stressing that education because they got educated or they had seen the importance of it and they don't want their child to have to work three jobs like they do and regardless of the situation and I have worked in different nationalities, different school districts. (Elijah, June 9, 2014)

Poor parents may be pulled into accepting services for their children because there is an economic incentive attached to it. Like Emily and Armand, Robina noted poor parents might accept services for their school-aged children that they do not need because a check will come with those services which they don't need because there is going to be a check coming with those services. Robina argued a parent should know to know the rules governing the education system. Only then will they be less vulnerable to the disenfranchising rules and regulations that affect their children. She said misinformed, poor parents of children in special education must be educated about the rules governing special education. The sense Robina brings to the argument is that poor parents' focus about special education is limited to here immediate economic help but not the long-term benefits for the child.

Because if they think somebody is poor, I'm going to tell you how it plays, how poverty really plays a role in it. It really has to do with the parent. Like if you are a poor parent that really does know the rules and regulations of special ED, the school system can pull you into pushing your kid into being special ED. If you are educated wise about it and so then you get pulled into signing that paper or they tell you that you can get a check because your kid is in special ED and so I think we get pulled into that a lot…

Robina built a case in my conversation with her about the issue of misidentification of poor African American children by saying that sometimes teachers have to step in to help some parents in making good decisions. In her experience, she said she had had a time to do just that. Some parents think they have bad children, with behavior issues, and so the answer they are given is to get their children tested for special education without considering the educational ramifications. Robina said in situations like these, the teacher's duty is to help the parent in the direction that benefits the "bad child" to receive the best education without necessarily being tested for special education. Robina's argument echoed that of Armand mentioned earlier, who said that sometimes special education is not the answer and other avenues that will refocus the child without the pain of putting her through special education should be considered.

Robina noted the parents accept any decisions that affect their children because of the economic situations they are in. The parents hope decisions about their children will finally improve their economic situations. She reiterated that poor African American parents blindly accept the rules of the school administrations that put their children in special education without clear explanations of the educational benefits in the process. Many African American children, she said, find themselves in special education because they are perceived as problematic, and so they are isolated from the general population to allow a learning atmosphere to thrive. She said most African Americans' parental rights are violated by these administration disciplinary procedures that have little to do with the future of the child's education. Robina indicated in situations when parents jump into conclusions about their own children, teachers have

to step in and provide sound advice instead of allowing children to be placed into special education.

> I said no ma'am we are not testing him for special ed. He's not special ed. She said well how do you know? I said because I'm a special ed teacher. I said we are not pulling him into that category. Okay, he's bad, I will tell you he's bad and he has got some issues, but not issues like that. She couldn't do that to me because I already knew and then I think it had to do with my economical situation, do you see what I'm saying? But I think it even has to do even if you don't really know the rules and regulations. A lot of parents and this is a lot about African American parents, they don't know the rules and regulations of special ed. You find very few of them that know rules about anything, about ID or anything that has to do with special ed, they really don't. They don't know their rights so they let the administration and other teachers push them into putting their kids into special ed.

Robina argued the parents of these students have to reject those special education proposals for their children. She indicated most of those emotional issues that determine placements in special education and diagnoses of emotional disturbance (ED) are superficial. She said some of the emotional displays a child makes are due to natural responses such as losing a mother, and should warrant placement in special education. She, however, stopped short of mentioning the best alternative to these situations, which Armand mentioned earlier, but strongly believed that special education is not an option. Robina argued that in her tenure as a special education teacher, she has seen cases of ED that do not warrant this label. She indicated that earlier signs in a child's

development might be justified with appropriate special education interventions up to

3rd grade level. She indicated all other traumatic possible triggering behavior events in

the child's life must be ruled out before the special education labels take place.

> And a lot of times they don't need to be put in special ed. because if a kid's
> mother died of course they are going to act out for maybe a year or two because
> their mother died! They don't have their mother anymore, but that doesn't mean
> they are ed, they are emotionally disturbed because they are acting out.

> Well in the first place the parent needs to say I don't want my kid in special ed.
> Now if it was a long life thing and the kid was doing that from kindergarten up
> and say they get to the third grade and they are still acting out, yeah you might
> say that kid actually has, and if nothing traumatic has happened in their life,
> yeah the kid may really have an emotional problem. But, I can tell you out of
> teaching, there are not too many emotionally disturbed kids that I have actually
> seen that were really ED kids. The majority of them were really kids that they
> were just, it wasn't even ED. That's not even a word, I can't even, they had
> behavioral problems. It had nothing to do with ED. When you are emotionally
> disturbed you actually have some emotional things that have happened to you
> where you are really disturbed mentally.

Robina said a student from another culture under the same circumstances would

not be treated in the same manner as an African American student would. She said these

events are often overlooked when they happened with children from other cultures, but

with African American children, they are considered emotionally disturbed.

You can get another kid from another culture that will act out when their mother

died and they say they are having problems because their mother died. You can

get an African American kid and could act out because his mother died and they

say he has some emotional problems.

Many young mothers, Robina said, are in low socioeconomic background

situations. These young mothers with poor parenting skills, often seek outside sources

for disciplinary interventions for their children's behaviors. In school, the best option

for them is special education because of misguided advice they received from some of

the teachers. Robina noted these young parents want to hear that with any endeavors to

help their children, there should be a pay check coming with the agreement to sign their

children into special education. She blames society for this behavior because it

encourages parents of poverty to allow their children into special education the same

way welfare encourages poor, uneducated parents to have more children for more

welfare checks. Robina said she has heard some teachers discussing the possibility of

special education checks with a few parents. She said, in my conversation with her, that

the teachers are lazy and do not want to deal with the behavior issues in their

classrooms, so they recommend the removal of these students into isolated special

education classes using these monetary influences to lure the parents into accepting

these services.

Robina indicated some parents might even initiate these services themselves

without seeking the teachers' help in order to target the checks that they will receive

upon their children's qualifying for the services. These parents did not have much to

contribute to their children's education. They themselves are immature and have limited

ideas and knowledge about education. Some of these parents are in their early 20's when their children start school. By the time their children start acting out in school and getting into trouble, some of their mothers, who are often single parents, are starting to figure out their own lives without a career and a stable job. These mothers fall for any suggestions provided to them since they do not have any known alternatives nor any knowledge of what questions to ask about the education given to their children.

I think not all of them. I'm not saying all of them. Just because you come from low economical background does not mean, but I think a lot of them, I think in today's society because we have a lot of young mothers. We don't have a lot of mothers that are not like when I had my kids I was older. We have a lot of mothers that are having kids at 13 and 14 so they are actually growing up with them. So when their kids start acting up and they go and say we need to put them in special ED and they say well yeah and the teacher will throw out you can get a check, because I have heard teachers say that, you will get a check. Yeah the mother is going to grasp that for the money. I'm going to get some money for my kid being special ED. Yep, I want him in special ED.

In summary, the purpose of this study was to explore if cultural misunderstanding caused disproportionality in special education. I did this by investigating the perceptions of African American special education teachers. I started the discussion of this results by answering these research questions by first defining cultural misunderstanding and then linking this misunderstanding to disproportionality phenomenon as well as if cultural misunderstanding affects African American male more than female. Indeed the results showed a strong correlation between cultural

185

misunderstanding and disproportionate representation of African American youth in special education as well as the males being affected more than females.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate African American teachers' perceptions about disproportionality of African American students in special education. Six teachers were involved in the study. They were all special education teachers and had at least three years of teaching experience. A variety of data were gathered from these teachers. The study was to refine my understanding of the variables related to the issue of disproportionality, or over-representation, of African American students in special education by examining the perceptions of African American teachers in special education. The study extended the emerging literature utilizing personal interviews to examine predictors of special education students and advance earlier literature.

Results showed that cultural misunderstanding indeed exists. The results highlight the importance of cultural misunderstanding and other predictors beyond race that strongly suggests it is a cause of disproportionality of African American students receiving special education services. Cultural misunderstanding impact more upon African American male youths more than it impacts female youths.

A variety of studies have been conducted investigating the disproportionality issue of African American students in special education with respect to different results many of which were revealed in the literature review to this study. Although many of these studies have addressed disproportionality, little has been said about cultural aspect of the disproportionality. Indeed, many studies that have been authored affirm the existence of disproportionality of African American students in special education. But, the specific reasons for this disproportionality phenomenon have not been narrowed to any particular research findings.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this research then was to add to the existing pieces of study by looking into the cultural phenomenon of African American people and if this cultural aspect has anything to do with the issue of disproportionality. In order to quantify the detail with which this representation took shape, I contextualized participants' comments with evidence from my interaction and discussions embedded in their experiences. The study sought to answer three research questions about disproportionality of African American students in special education.

Whereas the previous chapter examined each set of data to the greatest extent possible in respect to the research questions, as were represented by the participants, this chapter provides a holistic view of the perceptions of these participants. A number of explanations in the research literature have attempted to clarify the reasons for the disproportionality of African American students in special education programs. For example the importance of poverty as a predicator of racial disparity has been well represented in the existing literature and it is possible that African American students, being disproportionately exposed to the ravaging effects of poverty, are more likely to need a higher intensity of service across all disability categories. Yet the evidence does not support a link between socioeconomic status and special education disproportionality (Skiba et al., 2006). This study affirms to Skiba et al., study that poverty has no correlation to disproportionality of African American students in special education.

Other Findings

I touched on the issue of failed system awareness and that of poverty but not as part of the questions this study sought to answer but as unexpected findings. The failed system awareness will be heard throughout the body of this study but was not directly addressed. I need to point to the readers of this study that the results gathered in the previous chapter were very representative of the participants' perceptions and are represented suggestively. When carefully read, the voices of these teachers will be heard. This research dissertation study was carefully pondered and the ideas represented are those solely produced by the participants.

Four themes comprised this chapter and represent participants' perceptions and experiences relative to disproportionality of African American students in special education. Embedded within each theme are evidences from the participants' perceptions as they emerged linked to the themes.

African American children's adaptive behaviors are subject to survival in typical circumstances (Maholmes & Brown, 2002). Although these behaviors may be perceived to be in direct conflict with the educational environment, African American students may not be deemed likely to abandon them since they are a way of life of survival in their community. Participants gave a variety of views about these challenges. Eddy said his father wasn't there for him and that made a huge difference in his life. However, he said that he survived the challenges because he looked up to the role models and mentors worthy of attention perceived to be limited in most African American families. Participants attributed their success on opportunities that were given to them. They said lack of similar opportunities are the major contributors of unsuccessful situations seen

with African American students. African American students who come from low income, single parent homes lack fundamental skills to be successful in school (Maholmes & Brown, 2002).

Although a large portion of the results showed what would be perceived as generic issues every low income family would anticipate, African American students should be viewed differently because of the historical background they come from. This study showed African American students face challenges that educators should be aware of which come from lack of requisite instructional strategies that are conducive to or are welcoming environments to the students' backgrounds. These strategies need to be sought before resolving to become bona fide teachers of African American students. Most participants who were all African American special education teachers reported that most African American students come from impoverished families and communities that are not supportive of their endeavors. Eddy reported that relativity in terms of family members distant or close don't offer support and are not involved to the extent their presence will be realized among the African American youths. In addition, he reported that due to low socioeconomic statuses, most African American students do not have the resources to venture into activities that are more supportive to their educational needs and fall short of communities that are not reaching out to them thereby falling more and more behind in their education not because they have no aptitude to do more but because of the failure caused by the systems put in place.

Patterns of environmental failure were mentioned my all participants who perceived that African American youth are socially maladapted in that there are no adults responsible to show them direction in the homes and around the community. All

participants were within middle age typically raised in different times and with different experiences. Emily for example, mentioned that during her time, the whole community was involved in raising her. Everyone was aware of what was going in and around the community. She said that every child through her elementary and high school education was raised with values acceptable in the community and awareness of these values was a key factor to the success of every child. She said "being aware of what was going to happen because somebody was going to tell" kept the community together and helped African American children to grow with certain roles and responsibilities. She said the children were kept active with and supported by many activities that were school based as a form of friendship and academic grades were part of those activities.

Mwango on the other hand reported these combined efforts did not look at perceived weaknesses of the child but rather focused on successful endeavors aimed at boosting the child's ability by schools irrespective of their environments as seen in the interview data shared earlier in the results section by Mwango.

> Now I think if maybe schools would come together and expect the same thing out of each and every child regardless of their home environment, I think things would be a little bit different, but once a child walks through our doors, we tend to sometimes feel sorry for him and that's why …feel sorry for him is not going to get them in to Harvard. If we know they have the potential but like you said they are in special ED that automatically rules them out of ever imagining themselves going to Harvard.

Regardless of the image African American children come with to schools environment, participants perceived the main issue was with the teachers. Teachers

according to the participants do not have good relationships with the students much less with the African American parents. Relationship between the parent and the child's teacher will determine how well the child will perform academically. African American parents lack sound relationship with the teachers. My interview with these teachers revealed that due to low expectations of the teachers and the parents the African American students don't perform well in high level academic activities. The perceived notion about African American parental teacher relationship is the absence of actual mindful parental care that the children receive. In some situations, African American students are their own parents with no adult in their lives that would transform a relationship of teacher parent nature as was revealed in my interview data with Emily.

> Yeah they are put in adult situations like they may have to go home and they
> may have to prepare dinner and they may have to babysit. They may have to
> you know, something happened and they have got to be the one to make the
> decision.

When children are their own parents, teachers need to be aware of their 'parental' expectations as well as students. These students perceive there is none like them out in the community or school with the same potential issues. This may not be just African American family issue, but adulthood cannot be faked nor the concept of family organization thereof. Children learn from adults and the system in which they are deemed to grow. Childhood concept cannot be circumvented into adulthood behavior as in the case where children lack an adult who deserves the respect bestowed upon their teachers at school level. What I mean is that when the relationship between a child and parent is non-existent in the child's private life, then the child prematurely exhibits

192

some of the distinguishing characteristics of an adult culminated in the teacher parent relationship of the child's decision-making process. Hence, cultural misunderstanding between African American youth and educators because of the missing parental link between students and the educators. Participants described the situation in African American homes as lacking informed behaviors before they manifest in the public settings. Indeed as Payne (1996) puts it, the more teachers are aware of these cultural frameworks of poverty situations in the children's lives, the more successful they become as their teachers.

The symbolic significance of this 'cultural' factor is that the role differentiation of the children of poverty rests upon themselves as they strive to grow into adulthood. However, most of these characteristics are common among African American children of poverty which are remotely known to most non-African American teachers. Most African American students exhibit behaviors foreign to teachers who are not from the same backgrounds whom they resent in the light of the perceptions that they are not like them.

The behaviors seen is schools are the impetus of cultural misunderstandings on the part of the educators who do not take into account the cultural values of African American students.

Conversation about cultural mismatch dominated discussion with participants. The question was if the participants perceived there was a cultural clash between African American students with teachers from a different cultural background. All teachers interviewed consented there was cultural misunderstanding between teachers and students of color.

The study showed a good teacher does not come with being from the same race as of the child in your classroom. They come with the fact that one can earn that respect from the child. Participants perceived most referrals into special education were generated by teachers from other races who lacked cultural understanding of African American people. However, participants indicated that racial connection in the academic world does not perpetuate harmony between the learner and the educator. Such is the case for many students of all races. It depends on "the child to earn the respect of the teacher" …and the teacher to do the same. Whether this statement is true of all children in a pluralistic society remains to be seen because the educator should be in the position to teach respect to the youths. However, Mwango's assertion in my conversation with her indicated students have the responsibility to control their own behaviors to the extent they can earn the respect of that teacher. Moreover, most African American students feel left out in a racial conflict with a teacher who does not look like them, and this conflict seems to be continuing. Most participants' perception were that the teachers in these positions that have the morale to allow their racial biases to overcome them, have no place in a society where pluralism reigns.

As a researcher, I should ask myself if there is what is called cultural misunderstanding caused by racial divide. I reiterate my research question was: What is cultural misunderstanding? No one really understands every culture in the world but in a multicultural society, a misunderstanding does happen or understanding, for that matter, of some sort to thwart efforts of misunderstanding in terms of race.

The disproportionate representation issue has been in existence for many decades. My study was determined to explore the teachers' perceptions about this over

representation issue and the result was confounding. African American students have been misidentified due to cultural misunderstanding coming from educators and administrators who have failed to recognize their cultural values.

Acquisition of education does not innately follow a pattern. All participants agreed with this concept that African American children behave differently but these difference in behaviors has no innate perceptual link that is characteristic to African American people. These behaviors according to some participants are due to the fact that some African American students feel they have to mask certain behavior in order to get by with friends and peers to avoid rejection as seen in this data report with Eddy.

I think there are challenges that a lot of teachers have to deal with. In the African American culture, I think a lot of the African American kids, they feel like they have to protect themselves in a way, and sometimes that may manifest itself in a certain behavior …

This behavior correlates with earlier literature about the fear of rejection by African American students who contends that academic success beyond their peers ability does not bridge but widen the gap between them and their peers within the community (Henfield et al., 2008). The more academically successful they feel they are the more fear of rejection they are subjected to by those who do not like education.

The study showed the feeling of rejection behavior is more apparent with African American males than females. This then puts the question into perspective about whether there are more male that female students of color in special education which this study affirmed.

African American students felt they were better protected by educators of their own kind because they were in a better position to understand their background. However, they stopped short of saying if they (students) felt the educators were better teachers to them compared to the teachers of a different background. Participants also reported placement in special education did not warrantee treatment of the behaviors of African American students but rather created feelings of more disenfranchisement and perpetual alienation. These feelings of protection and advocacy formed intense conversation with participants perpetuated by vulnerability caused by perceived negligence by school systems.

The study showed African American students felt they were different to the outside world not because of their skin color but the way they behaved and acted. African American students felt they had vested interest in people of their own color but there were not many of those they could reckon with in many occasions. When African American students see an educator of the same color, the interaction eliminates any racist feelings that may be construed in educating the student and the focus will shift to the successful education goals attainment process. But teachers of a different color may be considered to be just "racist" in their attempt to redirect a behavior that will result to a good educational atmosphere like in this data communication with Armand.

"…they may say you are just a racist, but when they see me that eliminates that roadblock." (Armand,June 5 , 2014)

The study also showed due to the struggles they went through as African Americans, educators of the same backgrounds are more likely to bridge the educational gap and create a connection with African American students. In general, the participants

reported African American students were measured by the Eurocentric educational standards. The same goes to the African American students today. These findings are retrospective to earlier literature where African American students were reported masking high level educational performances due to the fact that they would be perceived portraying different image by their surroundings and peers (Whiting, 2009). These findings are particularly consistent to earlier findings by other scholars who reported that African American youths are perceived acting white by their peers if they portrayed these performance images (Goff et al., 2007).

The study reported the educators can cut the influx of African American students into special education if they first tried other ways than special education. The participants perceived the same institutional Eurocentrism still exists through which African American students are being measured as will be seen in the data conversations report with Armand.

Interviewer: So then who should do that?

Respondent: The educators are the ones, those are the teachers and the regular education environment see because prior to going in special ED everyone is in a regular education environment, but unless the educator is willing to put forth the effort. Now they just may be put down on paper well they did this, they did that, I tried this and that. Yes, but did you try the thing that worked and were you diligent? Did you with all fidelity do those things that were necessary to avoid over identification of students needing special ED? Let me give you another thing that the disparity that I have seen. The disparity I have seen is we use designations of what we labeling. We label. What I have seen with African

American students who have ADHD or ADD they will be given a labeling of

learning disability, but I have seen students of other cultures…

Interviewer: Very interesting.

Respondent: So we have different ways of treating depending on who has the

pencil of treating African Americans differently than other cultures.

Armand's perception was there is disparity in labeling of African American

students for special needs purposes. Most participants reported the same perceptions

about the existence of biased endeavors to alienate African American students'

behaviors. These findings showed the scarcity of African American teachers reported in

most schools. According to the participants, the more African American teachers there

are, the more patterns of special education eligibility based on perceptions of race

would be eliminated.

Participants linked most cultural issues to the dominant Eurocentric culture as

the main reason why those problems exist. They said that most standardized educational

activities are linked to Eurocentric cultural values, which have little correlation with

African American culture. The study affirmed it is hard for a Caucasian educator to

completely understand what goes on in an African American culture. That it is

practically impossible in any kind of assertion that there will be a complete match

between a Caucasian and an African American student for example in this conversation

data report from Robina.

I know I have to live in the Caucasian culture. You are not living in my African

American culture so I'm studying everything about you. Well you don't have to

study everything about me because you don't have to give a flip about me. You

don't have to know anything about my culture because really our culture all stems around the Caucasian culture. So you don't have to really learn anything about my culture.

Robina's contention underscores the existence of institutional ethnocentric beliefs and values through which everyone is purportedly measured. Even with conventional wisdom, in heterogeneous society punctuated by cynicism, complete cultural connection remains to be a challenge. The study affirmed early study that a great deal of patience for educators to African American students in order to achieve a functional relationship that is culturally relevant to African American students (Roberts, 2010).

Study showed while they (African American students) are struggling with their image protection phenomenon, teachers may by all means create a relationship that will help them see beyond their struggles if they (teachers) portray the image of neutrality towards African American students. For example, if a home has some issues going on, it is not something a child would like to be comfortable discussing with peers or teachers unless a good strategy is sought by teachers. According to Robina understanding the student's background will help diffuse many shortcomings for example in this this data conversation.

Interviewer: What do you think is the reason?

Respondent: Because I think our young men, especially of today, they don't have that father figure around them so they don't; I think they tend to act out more because they don't have that father figure. They have more the female figure. They really don't have the father figure so that's why I think they are

more prone to be put in special ED versus females because females have the female figure to help raise. To be a role model for them and they don't really have that role model. I think that's why a lot of African American boys are put in. Because you have to understand, if you really look at the statistics and you I look at it and you look at a lot of these African American young men or boys that are placed in special ED, I bet you their father is not around, they have either been killed or are in prison or they just don't come around. If you look at it I bet you the majority of them that's what it is and I think they see that and they are like okay.

In the light of this piece of conversation, it is just one of many examples of African American family designs. The study reported African American students in special education had somewhat this kind of family structure where at least one parent (mainly a father) missing resulting to being more vocal as in the case of African American males who are loud and profoundly use profanity as part of their culture. This was an interesting finding as in the acknowledgment from some of the participants as normal daily life in an African American community as in this data conversation with Robina.

We use profanity at our kids. That is an African American culture. I'm sorry it is. My daddy cursed at me, well he didn't curse a lot but you know what I'm saying and they think that is, well you shouldn't talk to them like that. Well I'm sorry that's how I talk to my kids. I'm not abusing them. I'm not beating them.

Another curious finding was information about issues African American students face as they are poised to live by the social norms of the community in which

they reside. These norms and behaviors form their daily lives and are manifested in their character and vested interests in the African American community before they enter the school environment. The implications of these behaviors on personal basis of African American child is that they are African American and therefore they should not be abandoned. The study reported behaviors may not be fixed with special education but with other interventions without applying special education measures.

Other discussions about image protection were very positive. In this age of television according to Emily, African American children have reconciled their appearance as part of break thorough into the world of beauty. This should not be an issue of obstruction of delivery or seeking their educational rights although in some instances, African American people in general may perceive certain behaviors as being racially motivated. However, as will be seen in this data conversation with Emily African American youth may feel accepted in the main stream society.

> *Respondent*: Yeah, they are. Fortunately over the years and because of television and things like that people, middle class or from different communities they see the way people dress. Like they will see like a person who have money look and act and dress a certain way so when they see our kids coming in looking and acting like that they are more receptive to it where if you didn't have access to it on TV, because they are not going to go into the communities and see it, but because they can see it on TV.
>
> *Interviewer*: On television.
>
> *Respondent*: They are a little bit more receptive to it, but before that you know they were not used to kinky hair or what's wrong with your hair or big designs

on the clothes and things like that. They were almost afraid of it. They want to keep their distance from it.

From this conversation, African American youth may perceive the sense of inclusion in the main stream society but some participants indicated the youth may use this television image to pursue other dreams which may be far-fetched like in this data excerpt from Elijah's conversation.

Respondent: There is a parent all right their parents were behind. For whatever reason they didn't see the benefits of an education, which leads to the children not seeing the benefit it makes a cycle that continues on then their kids can't. That's the first important thing and that they don't see, for most minorities African Americans especially, the importance all right. They think everybody can be Michael Jordan everybody can. You know be an athlete.

Interviewer: Athlete.

Respondent: But what we find is that 1 in 10 million people make it to the NBA. So there is 10 million people in Oklahoma one person would make it.

Sports were mentioned by participants as part of the new African American culture why the emphasis has diverted from education in African American community.

I discussed this factor with participants. School talk should be perceived as normal in a home where children are in school. This sounds ideal in affluent society. Findings of this study were profoundly tilting the pendulum other direction. In an African American home of poverty, school talk was a mere conjecture. The findings reported that due to limited resources, limited parental or poor parenthood contribution, school talk in African American families is non-existent. They said it is due to many

unsuccessful intellectuals in the community that schools talk will evolve or due to the parental inability to engage in school matters which they are not competent.

Lack of resources were mentioned as part of the major reasons and then parental involvement. Parental failure was mentioned as not only due intellectual incompetence but also as physically incapacitated to seek resources to engage in academic activities at home. Finally, the study found school talk at home that helped and encourage school age children to be successful was not the case with African American students because of different family structure.

Participants indicated the structural family may seem to be the same as any struggling American family. However, the behaviors noticed with African American youth, is causes cultural misunderstanding and this cultural misunderstanding results to many misidentifications experienced in special education resulting to disproportionate representation of African American students.

Implications for Research

This study investigated six African American special education teachers. The purpose was to investigate their perceptions about overrepresentation of African American students in special education. As the discussion above suggests, several conditions facing African American students add to the challenges of finding effective strategies to serve them. The path to the success of those involved in this endeavor will not be easy. However, arguably, in fact, this study points to new paths rather than simply demonstrating the existing ones or modifying the current paths. Participants saw themselves as having the core understanding of the struggles the African American

youth faces. I chose to take this study by investigating these teachers and the results showed a compelling outcome.

The analysis of this data should not be interpreted to mean that the participants had holistic understanding of the African American youth and their internal challenges. Rather it should be considered an additional material to the direction of solving many decades old problem. The participants provided a profound case based on their perceptions as African American adults with clear understanding of the traditional academic domains. This case was composed from their cultural and linguistic identity that encompasses their traditional challenges from which they were raised as African American teachers. This should not be taken lightly.

Furthermore, the objective of this research study was to gather the perceptions of these participants, analyze them and put this information in context to enable readers and researchers to hopefully use this study to advance overrepresentation research. Although this study sample cannot be generalized across teachers of all racial divides, the information contained herein have important implications for practice and further inquiry. However, the results of this study should be interpreted cautiously as there are many questions yet remain unanswered about disproportionality.

This study calls for educational practitioners to seek to understanding of African American students and their backgrounds. The results of this study provided a variety of factors to look for before they can become effective educators of students of color. I seek to provide some recommendations regarding potentially fruitful research and practice strategies of those educators poised to become potential instructors of African American students. I also seek to provoke even more events that would be productive

areas of this overrepresentation issue as it progresses into more challenges of research discussions. I believe that clear analysis of this work will find that these compelling goals have been achieved. This study was unique in that it investigated educators who are rarely represented in many patterns of qualitative research inquiries. Thus, it stands out as one that will stand the test of time in special education research realm of educational research industry.

Limitations

This study was conducted using African American special education teachers. The purpose was to investigate perceptions of African American special education teachers about overrepresentation of African American students in special education. The analysis of this study did not include teachers of other races nor did it include those who were not special education teachers otherwise the outcome would have been different. Furthermore, the perceptions of these teachers would easily be misconstrued to mean that they were representative of African American community in general. Moreover, the question about monetary notion on the part of the African American parents as motivating factor to allow their children into special education could easily misrepresent African American parents. Another limitation was lack of scholarly data to represent educators' perceptions of overrepresentation of African American students in special education or minority group in general. Finally, a comparative cultural behavioral study would be of essence to convey the existence of the cultural difference between the youths of African American and those of the white culture.

Future Direction

A variety of future studies should replicate this sample in investigating African American parental perceptions about poverty and cultural mismatch as predictors of disproportionality of African American youths in special education. Another future inquiry should investigate perceptions of teachers of other races, African American students, and teachers of African American descent from other disciplines. Yet another future inquiry should replicate this study by examining perceptions of African American teachers about poverty in detail if it correlates with disproportionality of African American students in special education (Skiba et al., 2005).

Quantitative representation in this study will also be an interesting future work about this overrepresentation phenomenon. Future direction also would lead a scholarly study of the comparative behaviors between cultures among youths. This will assist educators to adjust their teaching methods and modify their approach not to rely solely on authority conferred by their institutional role as teachers.

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APPENDIX A

Disproportionality in Special Education

<u>Interview Protocol</u>

Thank you for time and willingness to participate. As you know, I am interested in finding out ethnic disproportionality in special education. Why do we have ethnic disproportionality in special education? I will be asking you open ended questions. If the questions are general and abstract, you may volunteer any detail you wish. Also, depending on your answers, I may ask probing questions. You also have the option of declining to answer – passing on – any of the questions. Do you have any questions before we start? Participant/Participants will be special education African American male and female teachers.

<u>Interview Question</u>

1. Can you describe yourself for me (i.e your educational and cultural background, born and raised).Why did you chose to become a teacher?

2. What do you think are the most important characteristics of a special education teacher?

3. How does being African American teacher help you to understand African American students?

4. Do you thinks being an African American teacher make you better placed than other teachers from different ethnic groups in your understanding of African American students? Why or Why not?

5. Is being an African American teacher a good match with African American students in elementary middle school or high school level?

6. Do you think special education students are treated fairly by all teachers? If not Why? How are they treated?

7. How do you feel working in (name of school) as a special education teacher?

   IRBNUMBER:4354 IRB APPROVAL DATE: 05/30/2014

   How did you learn the ways you interact with special education students?

8. Do you think poverty plays a role in placement of students in special education? If so Why? Or Why Not?

9. What role if any does poverty play in placement of African American students in special education?

10. Do you have more boys than girls in special education or more girls than boys? Why?

11. Are you familiar with the process of evaluation or identifying special education students if so Explain. If Not Why?

12. Based on that process, why do you think we have more African American students in special education than those of other ethnic backgrounds?

13. What role if any does cultural misunderstanding play in identifying students with special needs?

14. What do you generally attribute to the reasons why schools have so

   many African American students in special education?

Closing

Now that we are done, do you have any questions you'd like to ask me about

this research project? If you want to contact me later, here is my contact

information (will give them my business card or follow-up contact

information sheet). Also, I may need to contact you later for additional

questions or clarification of some questions. Can I also have your follow-up

contact information?

IRB NUMBER: 4354 IRB APPROVAL DATE: 05/30/2014

University of Oklahoma
Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Project Title: Ethnic Disproportionality in special education
   Principal Investigator: Peter Araka Moriasi
            Department: Educational
Psychology

You are being asked to volunteer for this research study. This study is being conducted at urban and surrounding school districts in Oklahoma. More than one district will be applied. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a certified special education teacher.

Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this study is to obtain information about cultural perceptions of African American special education teachers about disproportionality of African American students in special education.

Number of Participants

About 6 teachers will take part in this study.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form to allow the researcher to conduct and audio record an interview with you.

Length of Participation: 45 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Risks of being in the study: **There is not anticipated risk being in the study. However, if you feel uncomfortable about some questions you many opt out at any time.**

Benefits of being in the study are: **There is no specific individual benefits for being in the study. However, your participation will contribute to knowledge of disproportionality in special education.**

Compensat
ion None

Confidentiality

There will be no information made available that will make it possible to identify you without your permission. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you withdraw or decline participation, you will not be penalized. If you decide to participate, you may decline to answer any question and may choose to withdraw at any time.

You have the right to access the research data that has been collected about you as a part of this research study.

Your name will not be retained or linked with your responses. The data you provide will be destroyed at the end of the study. Please check all of the options that you agree to:
I consent to being quoted directly.   ___ Yes ___ No
I consent to having the information I provided retained for potential use in future studies by this
researcher.   ___Yes ___   No

Audio Recording of Study Activities
To assist with accurate recording of your responses, this interview will be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty. "If you do not agree to audio-recording, you cannot participate in this study."
Please select one of the following options:
 I consent to audio recording. ___   Yes   ___   No

Future Communications
The researcher would like to contact you again to recruit you into this study or to gather additional information.

_____ I give my permission for the researcher to contact me in the future.

_____ I do not wish to be contacted by the researcher again.

Contacts and Questions
If you have concerns or complaints about the research, the researcher(s) conducting this study can be contacted at Peter Moriasi 405 – 209 – 3414 or moriasi99@yahoo.com or Dr. David Lovett at 405 – 325 – 1507 or dlovett@ou.edu.

Contact the researcher(s) if you have questions, or if you have any concerns.
If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than individuals on the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.
You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records. If you are not given a copy of this consent form, please request one.

Statement of Consent
I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received satisfactory answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Participant Signature   Print Name   Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

Print Name of Person Obtaining Consent

University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus
Office of Human Research Participant
Protection Appendix B – Graduate Student as
Principal Investigator

Highest degree held by student: ___Bachelors ___Masters
Student's degree program: ___Masters __**X**_Doctoral
This project has been reviewed to determine that the scope, anticipated risks and benefits, and methodology are appropriate for this research by:

_**X**__ Approval of thesis/dissertation proposal by faculty committee
___ My personal review and

approval of research proposal ___

Other—describe below

The graduate student is qualified to conduct independent research based on the following credentials (Check all that apply):

_**X**__ has completed a graduate research methods course
_**X**__ has completed the training in Responsible Conduct of Research

___ has experience as an independent or closely supervised research team member. Describe below and include the name of the researcher who supervised your activities.

___ Other—describe below

FACULTY SPONSOR'S ASSURANCE

By my signature as sponsor on this research application, I certify that the graduate

student investigator is knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing

research with human subjects and has sufficient training and experience to conduct

this particular study in accordance with the research protocol. Additionally,

I confirm that I have reviewed this IRB application, including the protocol, and

verify that it is complete and the research scope, anticipated risks and benefits, and

methodology are appropriate in design.

I agree to meet with the investigator on a regular basis to monitor study progress.

I assure that the investigator will promptly report unanticipated problems and will

adhere to all requirements for continuing review and modification.

If I will be unavailable, e.g., sabbatical leave, vacation, or resignation, I will arrange

for an alternate faculty sponsor to assume responsibility during my absence, and I

will advise the OU-NC IRB of such changes.

If the graduate student investigator leaves the university, I will provide all necessary

documents for terminating the study or continuing review.

Faculty	Date
Peter Aaka	
Print PI	

PI Signature	Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

IRB NUMBER: 4354
Revised 3/21/2014   IRB APPROVAL DATE: 05/30/2014Page 1 of 1