

THE PERCEPTIONS OF CAUCASIAN FEMALE ELEMENTARY TEACHERS AND THE
OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

by

Thomas Seaberry

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

There is a disproportionate amount of African-American males in special education programs. Several factors have been offered by researchers as to why this phenomenon continues to be a problem throughout the county. The purpose of this study was to understand how Caucasian female teachers' perceptions of African-American male students might influence their overrepresentation in special education. This qualitative study employed an ethnographic case study method, and relied primarily on a pilot study and teacher interviews to obtain data related to this phenomenon. Using this research design, the researcher established six themes related to the research phenomenon: (1) cultural discontinuity between Caucasian female teachers and their African-American male students, (2) lack of multicultural and/or diversity training for teachers, (3) Caucasian female teachers' perceptions of colorblindness may influence the research phenomenon, (4) lack of teacher understanding regarding special education and RtI process, (5) gender bias between teacher and student, and lack of male, specifically African-American male, teacher representation in elementary schools, and (6) Caucasian female teachers' low academic/behavior expectations of their African-American male students.

Keywords: Caucasian female elementary teachers, African-American male, overrepresentation (disproportional representation), special education, teacher perceptions

Dedication

This work is dedicated to:

- Every African-American boy who has been, and continues to be, denied the equitable educational opportunities afforded to him under federal law and basic moral understanding;
- Dr. Jill Jones who gave me my first, and only, failing grade on a college project. Her pursuit for perfection and unwavering demand for excellence had, and continues to have, tremendous influence in my life; and
- Waldo Jones who incessantly advocated the importance of education and through prodigious example taught me how to be a husband, father, and faithful pursuer. — *semper fidelis.*

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List of Abbreviations

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

Classical-view Theory (CVT)

Complicity Theory (CT)

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Cultural Deficit Model (CDM)

Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA)

Emotional Disturbance (ED)

Graduation Exit Examination (GEE)

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

In-School Suspension (ISS)

Intelligence Quotient (IQ)

Intellectually Disability (ID)

Learning Disabled (LD)

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Out-of-School Suspension (OSS)

Response to Intervention (RtI)

Social Dominance Theory (SDT)

Student Support Team (SST)

U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The overrepresentation of minorities, specifically African-American males, in special education continues to be one of the most troublesome issues in contemporary public education (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002; Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Gibb, Rausch, & Skiba, 2006; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006; Shealey & Lue, 2006; Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006; Watkins & Kurtz, 2001). Despite federal court decisions (*Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education*, 1969; *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954; *Larry P. v. Riles*, 1984; *Marshall v. Georgia*, 1984; *PASE v. Hannan*, 1980; *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, 1971) and federal law (*Civil Rights Act*, 1964; *Voting Rights Act*, 1965; *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*, 1975; *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, 1990; *No Child Left Behind Act*, 2001), directly or indirectly focused on illuminating, if not eliminating, the overrepresentation of African-American students in special education, the phenomenon has persisted over the last 45 years (Dunn, 1968).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the terms “disproportional” and “overrepresentation” interchangeably. Overrepresentation (more specifically defined in the Definition of Terms section) occurs when the percentage of students in the special education programs is considerably higher than the total percentage of students enrolled in the overall student body. The factors relating to the discrepancy between these percentages is the primary motivation of this study.

The focus of this study was to identify factors that contribute to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education. Of particular interest was how Caucasian female elementary teachers’ perceptions of African-American males contribute to the disproportionate

representation of this student population in special education. Chapter One will include the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, nature of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, definition of terms, assumptions, scope, and delimitations and limitations of the study. The theories that will be outlined in this chapter are the Classical-view Theory (CVT), Social Dominance Theory (SDT), Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Complicity Theory CT).

Background

In *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the United States Supreme Court concluded “...separate educational facilities [were] inherently unequal” (Russo, 2004, p. 944), which marked the court’s initial attempt to fully permit minority students, specifically African-American students, equal access to public education. However, educational institutions and institutional programs continue to keep minority students segregated from their Caucasian peers (Losen & Welner, 2001). Several key indicators could explain the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education. Among the more prominent indicators are: (a) disciplinary practices, (b) gender differences, (c) student-teacher racial imbalances, and (d) referral and assessment practices (Johnson, 2006; Krezmien, 2006; Sadker & Zittleman, 2005; Vanderheyden, Witt, & Naquin, 2003).

Disciplinary Practices

African-American male students represent one of the most disadvantaged subpopulations in the American educational system (Bailey & Paisley, 2004). These students receive very limited opportunities at succeeding in the academic environment. This is caused, in part, by disproportional disciplinary practices. Townsend (2000) and other researchers (e.g., Cooley, 1995; Constenbader, 1998; Foney & Cunningham, 2002; Krezmien, 2006; Skiba, Peterson, &

Williams, 1997; Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004) suggested, when compared to their Caucasian counterparts, African-American students are often disproportionately disciplined.

One of the first comprehensive studies conducted to address the discrepancies in disciplinary practices and consequences between Caucasian and African-Americans students was conducted by the Children's Defense Fund (1975). This study, while surveying school discipline data from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR), discovered that the suspension rates for African-American students were two to three times higher than suspension rates for Caucasian students. Researchers also discovered consistent evidence of significant minority overrepresentation in discipline referrals (Lietz & Gregory, 1978; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Townsend, 2000), in-school suspension (ISS) (Cooley, 1995; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Skiba, Simmons, Staudinger, Rausch, Dow, & Feggins, 2003), and out-of-school suspension rates (OSS) (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). These patterns remained consistent even while socioeconomic status was controlled (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Zang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004).

While schools should serve as the bastion of opportunity and hope, African-American males continue to experience systemic discrimination (Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 199), marginalization (Cash, 2004), and stigmatization (Obiakor & Beachum, 2005). In this setting, African-American males are often perceived as unintelligent and/or misbehaving burdens, and are often given harsher consequences than their Caucasian counterparts when violating negligible rules and regulations in school; the welfare of these students is rarely explored (Evans, Townsend, Duchnowski, & Hocutt, 1996; Smetler & Rasch, 1994; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2005; Vaughn, Elbaum, & Schumm, 1996; Zigmond, Jenkins, Fuchs, Deno, Fuchs, & Baker, 1995). Furthermore, these students are more likely to be

excluded from revered educational curricula such as gifted and talented (GT) programs, magnet schools, and/or other academically esteemed opportunities (Office of Civil Rights, 2002).

Gender Differences

The U.S. Department of Education's Report to Congress (2002) cited three possible hypotheses to explain the high number of males in special education. First, males have a higher vulnerability to genetic disorders and have a greater disposition to possess particular learning disabilities. Conversely, research has proposed that females have some biological advantages over males such as their rate of maturation and lack of birth anomalies (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001). Second, males are more likely than females to exhibit inappropriate behaviors in the classroom; hence, their overrepresentation in special education may be attributed somewhat to their behavior. Third, the overrepresentation of males in special education may also be caused by gender bias in referral, classification, and placement. Gender bias, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2002), is defined as the exhibition of inequitable treatment of boys and girls that is often subtle and difficult to detect (Sadker & Zittleman, 2005).

Racial Imbalance

Racial imbalance between teachers and students may also contribute to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education (Kunjufu, 2005). Demographic data suggest that more than one-third of students in elementary and secondary levels are African American (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). Conversely, demographic data also establish that the predominance of this country's teaching force is Caucasian female teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2001). For example, Caucasian females make up 83% of elementary teachers in the United States (Kunjufu, 2005). This cultural imbalance between students and teachers is further complicated as very few teacher education programs

sufficiently address the issues related to the cultural disparity in the classroom (G. Cibulka & Boyd, 2003, p. iii).

African-American stereotypes remain powerful (Schwartz, 2001). Johnson (2006) contended that the way individuals view African-American men is influential in how individuals respond to them. Johnson further argued that the majority of educational and psychological literature related to African-American males suggests that they are unintelligent predators who are likely to be unemployed or incarcerated. Consequently, this condemnatory description of African-American males often prevents such individuals the opportunity to foster their intellectual and creative qualities (Johnson, 2006). Adkison-Bradley, Johnson, Rawls, and Plunkett (2006) provided research indicating that a number of teachers base their special education referrals exclusively on whether they feel the student is teachable or non-threatening.

Referral and Assessment Practices

Teacher referrals and assessment are the primary mechanisms to determine whether a student should receive special education services (Vanderheyden, Witt, & Naquin, 2003). Skeptics suggest that both of these methods present unique challenges in terms of reliability and utility. Adkison-Bradley et al. (2006) suggested that problems regarding the referral process begin at the outset as the initial phase of screening is not sensitive enough in diagnosing students with internalizing problems.

Furthermore, Harry and Anderson (1994) contended, in the assessment of disabilities, subjective judgment takes precedence over verifiable biological criteria. According to Lee Swanson, Harris, and Graham (2003), there are common types of tests used to identify behavioral as well as learning disabilities, which include behavioral assessments and intelligence

(I.Q.) tests. Adequately determining, however, whether a learning disability exists is not as objective as many educators might think (Turnbull, 2009).

The initial legal issues concerning the disproportionate number of African Americans being placed in more exclusive, special education environments focused on the bias nature of Intelligence Quotient (I.Q.) (*Diana v. State Board of Education*, 1970; *Larry P. v. Riles*, 1979). School districts often used a discrepancy model that measured the difference between a student's I.Q. and his/her norm-referenced achievement tests (Fore, Burke, & Martin, 2006). For instance, when a student demonstrated an average or above average intelligence, yet his/her achievement measured below the predictable performance, the student was usually determined in need of special education services (Shinn, Good, & Parker, 1999). However, the accuracy and appropriateness of this process has been disputed (Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Hosp & Reschly, 2004).

African Americans routinely score 15 points lower on I.Q. assessments than their Caucasian counterparts (Flanagan & Ortiz, 2001). While there is some debate related to the cause of this point discrepancy, many researchers agree that cultural bias does play a part (Agbenyega & Jiggetts, 1999; Arnold & Lassman, 2003; N. Cabrera & G. Cabrera, 2008; Dykes, 2008; Marbley, Bonner, & Berg, 2008; Patton, 1998; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001). Although federal law no longer requires schools and districts to establish special education eligibility using the I.Q. and norm-referenced achievement test discrepancy model (20 USC § 1414(b)(6)), there is little doubt that this practice had far-reaching influence on educators' negative perceptions of students who demonstrated such a discrepancy (Macht, 1998).

Problem Statement

Data from the 28th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA (2006) affirmed that African-American males represent approximately 9% of the total student population; however, they represent approximately 20% of the special education population. African-American males also account for 21% of the emotional disturbance (ED) population and 12% of the learning disabled (LD) population. Despite a plethora of research focused on equating the educational experience of African-American males in education, the overrepresentation of this population in special education persists (Skiba et al., 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Although there has been a substantial amount of research focused on equating the educational experience of all children in public education, and teachers' perceptions of African-American students was noted by Harry and Klingner (2006), a research dearth exists related to how specifically Caucasian female elementary teachers' perceptions affect the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education (Kirp, 2010).

The researcher conducted Boolean keyword searches of peer-reviewed literature via online databases using general search terms including *overrepresentation*, *disproportional*, *African-American*, *teacher perception*, *female teacher perception*, *special education*, and *Caucasian (White) female* in various combinations. Table 1 provides the outcomes of these Boolean searches. The product of these searches indicated most research has not isolated the "race-plus-gender" effect of this phenomenon (Kirp, 2010, p. 157).

Table 1

Boolean Database Search Results (1996-2011)

Keywords	EBSCO	ProQuest	ERIC
overrepresentation and African American and special education	84	52	26
disproportional and African American and special education	9	6	3
teacher perception and African-Americans students	133	30	20
teacher perception and African-American male	31	21	4
Caucasian (White) female and perception and African-American male	23	6	0
female teacher perception and African-American male	1	10	2
special education and Caucasian (White) female and African-American male	1	1	0
overrepresentation and special education and Caucasian (White) female	0	0	0

Studies related to the overrepresentation of African Americans in special education often do not conduct an analysis of the variables or potential predictors of overrepresentation patterns (MacMillan & Reschly, 1998). Research has, however, proposed preventive and appropriate interventions for students who are at-risk for underachievement (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982; Markowitz, Garcia, & Eichelberger, 1997; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Serna, Forness, & Nielsen, 1998). Such research has enhanced teachers' abilities in working with students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

A solution to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education is critical as there are several detrimental effects. When a student is placed in special education services, perceptions of low academic expectations are pervasive (Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010). The impact of placing students in special education may result in disparities in educational opportunities, differences in graduation rates, and earning power after graduation (National Alliance of Black School Educators, 2002).

Data suggest students in special education are more likely to drop-out of high school than students in general education (Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002) and "over half of African-American males that do not graduate from high school will be incarcerated at least once by the

age of 30” (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010, p. 197). Such data are compelling when compared to numbers offered by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics (2007). The number of prison inmates increased over one and a half million between 2005 and 2006 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007). In 2006, although African Americans made up approximately 12.4% of the total U.S. population, they represented over one-third of the population in all U.S. prisons (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions Caucasian female elementary teachers have regarding African-American male students and attempt to understand how these teachers’ perceptions of this student population might influence their overrepresentation in special education. The primary participants targeted for the study were six Caucasian female elementary teachers who work in the northeastern Texas area (Region 10). Additionally, the researcher conducted an initial interview-pilot with individuals that provided rich and detailed information due to their expertise and knowledge in the field of study (Patton, 2002). The pilot participants were not limited by ethnicity/race, gender, or grade level. Rather, pilot participants represented a diverse group of educational professionals working in the northeastern Texas area (Region 10), and provided the researcher a holistic view of the overrepresentation phenomenon (Creel, 2010). The results of the study, which could identify the factors contributing to the disproportional representation of African-American males in special education programs, may lead to solutions and strategies to reduce disproportionality in special education.

Significance of the Study

There are two significant aspects to this research. The first relates to teacher perception. Research has demonstrated that a strong relationship exists between teacher perception and student performance (Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010; Rubie-Davies, 2006; Sanders & Horn, 1998; Scott & Bagaka's, 2004). In other words, if a teacher has high academic and/or behavior expectations for a student, it is highly likely the student will perform at a high academic level and will demonstrate appropriate behavior while in school. Conversely, if the teacher has low academic/behavior expectations for a particular student, the student's performance will likely demonstrate less than favorable results.

The second significant aspect of this study relates to race and gender. Kirp (2010) suggested that very little research related to the overrepresentation phenomenon has explored the "race-plus-gender" influence (p. 157). Thus, the researcher attempted to explore the perceptions female Caucasian elementary teachers harbor towards African-American male students, and how such perceptions may influence the overrepresentation phenomenon.

The researcher's intent regarding this study was to contribute to the growing research related to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education and to potentially validate or challenge the current research and findings related to this phenomenon. The findings of this study will provide recommendations that will enable educators to create research-based strategies, training practices, and early intervention approaches to help reduce the overrepresentation phenomenon.

Nature of the Study

Creswell (1994) contended a qualitative research approach is appropriate for exploring a phenomenon in-depth; quantitative studies are frequently used to verify a theory. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) offered a very holistic definition of qualitative study:

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter...qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 2)

Given the purpose of this study, the selected qualitative research design was a case study, using the ethnographic research approach. Caucasian female elementary teachers in the northeastern Texas area (Region 10) represent a culturally bounded system with a “finite quality” in terms of time and space (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 128). This qualitative case study was ethnographic as it described and interpreted the culture of Caucasian female elementary teachers as a community with shared social and cultural perspectives and practice (Tiainen & Koivunen, 2006).

Merriam and Simpson (2000) defined an ethnographic case study as a sociocultural analysis of a single social unit or phenomenon. This method helps to increase the understanding of ethnographic issues of philosophical, political, spiritual, and aesthetic elements (Clair, 2011). Orlikow and Young (1993) asserted the institution of education could benefit from ethnographic case studies, rendering research findings that would facilitate cultural diversity through challenging assumptions and encouraging dialogue and tolerance between cultures of educators and students (Canen, 1999; Spry, 2003; Townsend, 2000).

An ethnographic case study “primarily uses research techniques such as observations and interviews to discover the cultural knowledge that people hold in their mind” (G. Spindler & L. Spindler, 1992, p. 70). Inferences can be made from what people say and the way people act

(Spradley, 1979). The participants in the study were asked to relate their experiences through open-ended questions that provided opportunities to freely express their responses in their own terms rather than having them choose answers that were pre-determined (Soklaridis, 2009). This use of open-ended questions ensured the answers had meaning and depth (Ary et al., 2010).

The sample of the study came from northeast Texas and comprised of six Caucasian female elementary teachers. As previously mentioned, the researcher conducted an initial interview-pilot with individuals that provided rich and detailed information due to their expertise and knowledge in the field of study (Patton, 2002). The pilot participants were not limited by ethnicity/race, gender, grade level, or job title. Rather, pilot participants were chosen from the northeastern Texas area (Region 10), and their selection was entirely based on their ability to provide the researcher an experienced and holistic view of the overrepresentation phenomenon (Creel, 2010).

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative ethnographic case study was to explore the perceptions of educators concerning the overrepresentation of African-American male students in special education. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- R1. *What perceived factors contribute to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?*
- R2. *How are African-American males perceived by Caucasian female elementary teachers?*
- R3. *How does cultural/race bias affect the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?*

R4. *What perceived effect does gender difference (teacher/student) have on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?*

R5. *What is the perceived influence of multicultural and/or diversity training (pre-service and/or professional development) in the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?*

Appendix A contains the interview protocol designed for the proposed study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical analysis of the study was based on the following social theories: (a) Classical-view Theory (CVT), (c) Social Dominance Theory (SDT), (d) Critical Race Theory (CRT), and (e) Complicity Theory (CT). Each of these theories offers insight to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education.

Classical-view Theory

The usual method of identifying a student for placement in a special education program begins primarily with the recommendation of a classroom teacher; students are then assessed (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006). However, students of culturally diverse backgrounds often do not benefit from conventional assessment practices (Elliott & Fuchs, 1997; Fore, Burke, & Martin, 2006; Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Kim, Baydar, & Greek, 2003). Moreover, teachers' cultural attitudes and perspectives may influence the referral process and ultimately a student's special education placement (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006).

Delpit (2006) suggested a contention exists between teachers and minority students. Specifically, teachers are often unable or unwilling to adjust their traditional instruction to be culturally responsive to their minority students. Delpit went further to say that teachers often do not presume the learning potential of their minority students. Assuming minority students will

not grasp or retain a certain concept, teachers often self-impose restrictions to their instructional delivery. Such low assumption of minority students' abilities is often referred to as deficit thinking. Deficit thinking causes many teachers to view minority students as liabilities rather than assets; instead of capturing and engaging the wealth of knowledge all children bring to the classroom (Landsman & Lewis, 2006).

Social Dominance Theory

The Social Dominance Theory (SDT) has become a powerful influence in linking groups to the socio-political arena across various societal strata (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This theory suggests societies are constructed based on social hierarchies and stratifications that occur on the basis of gender, age, and arbitrary set (R. Cross & T. Cross, 2005). Arbitrary set specifically relates to the "socially constructed and highly salient groups" (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 33) that are based on any characteristics that can be anticipated (e.g., intelligence, income, education, religion, etc.).

The SDT suggests dominant groups (e.g., male, Caucasian, Protestant, etc.) experience and maintain an unbalanced amount of social benefit (e.g., wealth and power) while subordinate groups (e.g., female, African-American, Catholic, etc.) suffer from a disproportionate amount of social detriment (e.g., poverty and imprisonment) (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This phenomenon is maintained through an agreement (conscious or unconscious) between the dominant and subordinate groups that the "dominant group is deserving of its disproportionately large share of positive social value" (R. Cross & T. Cross, 2005, para. 7).

The SDT also presents the theoretical apparatuses that enable the dominant group to retain its place or position in society. Such is accomplished through discrimination, prejudice, bias, etc. The premise of SDT suggests that social ills such as discrimination are purely practical

rather than irrational (Sidanius, 1993). In other words, it is sensible for Caucasian females to discriminate against African-American males as they may benefit from this phenomenon. SDT is guided by three fundamental suppositions (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999):

1. An arbitrary-set will arise and advance in any society that has an economic surplus.
2. Any social conflict (e.g., racism, ethnocentrism, sexism etc.) can be observed as a “manifestation of the same basic human predisposition to form group-based social hierarchies” (p. 38).
3. Because social value, either positive or negative, is not equally distributed across the population, group-based social inequalities results. Through the use of social beliefs, doctrines, and myths, uneven distribution of social value is given justification.

Critical Race Theory

Though application of CRT can be seen in numerous disciplines (Rabaka, 2006), its focal point, which emerged during the American Civil Rights Movement of the mid-1950s to the late-1960s (Milner, 2008), relates to challenging liberals’ points of view such as objectivity, neutrality, and colorblindness of the law and contends such principles are the ones that actually spread and tolerate racism by ignoring the inequalities permeating in social institutions. Much of the establishment of CRT can be attributed to two legal articles: *Serving Two Masters: Integration Ideals and Client Interests in School Desegregation Litigation* (Bell, 1976) and *Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma* (Bell, 1980). Bell maintained civil rights advances were “less about an expansive societal consciousness than they were about improving America's tarnished international image and avoiding racial strife domestically” (Belanger & Walker, 2009, para. 14). Bell went further to suggest civil rights

developments were simply products of the majority, and did not reflect the needs of their subordinates (Belanger & Walker, 2009).

Critical race theorists' specific interest is in exposing the majorities' discriminatory practices and policies that continue to oppress groups in an attempt to maintain power (Milner, 2008). A fundamental notion of CRT relates to the idea that minorities, specifically African Americans, were not a part of the legal formulation conceptualized to deter such social ills as racism and discrimination; thus, no genuine resolve has occurred (Brown, 1995). CRT proposes that to understand the past you must hear from those who experienced it. Hearing their stories and narrations would serve to challenge liberalist concepts of neutrality, colorblindness, and universal truths (Delgado, 1989). In other words, as Brown (1995) asserted, "Hear us, and hear us in our own voices. It is only then that you will truly hear us" (para. 7).

Abrams and Moio (2006) suggested the tenants of CRT are as follows:

1. Racism has an endemic nature in society. The intrinsic temperament of racism causes the phenomenon to often be imperceptible, particularly for those individuals who have racial privilege;
2. Race is a contrived scheme where people are categorized with reference to observable physical features that have no association to the reality of genetics and/or biology;
3. Social groups that are dominant and individuals in authority and power are capable of rationalizing discriminatory actions based on economic, social, or historic need;
4. Convergence of interests - racism and discriminatory practices will continue until eradicating these social ills is as vital to the majority group (Caucasian) as is to minority groups;

5. Dominant groups tend to exclude African Americans' and other minority groups' perspectives regarding history and law so their power is justified and legitimized; and
6. Antiessentialism/Intersectionality – which recognizes the intersectionality of oppressions and implies when race is the primary focus; there is a tendency to negate other types of exclusion.

Complicity Theory

A theory that “examines how assumptions can inhibit the desires called forth by policy because there is a failure to question and acknowledge those institutions that can prohibit revolutionary change from occurring” (Patton, 2000, p. 42) is referred to as Complicity Theory (CT). CT also attempts to create awareness of inequality by scrutinizing suppositions that restrain change. As Patton (2000) purposed, it is not enough to be conscious of disparity, there must also be a push to “question and acknowledge those institutions that can prohibit revolutionary change from occurring” (p. 42). Such a process can be ignited, Zoller (2000) contended, through meaningful dialogue: “dialogue asks us to hear the voices of those whose language, meaning, systems and social locations are different from our own” (p. 193).

There is also a self-examination element within CT. Individuals, willing to objectively explore and scrutinize their personal perceptions, behaviors, and privilege, and determine how these can not only ambiguously support, but can also become integral parts of the problem, are necessary within CT doctrine. Patton (2004):

[CT] requires people to examine and reflect upon how they tacitly maintain privileged spaces and discourses, and how their behavior affects or maintains a situation. In other words, in invoking complicity theory one must be willing to recognize one's own perpetuation of dominance on society or a specific group...(para. 29)

Although CT has been applied to several disciplines (e.g., socioeconomics, socio-history, business, criminal justice and law, etc.), when applying this theory to education, it is used to illuminate educational inequities and marginalizations caused by indifferent acceptance of educational inequities (McPhail, 1996). For example, educators are not only aware such inequities and marginalizations, such as the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education exist, but allow such grievances to continue, represents a classical example of complicity. "The complexities become apparent when we begin to recognize the infinite ways in which marginalizations become normalized and naturalized through communication and action" (Patton, 2004, para. 1). Allen referred to this naturalizing process as the "barriers" that have been erected to "insure the perpetuation of a status quo rooted in an unfair system of racial stratification" (p. 42). Allen (1992) furthered this idea and asserted such environments "seem to be not only content with, but committed to, the current system of structured inequality, a system in which [for example] African Americans suffer grievously" (p. 42).

To counter such grievance intrinsic to complicity, CT suggests educators become agents of change (Patton, 2004). Educators have the responsibility to be aware of the differences in students, such as race, culture, socioeconomic status, and sex that cause inequitable or unlawful circumstances for students (e.g., overrepresentation of African-American males in special education, underrepresentation of African-American males in gifted talented programs, etc.) (Andersen & Collins, 2001). The tenets of CT present educators with the responsibility to see the entrenched culture of education that prohibits each and every student an equitable educational opportunity (Allen, 1992; Patton, 2004), and to take the uncomfortable steps to right the wrong.

Definitions

The following terms will be defined to better understand the problems of the study:

Race. A social constructed category used to classify and divide people based on physical characteristics (J. Banks & C. Banks, 2007).

African American. A racial and cultural group historically referred to as Colored, Negro, Black, or Afro-American, of black African descent, heritage, and/or identity (Coontz, Parson, & Raley, 1999), which represents approximately 11% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a). The U.S. Department of Education determined African Americans represent 32% of the special education population; however, this group represents a mere 16% of the total student population (Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002).

Caucasian. A racial and cultural group often referred to as White, most commonly descendants of European heritage and/or identity, which represent approximately 79.5% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Overrepresentation. Skiba et al. (2008) defined overrepresentation as the disproportional representation of a specific group (e.g., race, gender, language, etc.) of students assigned to a specific educational placement or program. Determining overrepresentation is traditionally established through one of two measurements: (1) risk index or risk ratio, which refers to the extent to which a specific group of students receives educational services at a rate different from that of other groups, or (2) composition index, which refers to the extent to which a specific group of students receives educational services at a proportional rate different from that of the broader population (Skiba et al., 2008).

Disproportional representation. See overrepresentation.

Referral. A system or instrument used by school personnel to request or acquire formal and comprehensive assessments for possible special education identification, evaluation, and placement (VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Naquin, 2003).

Mentally retarded. A disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior (AAIDD, 2011). Federal law, however, requires the use of *intellectually disabled* rather than *mentally retarded*, when referring to such students (Public Law No: 111-256). The researcher uses *mentally retarded* in direct citations only.

Assumptions

There are seven assumptions associated with this proposed qualitative ethnographic case study. First, the perceptions and biases of teachers are factors related to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education (Bondy & Ross, 1998). Second, educational inequity is directly related to issues of culture and race (Jost, Whitfield, & Jost, 2005). Third, there is a broadening racial imbalance between teachers and student populations (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Kunjufu, 2005). Fourth, African-American males are often perceived as being endangered, intellectually inept, and dangerous (Bailey & Moore, 2004; Davis, 2003; Ferguson, 2003; Kunjufu, 2005). Fifth, the study participants truthfully answered the interview questions. Sixth, participant groups were adequately represented to produce conclusive results that will be useful in alleviating the problem of overrepresentation. Finally, because the research procedure was conducted through purposeful and homogeneous sampling, conclusions were generalized to reflect the overall view of Caucasian female elementary educators throughout the northeastern Texas area (Region 10).

Scope

The study participants included educators working in schools located in the northeastern Texas area (Region 10). The primary research participants for this study were chosen based on the following criteria: (a) female, (b) Caucasian, (c) currently employed as an elementary teacher, (d) has referred at least one African-American male to special education in the last year, and (e) works in the northeastern area of Texas (Region 10).

However, research participants selected for the interview pilot were not limited to Caucasian teachers exclusively. The researcher utilized both gender and racially diverse sampling techniques during the initial pilot interviewing process to obtain a more inclusive and complete expression of the research phenomenon (Creel, 2010). The focus of the pilot was to (a) verify the overall feasibility of the study, (b) check procedures for obvious flaws, (c) check for the appropriateness of the data-collection methods, and (d) hone and refine interview questions (Ary et al., 2010).

Delimitations and Limitations

Although a review of the current literature on this topic was conducted, and an analysis of the contemporary issues discussed, a broader view of this topic may render different results. This research specifically addresses the influence Caucasian female elementary teachers' perceptions have on the overrepresentation of African-American male students in special education. However, disproportionality is not exclusively Caucasian female or African-American male, nor is disproportionality a trend restricted to elementary teachers or special education.

The delimitations of this study relate specifically to aspects of this study that limit the scope of the inquiry. Since this study was explicitly interested in the influence Caucasian female

elementary teachers' perceptions of African-American males have on the overrepresentation of this student population in special education, the research focus negates any teacher perspectives outside of the ones chosen for this study. If the researcher, for example, would have chosen African-American female elementary teachers as the primary participants for this inquiry, the research findings may be significantly altered.

The research also negates any student population that may experience the same phenomenon as the focus of this study. For instance, other minority groups as a whole and Hispanics in particular, suffer from disproportionality in special education as well (Guiberson, 2009). There is substantial research available that indicates a negative trend in special education referrals for Hispanic students. This trend becomes more prolific when students demonstrate a deficiency in English language proficiency (Welner, 2006).

Since this research was focused on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education, it negates other discriminatory trends in public education such as the underrepresentation of this student population in Gifted and Talented (GT) programs.

Substantial research is available regarding this topic (Ford & Moore, 2005; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Moore, 2003; Worrell, 2007). Research indicates African-American students frequently lack access to GT programs, experience low teacher expectations, lack of motivation to do the work, and suffer from peer alienation (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008).

The limitations of this study are related to researcher bias, the number of participants included in the study, the ethnic/racial and geographic homogeneity of the sample, and the researcher's assumptions and biases. Although the researcher's predominate ethnic composition is European (German, Irish, and Italian), the researcher's ethnicity also includes an African-American genetic lineage. This genetic verity may bias the research in two distinct ways: (a) a

similar-to-me effect may currently exist between the researcher and African-American males and (b) a similar-to-me effect may develop between the interview participants and the researcher.

Research has demonstrated that researchers conducting investigative inquiry demonstrate an unconscious tendency to favor people (e.g., interview participants, subjects, etc.) who are similar (physically, ethnically, genetically, etc.) to themselves (Rand & Wexley, 1975). For example, if the researcher self-identifies with African-American males, the researcher may actively pursue ways in which African-American males are discriminated against. A bias would occur if the researcher negates to accept data that suggest discriminatory acts are not present in the research findings.

Conversely, since the researcher appears Caucasian, research participants (Caucasian) may self-identify with the researcher. If this phenomenon occurs, a similar-to-me effect between the research participants and the researcher may occur. However, this phenomenon may prove to be advantageous to the research topic as the research participants may be more comfortable relaying their thoughts and habits to someone they find analogous to themselves (Rand & Wexley, 1975).

The research was limited to the availability of participants and participants' bias. The study only included educators teaching in the northeastern area of Texas (Region 10); teachers from other areas outside the northeastern area of Texas were not included in the study. Finally, limitation may exist due to any/all research assumptions and biases that occur during the research process.

Summary

The focus of this chapter was to introduce the phenomenon of the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education. Despite federal court decisions, federal law, and

research focused on elucidating, if not eradicating, the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education, the phenomenon has persisted for over 40 years (Dunn, 1968). The purpose of this qualitative ethnographic case study was to explore the perceptions of Caucasian female elementary educators concerning the overrepresentation of African-American male students in special education.

Chapter One contains discussions on the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and significance of the study. The chapter also contains information regarding the nature of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, definition of terms, assumptions, scope, and limitations. The theories utilized in the study are the Classical-view Theory, Social Dominance Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Complicity Theory.

Although there are several factors that research has demonstrated exacerbates this phenomenon, Chapter Two will contain a review of the literature that prejudicially outlines such factors as gender bias, cultural bias, Caucasian female culture, and cultural discontinuity. The second chapter will also address human perception, and the effects American history and judiciary and statutory mandates have had on teachers' perceptions of African-American students. The literature review will also contain the theoretical framework for this research. As previously mentioned, the theoretical framework will be conveyed using such social theories as Classical-view Theory, Social Dominance Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Complicity Theory that convey racial conflict which continue to exacerbate the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to understand how Caucasian female teachers' perceptions of African-American male students influence the overrepresentation of this population in special education. The primary participants of this study included Caucasian female elementary teachers working in schools located in the northeastern Texas area (Region 10). The teachers to be included in the study were chosen based on the following criteria: (a) female, (b) Caucasian, (c) currently employed as an elementary teacher, (d) has referred at least one African-American male to special education in the last year, and (e) works in the northeastern area of Texas (Region 10).

The overrepresentation of minorities, specifically African-Americans, in special education is a complex phenomenon that has been thoroughly documented and researched for over 40 years (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002; Chinn & Hughes, 1987; Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Dunn, 1968; Gibb, Rausch, & Skiba, 2006; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Hosp & Reschly, 2002, 2003, 2004; Jordan, 2005; Ladner, 2009; Losen & Orfield, 2002; National Research Council, 2002; Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Sarah Gallini, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz, 2006). However, in spite of such research, federal court decisions (*Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education*, 1969; *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954; *Larry P. v. Riles*, 1984; *Marshall v. Georgia*, 1984, 1985; *PASE v. Hannan*, 1980), and federal law (Civil Rights Act, 1964; *Voting Rights Act*, 1965; *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*, 1975; *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, 1990; *No Child Left Behind Act*, 2001), discrimination and disproportionality in public education persists.

Skiba et al. (2008) stated that "although consistently documented, it is fair to say that the full complexity of minority disproportionality has not yet been understood" (para. 2). Research

has identified a myriad of factors that have contributed to the overrepresentation of African-Americans males in special education (Fore, Burke, & Martin, 2006). Discrimination and racism (Jordan, 2005), poverty, (Orfield & Eaton, 1996), teachers' perceptions of African-American males (Rouse, 2011), Caucasian privilege (Harry & Anderson, 1994), student grouping/tracking (Ogbu, 2003), disproportional disciplinary policies (Kunjufu, 2005; Nichols, 2004; Skiba & Peterson, 2000), cultural discontinuity (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008), urban school failure (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005), inappropriate and inaccurate assessment techniques (Hosp & Reschly, 2004), and teacher gender and cultural bias (Herrera, 1998), are among the more common factors that have been identified as consistent contributors to the overrepresentation of minorities in special education.

The second chapter of this proposal reviewed and synthesized the literature related to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education. Disproportionality in special education is a complex phenomenon that cannot be rationalized through one imperious cause; rather, as indicated above, the literature and research related to this phenomenon has suggested that several causes may be in effect (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Fore, Burke, & Martin, 2006; Gagné & Schader, 2006; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Jordan, 2005; Kunjufu, 2005; Nichols, 2004; Ogbu, 2003). This chapter addressed the commonly proposed causes for the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education. The literature review is divided into five sections. The primary focus of the initial section of this chapter was to present research concerning human perception and how perception effects the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education phenomenon. This section also includes the perception of deficit thinking, Ruby Payne's *Framework for*

Understanding Poverty, teachers' perceptions of African-American students, the perception of disability, and the perception of colorblindness.

The second section of this chapter provided a historical overview of African Americans. This section addressed social ills such as slavery, negative stereotyping, discrimination, disenfranchisement, and legal and accepted brutality. This section also addressed how such realities have influenced Caucasian Americans' perceptions of African Americans from their initial and compulsory entry into this country to the present.

The third section of this chapter consists of a legal and statutory overview of African Americans and U.S. public education. The primary focus of this section was to establish the legal struggle African Americans have endured for free and appropriate access to U.S. public schools. This section includes *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the *Civil Rights Act* (1964), the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (1975), and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (1990).

The fourth section of this chapter provided the theoretical framework. This section introduces social theories that convey racial conflict that exacerbate the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education phenomenon. This section presents Classical-view Theory, Social Dominance Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Complicity Theory.

The fifth and final section of Chapter Two addressed the common factors literature and research has indicated contribute to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education phenomenon. This section includes such factors as Caucasian-female privilege, assessment practices, the school-to-prison pipeline, resegregation, urban school failure, and cultural discontinuity. This section also addresses such issues as I.Q., gender and cultural bias, and assessment discrimination.

Human Perception

Human perception occurs when external stimuli are filtered through past experiences, multiple stratum of assumptions, and presuppositions (Foley & Matlin, 2010). Such stratum have the prodigious facility to modify objective reality to such an extent that perception can be viewed as absolute truth or absolute duplicity (Yolton, 1996). Plato's *Cave* offers an illustration of the duplicitous nature of both reality and perception.

In Plato's *Republic* (Book 7) a dialogue ensues between Socrates and Glaucon (Plato's older brother) regarding the philosophical questions related to reality and perception (Irwin, 1989). This dialogue, commonly referred to as *The Allegory of the Cave*, is an expanded metaphor used to distinguish human perception and truth (Dunne, 2003). Through Socrates, Plato describes a "cavernous chamber" (Plato, 1994, p. 240), where slaves have dwelled since their childhood. The slaves are shackled in such a way which prevents movement, and enables only a forward gaze (Plato, 1994). The only light permitted in the cave, Plato added, is from a fire set above and behind the slaves' position (Plato, 1994). Puppeteers, located between the fire and the slaves, manipulate "various artificial objects, including figures of men and animals in wood or stone" (Plato, 1945, p. 228) to create shadows on the wall in front of the slaves.

Through the description of the cave and the circumstances of its inhabitants, Plato intimates that the shadows are the slaves' reality (Plato, 1994). Unable to turn from the shadows, unaware of any reality outside of the shadows, the slaves perceive the shadows as reality (Plato, 1945). Alas, the shadows are mere manipulations and projections of "artificial objects" (1945, p. 228). The slaves' reality, Plato suggests, is based entirely on ignorance and flawed perception, misrepresentations produced by the influence of culture (Morris, 1961).

What further complicates human perception is its endemic and oblique nature.

No man ever looks at the world with pristine eyes. He sees it edited by a definite set of customs and institutions and ways of thinking. Even in his philosophical probings he cannot go behind these stereotypes...(Benedict, 1934, p. 2)

Perception, when applying it to education, can have devastating effect (Thompson, 2002).

This is particularly true when relating perception to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education phenomenon. There is a tendency for schools to embrace a Caucasian, female, middle-class culture, as this is the predominate description of most elementary teachers (Kunjufu, 2005). However, the preponderate tendency for such a culture is to over-refer and place African-American males into special education settings (Jordan, 2005).

The U.S. is quickly becoming a Caucasian-minority state. Minority students are projected to account for approximately half of the population in the U.S. by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). In 2006, West Virginia was the only state that in the union that did not show “rapid growth” in minority population (Crocco, 2009, para. 3). However, there is an importunate contrast between student and teacher ethnic/racial identities (Fierros, 2009). Although student populations are gradually increasing in ethnic/racial diversity, the majority of teachers are “White, middle-class females with limited cross-cultural interaction” (Brown, 2004, p. 325). As a result, the Caucasian female culture is the predominate culture in public schools (Kunjufu, 2005). With this teacher culture come certain perceptions regarding students (Tettegah, 1996).

Perception can be defined as the human mind attempting to interpret what has been experienced through sensation (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). Perception requires humans to process sensed experiences and attempt to determine what has been experienced based from previous knowledge (Foley & Matlin, 2010). When perception is formed resident tendency follows (Okoli, 2006). Resident tendency refers to the innate and reflexive thought and behavior that

requires little to no cognition (Okoli, 2006). In other words, once perception is formed, humans rely on the perception to guide them through future experience, responding to the experience without consideration or reflection. When perception is used to establish the ways in which people interact with others, Okoli (2006) maintained, it can lead to unintentional and injurious thought and behavior.

Palmer and Altrocchi (1967) proposed that misguided perception may lead to hostility (conscious or unconscious). These researchers defined conscious hostility as “the intention or desire to hurt or injure someone in any way” (p. 164). They defined unconscious hostility as “motivation of which a person is unaware...a person intends to harm another person but is not aware of this desire” (p. 164). This is particularly compelling when coupled with research that indicates that the way teachers perceive African-American students is not on par with their Caucasian counterparts (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Farkas, 2003). Caucasian teachers often perceive minority students as low achievers, lazy, and academically inept (Artiles, 1998; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

...researchers generally explain the behavior of African Americans based on their beliefs and assumptions about the origins and meanings of behavior...identifying and interpreting worth and behavior that one might say are deviant and different is [based on the researcher's] culturally bound frame of reference. (Patton, 1998, p. 28)

Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968) held, over 40 years ago, it is not enough for teachers to believe in what they are teaching, they must believe in the students they teach. This suggests that teachers' perceptions of their students have a degree of effect on their students' academic achievement. There has been a plethora of research that has established a link between teacher perceptions and expectations and student achievement (Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010; Rubie-Davies, 2006; Sanders & Horn, 1998; Scott & Bagaka's, 2004). Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968)

referred to this phenomenon as a self-fulfilling prophecy; the student will rise or fall to the level of the teacher's perception/expectation. This is significant, as Pringle, Lyons, and Booker (2010) suggested, a teacher can be one of the most influential aspects in the academic success or failure of a student. The self-fulfilling prophecy assertion has greater significance when it is linked to sociological issues such as race, ethnicity, and culture.

Perception of Deficit Thinking

The genesis of negative perception is difficult to determine with absolute certainty (Shepp & Ballesteros, 1989); however, the Cultural Deficit Model (CDM) offers a theory (Grieshaber, 2001). As previously mentioned, perception is formed by preceding experience; either positive or negative (Yolton, 1996). When an individual has a positive experience, typically a positive perception is formed. Conversely, when an individual has a negative experience, a negative perception follows. The CDM proposes that negative cultural or race perceptions, held by an individual or a group of people, are often guided by "negative beliefs and assumptions regarding the ability, and work ethic of systematically marginalized peoples" (Irizarry, 2009, para. 2). These beliefs and assumptions are typically deficit-laden and gross overgeneralizations that presume difference as synonymous with deficient, and place culturally less common peoples in jeopardy of "being viewed as less capable, less cultured, and less worthy" (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Gorski (2005):

The "deficit perspective" is an approach through which scholars explain varying levels of opportunity and access among groups of people by identifying deficits in the cultures and behaviors of the underprivileged...by drawing on stereotypes and assumptions usually unsupported by research and disconnected from a larger systemic analysis. (p. 8)

When relating the CDM to education, Utley and Obiakor (1995) maintained that such assumptions occur as cultural and race minority students enter the school setting with a culture

that conflicts with the “Eurocentric normative and scientific principles” which are habitually held in high esteem in the public education setting (p. 11). Moreover, educators harboring such negative assumptions often believe cultural deficiencies are counterintuitive in the educational environment and will cause students to be unsuccessful in the school environment (Grieshaber, 2001). In other words, students that exist outside the Caucasian, middleclass norm, due to cultural deprivation, are likely to fail academically.

Students, such as African-American males, existing outside the norm, lack what Bourdieu (1997) referred to as “cultural capital” (p. 40). This suggests that such students arrive to the school setting with little to no cultural credibility; simply, educators do not appreciate the cultural diversity such students often bring to the academic environment (Irizarry, 2009). On the contrary, “upper and middle-class students, according to the theory, are more likely to do well in school because they possess more cultural capital” (Wiederspan & Danziger, 2009, p. 376). Furthermore, educators often hold or develop negative perceptions concerning their students that do not reside within the norm (Mcfalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001). Irizarry (2009) affirmed that such sentiment is “deeply embedded in the fabric of schools” and is transferred through educational research, pre-service training, and professional development programs.

Perception of Payne

Although Payne’s *Framework for Understanding Poverty* is not concentrated on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education phenomenon, it has been offered by Gorski (2005) and Irizzary (2009) as an example of such negative perception transference in education previously discussed. Payne’s book, primarily intended for educators and educational training, aims to address the impact poverty has on students, specifically how poverty effects students’ ability to learn (Payne, 2005). Payne defines poverty as “the extent to

which an individual does without resources” (e.g., financial, physical, mental, emotional, etc.) (p. 8). Payne added, that “poverty is more about other resources than it is about money” and challenges educators to explore opportunities to assist and support impoverished students with non-financial resources (p. 25).

Payne’s book, however, takes a negative, yet all-too-common, turn when group and collective descriptions and attributes of those suffering from poverty are afforded less than flattering qualities. Payne creates a “caricature of the cultural perspective of poverty” when suggesting those suffering from low socioeconomic status exhibit common characteristics such as physical aggression, disdain for authority, and unfettered behavior (Wiederspan & Danziger, 2009, p. 376). Payne also suggests that socioeconomically disadvantaged students and their families place less worth on education than their predominately Caucasian, middle-class subordinates (Payne, 2005).

Wiederspan and Danziger (2009) contended that such assertions made by CDM theorists like Payne “ignore a half century of research on the complex social processes nested in macrostructural systems of inequality” (p. 376) such as deficit thinking, discrimination, and racism. In other words, as Gorski (2005) proposed, the CDM “flubs the cause-effect relationship” of low socioeconomic status and poverty by framing such social ills as cultural deficits rather than outcomes based on social inequalities. Payne (2005) suggested that “poverty is caused by interrelated factors: parental employment status and earnings, family structure, and parental education” (p. 12). Yet, as Gorski advised, “parental employment status and parental education do not cause poverty. Instead, they reflect the impact of poverty” (p. 4)

Teachers' Perceptions of African-American Students

Understanding the extent teachers' perceptions of African-Americans have on the academic achievement or ultimate demise of these students is essential in understanding this populations' overrepresentation in special education. Research has indicated that teachers' perception of students, positive or negative, directly correlates with students' success or failure (Armendariz, 2000). This correlation is especially noteworthy when research has also concluded Caucasian teachers often have negative views of African-American students (Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010). Such an assertion is not new to education. Irvine (1990) came to the same conclusion over twenty years ago.

Negative views of African-American students often lead to student failure (Brand, Glasson, & Green, 2006). For instance, if a teacher regards students of minority groups such as African-Americans as incompetent or not having the potential of Caucasian students, the African-American students in this case are victims of discrimination and low expectations. If the teacher does not give assignments or homework because of the perception that African-American students are incapable of completing such assignments, they are again victims. Though some students representing the minority can still be successful under these circumstances, poor test scores and overall achievement are almost inevitable (Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010).

Often when students are taught by teachers who are not confident in them, students may display disruptive or deviant behavior since they perceived the teachers' treatment as an insult to their dignity as competent students or as simply human beings (Kunjufu, 2005). Primarily, their alternative is non-compliance or refusal in working with particular teachers (Dempsey, 2006). This suggests a cyclical effect: the student is disruptive due to low teacher perception; the teacher's perception is confirmed due to the student's behavior.

Research has indicated that such negative perception regarding a certain group may actually represent preference for the perceiver's personal characteristics (Baskett, 1973; May & Gueldenzoph, 2006; Peters & Terborg, 1975; Rand & Wexley, 1975; Sears & Rowe, 2003; Wexley & Nemeroff, 1974). Rand and Wexley referred to this preference as the similar-to-me effect. In other words, people tend to look more favorable upon those who demonstrate similar characteristics (e.g., racial and ethnic background, socioeconomically status, attitudes and perceived personalities, etc.).

Perception of Disability

Jordan (2005) pointed out that the disability perception serves two detrimental purposes. First, such a label reinforces negative views upheld by Caucasian teachers who consider African-American children to be incapable or deficient learners. Conner and Ferri (2005) summarized this view by suggesting that the label "disability is perceived as a 'problem' within an individual who is viewed as 'broken' or 'ill' and therefore in need of being 'fixed' or 'cured'" (para. 6). Disability also allows the responsibility of student failure to be placed entirely on the student, rather than the school or educator. Jordan (2005) asserted that when the disability label is applied to a student, the "responsibility for failure is swapped, which in turn relieves schools of the pressure to enact reforms that address race biases in schooling" (para. 35).

Dudley and Dippo (1995) reached the same conclusion ten years previous to Jordan. These researchers argued that the perception of disability allows schools to blame students with such a label for any demonstrated lack of academic success. These researchers also maintained that the disability label preserves the myth that schools are institutions of equality and that success, as was mentioned in previous research, can be directly attributed to ability and work ethic. Thus, disability is viewed as a "predicament of the individual in the biological domain

(ignoring social or cultural influences)" (Connor & Ferri, 2005, para. 6). If success is not experienced, then the student, not the school, can be blamed for his/her lack of desire and/or willpower. Such an environment creates, what America (1993) referred to as the *haves* and the *have nots*. "Students designated disabled are often taught in separate classes, segregated and grouped together with 'others' with the same or similar labels" (Connor and Ferri, 2005, para. 6). This separation "helps to maintain the existing social order which benefits some, while disadvantaging others" (Jordan, 2005, para. 35).

Perception of Colorblindness

The concept of colorblindness in schools has been prevalent since the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Brown et al., 2003). This concept suggests that schools do not see color; in other words, all children are viewed the same. This idea, however, has enormous effect on teachers' perception of African-American students as it creates two divergent dilemmas. The first dilemma is related to colorblindness it its inability to see an individual. By removing a student's color, educators perceive that all children are the same; culture and ethnicity are given little to no value. The question that has often been raised in response to the colorblindness movement is, if color cannot be seen, then what can? Kunjufu (2005) offers an anecdotal response:

I am often reminded of a teacher who told me that she did not see color. I asked her if I could visit her classroom. Her students were a mosaic of the country... Yet she had an all-White bulletin board, library collection, and lesson plans. The only color she saw was White. (p. 19)

The second dilemma created by the colorblindness approach negates difference; thus discounting such socio-historical aspects as Caucasian-privilege. In other words, if color does not exist, then atrocious acts of brutality, such as slavery, have little to no relevance in contemporary thought. Jordan (2005) elaborated on this idea by proposing that "the invisibility

of Whiteness and its relationship to power and privilege serve to maintain the myth of meritocracy, and, in effect, leave teachers seemingly unaware of the structural bases, the power relations, and ideologies that produce and reproduce racial inequality” (para. 39).

Historical Overview

Human perception does not occur in a vacuum; rather perception, as previously discussed, occurs in part through past experiences, assumptions, and presuppositions (Foley & Matlin, 2010). The history of African Americans in this country has traditionally left many, specifically Caucasian Americans, perceiving them as less than capable or simply inept (Lintner, 2004). African Americans, traded as slaves, treated as property to be procured and possessed, denied inalienable rights and citizenship, and regarded as less than human, represent one of the most victimized populations in this country’s history (Aguirre & Turner, 2011). There were an average of 101 African Americans lynched per year around the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century (Klarman, 2004). The effects of such malice cannot be abruptly reversed; the legacy of history presents an impediment to both the present and the future (Pinkney, 1969). Although such gross atrocities of the past, such as slavery and legal and justified brutality are no longer a part of mainstream contemporary American society, there is little doubt that African Americans still remain as one of the most aggrieved groups in this country; often living below the poverty line (Table 2), in criminally infested inner-city housing (Aguirre & Turner, 2011; Jaynes & Williams, 1989), being raised in single-parent households (Table 3), existing in an economic climate of inequity (Latimer, 2003), and attending crowded, often dangerous schools that offer limited opportunities for success and equality (Aguirre & Turner, 2011; Bullard, 1991; Caputo, 1993; Pollack, 2003).

Table 2

Percentage of African Americans Living Below the Poverty Line

Year	African American	Caucasian
2009	25.8%	9.4%
2000	24.7	7.4
1990	30.7	10
1980	31.0	9
1970	33.5	9.9

U.S. Census Bureau: Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2009

Table 3

Low-Income Children Living in Single-Mother Families, 2009

Race	Percentage
Black	66%
Hispanic	35
Caucasian	35
Asian/Pacific Islander	21
Other	51

U.S. Census Bureau: Current Population Survey: 2009

Caucasian Americans often fail to recognize, as Aguirre and Turner (2011) proposed, that such residential, educational, and occupational inequalities are products of longstanding discriminatory practices, and now operate as a “new kind of discriminatory barrier” (p. 101). African Americans are habitually maligned by Caucasian Americans for not rising above such social impediments, “as if centuries of massive oppression can be immediately eradicated by individual initiative and drive” (Aguirre and Turner, 2011, p.101). Such misguided thinking often generates negative ideas concerning African Americans (Lintner, 2004), which frequently leads to iniquitous and prejudicial practices.

Stereotypes and Discrimination

Being black (African-American) creates an immediate problem in a White (Caucasian), prejudicial and discriminatory world, as an African American, Aguirre and Turner (2011) suggested,

You stand out, and dramatically so. Black and White are perceived as opposite colors...Skin color is, in the biological sense, a minor genetic trait, but in the sociological sense it is anything but minor. Identifiability makes people easy targets of discrimination. (p. 109)

This immediate biological difference often creates an *us* and *them* divergence (Carnes, 1995). W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) referred to this as, "the color line" (p. 29), which separates Black from White. Du Bois' color line is as evident today as it was in the early part of the twentieth century. Contemporary America is just as cognizant of Du Bois' color line, yet differently deems it acceptable or even necessary (Lintner, 2004). The color line, Banks (1995) believed, is a socially created ideal, used to separate and alienate. Separatism and social alienation, sequentially, open the door for harmful and destructive negative stereotyping (Lintner, 2004).

A stereotype refers to a belief system in which psychological characteristics are credited indiscriminately to members of a minority and/or subordinate group (Allport, 1979). Allport (1979) proposed three categories of racial stereotypes: (1) intellectual and educational, (2) personality or character, and (3) physical appearance. Intellectual and educational stereotyping has traditionally attacked African Americans' ability to think and or academically achieve. Personality and character stereotyping refers to demeaning ways in which African Americans have been depicted, such as criminal, dependent, and/or lazy (Rome, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Physical appearance stereotypes frequently revolve around caricature-like and/or exaggerated body and/or facial features to depict subordinate, inferior, or other-than-normal qualities (Boeckmann, 2000). Stereotypes, according to Allport (1979), act as crude devices

used to accept or reject groups using overly simplistic, obvious and/or exaggerated characteristics. All three of Allport's stereotype categories have been used throughout this country's history extensively to support negative views of African Americans. The mass media has perhaps been the most egregious user of negative racial stereotypes regarding African Americans (Lintner, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). African Americans are commonly portrayed as drug-addicted, angry, violent, and/or stupid (Rome, 2004); conversely, African Americans are rarely portrayed as "achievers" (Rome, 2004, p. 2).

Bestial Savage

The introduction of African Americans into the colonies occurred in 1619 when *savages* from the continent of Africa disembarked in the new world as captured indentured servants (Rome, 2004); subsequently, becoming slaves. This practice, as Rome contended, was continued for almost 200 years; "men, women, and children—were transported to the West to participate in the making of America" (p. 19). Such conduct was justified as these *savages* were viewed as uncivilized, bestial, and as tormented by the curse of God, who made them black (Fredrickson, 1981; Jordan, 1968; Turner & Singleton, 1978).

Such metaphors and beliefs of African Americans which were pioneered in the seventeenth century and further cultivated in the eighteenth century, Fredrickson (1981) suggested, develop into conventional thought for Western European colonists and created the "distorted lens through which the early colonists assessed the potential and predicted the fate" of all African-American peoples (p. 7). Fredrickson's distorted lens helped colonists create the idea that Africans, due to their overt *savagery*, could be enslaved, while Europeans could not. As Frederick Douglass' "myth of the black rapist" was later created to legitimize lynchings (Rome, 2004, p. 2), Fredrickson's distorted lens helped legitimize slavery. This deduction, Fredrickson

(1981) contended, is an example of conscious racism; the “belief that Whites were destined by God or nature to rule over peoples whose physical characteristics denoted their innate inferiority” (p. 70).

While some scholars have maintained that not all European colonists had such disparaging beliefs regarding African Americans (Roediger, 1991), these convictions were not seriously challenged until abolitionism, which had little influence until the early to mid-nineteenth century, began to change conventional thought regarding slaves (Bordewich, 2005). As the new world evolved into the United States, abolitionism helped create a national divergence: North and South.

Black Sambo and Uncle Tom

The early to mid-nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of new African-American stereotypical caricatures: (a) the Black Sambo and (b) the Uncle Tom. The Black Sambo illustrated the helpless, childlike, shuffling and fumbling nature of African Americans (Boskin, 1986; Rome, 2004). However, the Black Sambo, complementary to its childlike disposition, also had “potentially aggressive tendencies” (Aguirre & Turner, 2011, p. 110). While abolitionists did not embrace the Sambo stereotype, radical abolitionists did, however, assume the intellectual inferiority of African Americans (Fredrickson, 1981).

The second stereotypical caricature that emerged during this time period was the Uncle Tom. In her 1852 melodramatic novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe humanized the misery of slavery by depicting Tom as a strong, vigorous, and honorable man (Euell, 1997). Ultimately beaten to death for not divulging the location of two women who escape from slavery, Stowe's *Tom* epitomized the concept of passive acceptance (Aguirre & Turner, 2011). Aguirre and Turner (2011) proposed that passive acceptance was a way for slaves to salvage a

sense of “identity and dignity” (p. 25) while accepting complete subjugation. Over time, however, the perception of Stowe’s *Tom* changed, and was seen less as honorable and more of subservient. Uncle Tom became a stereotypical label applied to African Americans who demonstrated compliant or deferential behavior towards Caucasian authority and culture.

Segregation and Jim Crow

After the Civil War, segregation, known also as separate but equal practices or Jim Crow Laws, emerged as the vogue discriminatory exercise against African Americans (Spencer, Brookins, & Allen, 1985). Such laws, ratified between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth century, mandated de jure racial segregation in all public facilities. In other words, facilities could be “separate” providing such facilities were “equal” (Burner, Genovese, & McDonald, 1980, p. 370). These laws, intended to create distinct yet equitable resources for African Americans, proved, over time, to be far more derisory than equivalent. In reality, Jim Crow Laws led to accommodations that were frequently inferior to those provided to Caucasian Americans. Separate but equal laws, which ultimately led to economic, educational, and social disadvantages for African Americans, Burner et al. (1980) reasoned, systematically assured Caucasian Americans “continued control” over African Americans (p. 481). Such laws, Aguirre and Turner (2011) contended, were thoroughly justified by Caucasian Americans as evolutionary theory began to emerge that confirmed “black inferiority” as “scientific fact” (p. 111). Although various social theorists disagreed with the inferior intellectual, social, and behavioral qualities of African Americans, most Caucasian Americans gravitated to the idea of biological supremacy.

Disenfranchisement

Any status gained by African Americans through the Emancipation Proclamation, the North’s victory in the Civil War, or the Reconstruction period was fleeting (Weisbrot, 1990). By

the end of the Civil War, “all southern states had enacted compulsory ignorance laws” for African Americans (Aguirre & Turner, 2011, p. 132). The decades after Reconstruction observed a deterioration of African American status “to a level near slavery” (Weisbrot, 1990, p. 4). A common tactic used against African Americans during this time period related to the revocation of the right of suffrage (Gomes & Williams, 1995).

The disenfranchisement, which specifically refers to the intent of a person or group of people to render an individual’s vote less effective or ineffective (Klarman, 2004), of African Americans developed into the principal focus of local and state legislators (Clarke, 2005). Disfranchisement may occur subversively through the advent of discriminatory law or overtly through intimidation or by creating unreasonable requirements for voters (Klarman, 2004). Caucasian Americans’ opposition to African-American suffrage did not cease with the Civil War. Although the war’s egalitarian principles increased African-American voting patronage, as Klarman suggested, “White southerners generally remained opposed, as did northern Democrats” (p. 28).

During this time period, varying disfranchisement techniques were used by Caucasian Americans throughout the country. All of the southern states assumed a poll tax which significantly deterred African Americans, usually poor, from voter participation (Ogden, 1958). Most southern states also adopted literacy tests, which disproportionately disqualified African Americans from voting (Bass & Devries, 1976). South Carolina enacted a draconian registration law referred to as the Eight Box Law. This law in essence acted as another form of literacy test by requiring voters to deposit ballots in the correct boxes (Klarman, 2004).

Many states also adopted secret-ballot laws and complex registration requirements, which essentially served as “de facto literacy test,” since such laws disallowed anyone’s assistance

while voting (Kousser, 1999, p. 34). As a result of such disfranchisement practices, the voting customs of African Americans dramatically decreased in the late nineteenth century (Holloway, 2009). Between the late 1890s and the early 1900s, African American voting had become all but obsolete in all southern states (Klarman, 2004). During this time period, African American voter registration in the state of Louisiana fell from 95.6 to 1.1%, voter registration in the state of Alabama dropped from almost 200,000 to a mere 3,000, Mississippi's African-American voters plunged from 29% to 0%, and after the state of Florida employed election-law restrictions, African-American voters decreased from 62 to 5% (Klarman, 2004). The cause for such crippling disfranchisement practices in the southern states were varied and complex; however, the majority of southern Whites believed that the Fifteenth Amendment was unlawful, had no moral authority, and was not obligatory to southern principles (Klarman, 2004).

Desegregation Backlash

Post-World War II America witnessed dramatic shifts in Caucasian American sentiment regarding African Americans (Aguirre & Turner, 2011). Although the 1960s are commonly referred to as the decade of the American Civil Rights Movement, the following events occurred prior to 1960: (a) in 1948 President Truman signed Executive Order 9981, which stated, "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin;" (b) in 1954, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional (*Brown v. Board of Education*); (c) in 1955 Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a Caucasian passenger. This action by Parks, along with her impending arrest, launched a bus boycott, led by Martin Luther King, Jr. (Levy, 1992); and (d) in 1957 the

Little Rock Nine, protected by federal agents and the National Guard, attend Central High School, previously an all-Caucasian school in Little Rock, Arkansas (Levy, 1998).

It would be imprudent, however, to assume such actions occurred without sacrifice and backlash (Levy, 1992). Although Truman integrated the military, African Americans suffered from discrimination in the Armed Forces for decades to come (Edgerton, 2001). Although segregation was determined unconstitutional in 1954, covert and intricately formulated segregation practices continue (Connor & Ferri, 2005; Webb, 2004; Wong, 1999). Although Rosa Parks' actions ignited the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the Little Rock Nine were able to integrate into a previously established all-Caucasian school, backlash was imminent (Weisbrot, 1990):

- Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy, was brutally slain by two men who confessed; suggesting Till had flirted with a Caucasian woman, and were inexplicably acquitted in the court of law for their actions (Baker, 2006).
- Lamar Smith was shot to death on the steps of the Brookhaven, Mississippi courthouse, for urging African Americans to vote. A grand jury declined indictment of the three men who were charged for his murder (Weisbrot, 1990).
- Reverend George Lee was shot and killed for keeping his signature on the voting lists in Belzoni, Mississippi. When asked about the pellets found in the late Rev. Lee's mouth, the local sheriff speculated, "Maybe they're fillings from his teeth" (Weisbrot, 1990, p. 94).

Civil Rights to Present

Overt discriminatory practices against African Americans, such as intimidation and brutality, were all but extinguished after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Aguirre &

Turner, 2011). Most Caucasian Americans in the 1950s, as previously mentioned, no longer viewed African Americans as genetically inferior. Post-1960s Caucasian American sentiment regarding African Americans could be typified as reluctant acceptance coupled with harbored resentment (Kluegel & Bobo, 1993). Although Caucasian Americans, by and large, no longer believed that there were biological differences, specifically related to superiority and inferiority traits, between Caucasian Americans and African Americans, many Caucasians reserved contempt for African Americans for gaining legal prominence during the Civil Rights Movement (Weisbrot, 1990).

Thirty years ago, 65% of Caucasian Americans considered African Americans as “unmotivated” (Aguirre & Turner, 2011, p. 112), and ten years ago approximately 50% of Caucasian Americans believed African Americans were lazy (Aguirre & Turner, 2011). Although these perceptions of African Americans have diminished, prejudicial beliefs still persist. Aguirre & Turner:

...half of Americans still believe that African Americans lack motivation, and one-third view blacks as lazy...40 percent of Americans believe government should not aid blacks...30 percent believe that government should ensure fair treatment in jobs. (p.112)

Such thinking by Caucasian Americans has inhibited African Americans’ ability to assume equitable legal, social, economic, political, and educational status. As Aguirre and Turner’s (2011) data demonstrate, a considerable percentage of the American population retains negative perceptions of African Americans’ “motives” and their entitlement to “fair treatment” (p. 112).

Legal Overview

U.S. law and legislation have been undeviatingly connected to education (Skiba et al., 2008; Smith & Kozleski, 2005). Thus, assessing the overrepresentation of African-American

males in special education phenomenon would be remiss without conducting a legal examination of the laws that have played a part in the treatment of minorities and the formation of special education in this country. Although there are volumes of statutory and federal mandates and court decision that have created lasting impressions on both the treatment of minorities and the educational system in this country (e.g., *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education*, 1969; *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954; *Civil Rights Act*, 1964; *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*, 1975; *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, 1990; *Larry P. v. Riles*, 1984; *Marshall v. Georgia*, 1984; *No Child Left Behind Act*, 2001, *PASE v. Hannan*, 1980; *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, 1971, *Voting Rights Act*, 1965; etc.) the primary focus of this section of Chapter Two will be on the following: *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the *Civil Rights Act* (1964), and the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (1975).

Plessy v. Ferguson

In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court issued an opinion in *Plessy v. Ferguson* upholding the constitutional state laws permitting segregation under the doctrine of “separate but equal,” which established the way of life in the southern U.S. for the next five decades. *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896) (“*Plessy*”). The origin of the now infamous court opinion was established in 1892 when Homer Adolph Plessy dared to defy the Separate Car Act, of Louisiana. *Id.* at 540. Plessy, having an African-American great-grandmother, was seven-eighths Caucasian and one-eighth Black. *Plessy*, 163 U.S. at 538. Although classified by the state of Louisiana as Black, Plessy and much of his family often passed as Caucasian. *Id.*

The Citizen’s Committee, a New Orleans-based political group comprising of African Americans and Creoles, requested Plessy’s help in challenging the then newly enacted Separate

Car Act, a Louisiana law which mandated that Blacks and Whites ride in separate railroad cars. *Id.* at 540. The Act mandated that if a person of color sat in the wrong car, he or she would be jailed for 20 days or forced to pay a fine of twenty-five dollars. *Id.* at 541. Plessy agreed to assist the Citizen's Committee and bought a first-class train ticket bound for Covington, Louisiana. Plessy seated himself in the car exclusively designated for Caucasians waiting for the arrival of the conductor. *Id.* Upon the conductor's arrival, Plessy refused to move to the colored car. *Id.* at 542. The conductor then called the police, and authorities apprehended Plessy. *Id.* He was jailed for a night then released the following day on bond.

The Citizen's Committee retained Albion W. Tourgee, a New York attorney who had previously worked with civil rights cases involving African Americans. The case of Plessy was tried in court a month after his arrest. Plessy's lawyer argued that the Louisiana law requiring travel in separate railcars was unconstitutional because it conflicted with the freedoms afforded to all Americans in the U.S. Constitution. *Id.* at 539. Essentially, Tourgee attacked the law on the grounds that Plessy had been deprived of the civil rights provided by the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution. *Id.* at 542. However, state court judge, Hon. John Ferguson, upheld Louisiana's state law. *Ex parte Plessy*, 45 La. Ann. 80, 11 South. 948., La. 1892. The Louisiana Supreme Court, to whom Plessy appealed, also held that although separate cars in interstate travel were not permitted due to possible conflicts of laws between states, Louisiana nevertheless had the right to delineate railroad policies regarding segregation within its own borders, thereby upholding Judge Ferguson's ruling. *Id.*

The U.S. Supreme Court received and reviewed the merits of *Plessy* in 1896. In a seven to one decision the Supreme Court upheld the Louisiana court's holding. *Plessy*, 163 U.S. at 552. The consequences of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision infiltrated into countless aspects of

American culture in the South, not only in transportation, but also in educational institutions, theaters, hotels, restaurants, and many others (Aguirre & Turner, 2011; Elliott, 2006; Kelly, 2007; Pollak, 2005). The doctrine of separate but equal eventually found its end in 1954 when the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Brown v. Board of Education

The landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case brought about the dissolution of segregation in public schools. *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) ("Brown"). At the center of the controversy was Linda Brown, an African-American third grader in Topeka, Kansas in 1951 (Gold, 2005). A Caucasian elementary school was the closest to her home, and since it was most convenient, her father decided to have her enrolled; however, his request was denied (Patterson, 2001). Consequently, Linda Brown had to travel approximately a mile each day to go to the nearest school catering to African-American students (Raffel, 1998).

The earlier *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision had set the legal precedent of "separate but equal," which became the applicable standard in schools in Southern states. *Plessy*, 163 U.S. 537. Schools in the South were especially unequal because of the prevalence of segregation in the region (Aguirre & Turner, 2011). Parents of African-American students in Delaware, Virginia, South Carolina, and Washington D.C. were determined to put the "separate but equal" doctrine to a legal challenge at approximately the same time that Oliver Brown appealed the decision of the Kansas District Court. *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483, 486.

During the summer of 1951, a class action case filed against the Topeka Board of Education, with Mr. Brown as the named plaintiff, was heard before the U.S. District Court in Kansas. *Brown v. Board of Ed. of Topeka*, Shawnee County, Kan., 98 F. Supp. 797 (D. Kan. Aug. 3, 1951). Brown sought an injunction to halt segregation in Topeka schools. *Id.* The

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) argued that the separation of African Americans from Caucasians is tantamount in making equality in education impossible to achieve. *Id.* at 797-8. The Topeka Board of Education argued that segregation was a part of the social landscape in schools, and that segregation would better prepare students for reality in later life as adults (Bryce, Nolan, & Duncan, 2007; Cozzens, 1995). The Board of Education also cited prominent African Americans, like Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, and Frederick Douglass, none of which attended integrated schools (Cozzens, 1995). In deciding the case, the judges wrote that they believed that the precedent set by *Plessy v. Ferguson* prevented the court from issuing the injunction. *Id.* at 800. Thus, they ruled in favor of the Board of Education in Topeka. *Id.*

Brown appealed the decision of the Kansas District Court to the U.S. Supreme Court. *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483. It was integrated with cases from Delaware, Virginia, South Carolina, and Washington D.C. *Id.* at 486. In reaching its decision, the U.S. Supreme Court focused predominantly on the purpose of the Fourteenth Amendment, adopted in 1868. *Id.* at 489. The Court also considered the cases that had interpreted the Fourteenth Amendment to date, including *Plessy* and six school cases that followed its “separate but equal” precedent. *Id.* at 490-2. Instead of its prior method of comparing tangible factors between Caucasian and African-American schools, the Court noted that in *Brown*, it “must look instead to the effects of segregation itself on public education.” *Id.* 492. On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered its landmark decision that separate education facilities were inherently unequal, as follows:

We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal...we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated ... [are] deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. *Id.* at 493-5.

Civil Rights Act of 1964

The Civil Rights Act (1964) was considered landmark federal legislation as its primary purpose was outlawing voting inequality, as well as racial discrimination in educational settings, places of employment, and other facilities that serve the public. Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241 (codified as amended in scattered sections of 2 U.S.C., 28 U.S.C., and 42 U.S.C.). When it was implemented, its impact was far-reaching and long-term, as it operated to prohibit discriminatory acts in public, in the workplace, and in government (Humphrey, Rauh, & Stewart, 1997). In effect, The Act invalidated the Jim Crow laws in the South by ending legalized racial discrimination in hiring employees, in housing, and in education. Initially, its implementation was weak, but in later years efforts at enforcing it become stronger (Humphrey, Rauh, & Stewart, 1997; Wirt, 1997).

Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was enacted in 1975 by President Gerald Ford which modified and improved *Education for All Handicapped Act* (1974). Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, Pub. L. No. 94-142, 89 Stat. 773 (1975) (codified as amended at 20 U.S.C. §§ 1400–1461 (1976)). In the 1974 Act, Title VI was expanded and confirmed by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Pub. L. No. 93-380, 88 Stat. 579 (1974). The purpose of EAHCA was to provide educational opportunities to children with disabilities who had formerly not been properly educated. The EAHCA obliged states to generate practices and policies that facilitate students' needs.

In 1986 the Handicapped Children's Protection Act of 1986 was passed by Congress. Handicapped Children's Protection Act of 1986, Pub. L. No. 99-372, 100 Stat. 796 (codified as amended at 20 U.S.C. §§ 1400-45). In 1985, the verdict of the Supreme Court decision on

Burlington v. the Department of Education of Massachusetts, 471 U.S. 359 (1985) defined the right of courts to compel the school to refund a family for tuition in a private institution. This was permitted when the child was not provided appropriate education by the public school. *Id.* A number of cases in court have questioned the concept of “related services” in this act. The decision in the case of *Irving Independent School District v. Tatro*, 468 US 883 (1984) attempted to define the meaning of this concept. It is a requirement for schools to make a wide assortment of “related services” available to students with special needs provided the schools are capable of dispensing this function as stipulated in the Act. *Id.* In *Honig v. Doe*, 484 U.S. 305 (1988), the Supreme Court held that a special child cannot be excluded because of the misbehavior posed by their disability. The court, however, did provide guidance on the course of action that school can take in dealing with threatening behavior from time outs to suspension (Beyer, 1989).

Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act of 1990

The EAHCA was reauthorized as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (1990). Pub. L. No. 104-476, 104 Stat. 1103, 1141-42 (1990) (codified as amended at 20 U.S.C. §§ 1400-1482). IDEA is a federal law aimed at protecting students’ rights, particularly those with disabilities, by ensuring they are provided with free and appropriate public education (FAPE), despite the type of ability. In addition, IDEA not only strives to grant students with disabilities equitable educational opportunities, but also additional services in special education, as well as safeguards in the procedure.

The provisions of IDEA also mandate that services in special education are individualized and therefore meet the needs unique to the child with disabilities and are implemented in an environment considered to be the least restrictive. These services include the following: speech, physical or occupational therapy, transition services, small group or

individual instructional, teaching or curricular modifications and the like. The provision of these services is guided by an Individualized Education Program (IEP) which is specifically intended to address the unique needs of individual students.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical analysis of this study was based on the following theories: (a) Classical-view Theory (CVT), (b) Social Dominance Theory (SDT), (c) Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Complicity Theory (CT). These theories offer the conceptual lenses that are critical when illuminating the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education phenomenon. Moreover, the theoretical framework of this study facilitated the research related to how Caucasian female teachers' perceptions of African-American males influence the overrepresentation of this student population in special education.

Classical-view Theory

The Classical-view Theory, when relating the theory to education, refers to the traditional reason, African-American males are referred to special education. The usual method of identifying a student for placement in a special education program begins primarily with the recommendation of a general education classroom teacher; students are then assessed (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006). However, students of culturally diverse backgrounds may not benefit from mainstream referral and assessment practices and instruments (Elliott & Fuchs, 1997; Fore, Burke, & Martin, 2006; Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Kim, Baydar, & Greek, 2003). This assertion is given credence when it is determined that "African Americans are three times as likely as Caucasian children to be placed in classes for the mentally retarded" (Kozol, 1991, p. 119).

Teachers' cultural attitudes and perspectives may also influence the special education referral process and support personal biases. Learning theory and process are both entrenched in culture (Bailey & Pransky, 2005; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006). Delpit (2006) claimed that a contention exists between teachers and minority students in adjusting between culturally responsive and traditional instruction. Although the prevalent progressive pedagogies' such as "open classrooms, whole language and process writing" (Bailey & Pransky, 2005, p.20), claim to epitomize the optimal learning of all students, such practices often do not adhere to the learning needs of African-American students. Delpit further suggested that such progressive pedagogies are based on dominant culture norms and do not take into account the instructional needs of minority communities.

Classical-view Theory also takes into account the deficit thinking of teachers regarding African Americans. Often teachers do not understand the learning potential of minority students; furthermore, teachers have the tendency to place limits on their instructional delivery (Delpit, 2006). Deficit thinking causes many teachers to view minority students as liabilities rather than assets; instead of capturing and engaging the wealth of knowledge all children bring to the classroom (Landsman & Lewis, 2006). Deficit thinking may generate negative beliefs about African-American students generally, or their academic abilities specifically. These negative beliefs may be validated and reinforced by teachers who share the elementary level, Caucasian, female, and middle class culture (Howard, 2002). Kearns, Ford, and Linney (2005) asserted that such negative beliefs concerning Africa-American students often lead to erroneous referral for special education assessment.

Social Dominance Theory

The social dominance theory (SDT) has become a powerful influence in linking groups to the socio-political arena across various societal strata (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996). This theory suggests that societies are constructed based on social hierarchies and stratifications that occur on the basis of gender, age, and arbitrary set (R. Cross & T. Cross, 2005). Arbitrary set specifically relates to the "socially constructed and highly salient groups" (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 33) that are based on any characteristics that can be anticipated (e.g., intelligence, income, education, religion, etc.).

The SDT suggests that dominant groups (e.g., male, Caucasian, Protestant, etc.) experience and maintain an unbalanced amount of social benefit (e.g., wealth and power) while subordinate groups (e.g., female, African American, Catholic, etc.) suffer from a disproportionate amount of social detriment (e.g., poverty and imprisonment) (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This phenomenon is maintained through an agreement (conscious or unconscious) between the dominant and subordinate groups that the “dominant group is deserving of its disproportionately large share of positive social value” (R. Cross & T. Cross, 2005, para. 7).

The SDT also presents the theoretical apparatuses that enable the dominant group to retain its place or position in society. Such is accomplished through discrimination, prejudice, bias, etc. The premise of SDT considers these apparatuses (e.g., discrimination) as functional rather than irrational (Sidanius, 1993). In other words, it is sensible for Caucasian females to discriminate against African-American males as they may benefit from this phenomenon (Sidanius, Levin, Liu, & Pratto, 2000).

There are three basic assumptions in the SDT (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The initial assumption relates to the intrinsic nature of social hierarchy. “While age- and gender-based

hierarchies will tend to exist within all systems, arbitrary-set systems of social hierarchy will invariably emerge within social systems producing sustainable economic surplus” (p. 38).

The second assumption outlines the variance between SDT and social identity theory (SIT). Though SIT recognizes the phenomenon of social hierarchy as well as the influence of power regarding social groups, the emphasis for SDT relates to group-based social hierarchy (Sidanius, Pratto, & Rabinowitz, 1994). This distinction is significant as “most forms of group conflict and oppression (e.g., racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, nationalism, classis, etc.) can be regarded as different manifestations of the same basic human predisposition to form group-based social hierarchies” (Sidanius, Pratto, p. 38).

The SIT defines preference within groups arbitrarily (Sidanius, 1993). However, SDT offers a clear framework that explains the presence of social hierarchy. Subsequently, the SDT’s principal purpose relates to the influence social discourses and individual and institutional behavior have on the type and level of group-based hierarchy (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994).

The SDT states not only will group-based social hierarchy form ubiquitously, but also most, if not all prejudices, ideologies, and stereotypes pertaining to superiority and inferiority among groups, contribute and reflect group-based social hierarchy (Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1994). Accordingly, social phenomena such as discrimination and racism cannot be explained external to the framework of group-based social hierarchy (Pratto et al., 2000; Sidanius, Pratto, & Brief, 1995).

The third assumption of SDT relates to social value (positive or negative), which is inconsistently disseminated; thus, group-based social inequalities are assured (Pratto, Stallworth, Sidanius, & Siers, 1997). Through the use of dogma, policies, and social practice,

disproportionate allocation of social value is justified (Sidanius, 1993). As one reads historical accounts in societies that are non-hunter-gatherer, there are testaments to extreme group-based social inequality (Sidanius, 1993). A relatively recent example is the chattel slavery in the U.S., which is one of the most gruesome illustrations of inequality in human history.

Attempts, however, have been made to create more inclusive and egalitarian social systems. Such attempts are referred to as hierarchy-attenuating (HA) forces (as opposed to hierarchy enforcing (HE) (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). HA forces have been evident since the early Christian discourse to the sociopolitical movements of the 19th century (e.g., Marxism, Socialism, etc.) and the Human and Civil Rights movements of the middle and late 20th century. The HA forces, however, have had moderate sustaining influence regarding intrinsic inequitable nature of non-hunter-gatherer societies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Critical Race Theory

A "revolutionary intellectual movement that puts race at the center of critical analysis" (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999, p. 1) is Critical Race Theory (CRT). The theory emerged during the American Civil Rights Movement (Milner, 2008), and draws from diverse fields (e.g., economic, scientific, political, ethnic, sociological, historical, cultural postcolonial, and feminist studies) (Parker et al., 1999). Although there are no fixed set principles or doctrine of CRT, theorists who support this intellectual movement impart two general purposes:

1. CRT explains "the relationship between ostensibly race-neutral ideals, like 'the rule of law,' 'merit,' and 'equal protection,' and the structure of White supremacy and racism" (Parker et al., 1999, p. 1) and

2. CRT advises ways to exploit "the vexed bond between law and racial power"

(Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xiii) to change social construction and progress racial equality.

Though application of CRT can be seen in numerous disciplines (Rabaka, 2006), the theory's focal point relates to challenging liberalists' points of view such as objectivity, neutrality, and colorblindness of the law. CRT contends that such principles are the ones that actually spread and tolerate racism by ignoring the inequalities permeating in social institutions.

Much of the establishment of CRT can be attributed to two legal articles: *Serving Two Masters: Integration Ideals and Client Interests in School Desegregation Litigation* (Bell, 1976) and *Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma* (Bell, 1980). Bell insisted that civil rights advances were "less about an expansive societal consciousness than they were about improving America's tarnished international image and avoiding racial strife domestically" (Belanger & Walker, 2009, para. 14). Bell went further to suggest that civil rights developments were simply products of the majority, and did not reflect the needs of their subordinates (Belanger & Walker, 2009).

When analyzing the law, critical race theorists advocate that it is impossible to take a neutral and objective position and likewise emphasizes that for racial reform to occur radically, voices of races must be recognized and race consciousness encouraged (Parker et al., 1999). Since race acts as a scaffolding in American society, "there can be no perch outside the social dynamics of racial power from which to merely observe and analyze" (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiii).

Refuted in CRT are two foremost liberalist assertions pertaining to law: (1) colorblindness of the law and (2) that this colorblindness is above race consciousness. For

instance, Gotanda (2000) argued that in itself the concept that the law is colorblind is contradictory because by excluding races from the process of decision making would entail the initial acknowledgement on the existence of races. He concluded that colorblindness which denotes the choice of excluding races is based on the actual premise of race rather than being neutral.

Critical race theorists' specific interest is in exposing the majorities' discriminatory practices and policies that continue to oppress groups is an attempt to maintain power (Milner, 2008). A fundamental notion of CRT relates to the idea that minorities, specifically African Americans, were not a part of the legal formulation conceptualized to deter such social ills as racism and discrimination; thus, no genuine resolve has occurred (Brown, 1995). CRT proposes that to understand the past you must hear from those who experienced it. Hearing their stories and narrations would serve to challenge liberalist concepts of neutrality, colorblindness, and universal truths (Delgado, 1989). In other words, as Brown suggested, "Hear us, and hear us in our own voices. It is only then that you will truly hear us" (para. 7).

Despite the diversity of approaches and thrusts of CRT theorists and practitioners, their study of the law and advocacy has common positions which are as follows according to Abrams and Moio (2006):

The first position implies the endemic nature of racism. In CRT, racism is not regarded as individualistic or abnormal but an ordinary day-to-day occurrence affecting a group of people, specifically people of color. Owing to history, racism is deeply seated in American culture which permeates social practices and structures. Because of the nature of racism being ordinary and embedded, its impact on the way individuals think are often imperceptible, particularly those individuals who have racial privilege. This invisibility consequently maintains racism in society.

A second position suggests that race is a social construction. CRT argues that race is a contrived scheme where people are categorized with reference to observable physical features that have no association to the reality of genetics and biology. Though CRT views race as a social construction, there is due recognition on the force of its implications and meaning in society.

A third position proposes that social discourses that are dominant and individuals in authority and power are capable of racializing discriminatory acts against groups of individuals in different ways and at different time periods, depending on economic, social or historic need. For instance, Abrams and Moio offer the treatment of Asian Americans as an example of such racializing. Asian Americans have been considered by the majority of society as benign, if not favorable, when America has been in desperate need of a large, inexpensive labor force. Over time Asian Americans have increasingly become more financially independent and secure causing them to be viewed by the majority as threats to the national economy. These groups have been demonized and excluded from citizenship by law. Because of the reversal of racialization for the third time, Asian Americans have been regarded as a “model minority” (p. 251).

The next position relates to the concept of racism. Racism, CRT purposes, results when the majority or ruling race has both physical and material advantage over a subjected or oppressed race. This social phenomenon changes only if convergence of interests of both the ruling race, which is powerful, and the race that is subjugated or oppressed, have an interest in changing the status quo. Abrams and Moio refer to this CRT tenet as interest convergence/materialist determinism.

Another CRT position suggests that when the dominant group performs an inventory of their history, they tend to routinely exclude perspectives about African Americans and other minority groups so that their power is justified and legitimized. This so called silencing of these perspectives obscures the power-oppression relations temporally and spatially. CRT pushes for rewriting history by including the lived experiences of the oppressed races; obtaining their perspectives in their words. Hearing their stories and narrations would serve to challenge liberalist concepts of neutrality, colorblindness, and universal truths.

The final tenet is termed antiessentialism/intersectionality. The theory recognizes the intersectionality of oppressions and implies that when race is the primary focus, it has the tendency of eclipsing other types of exclusion. For example, economically challenged African Americans present a very complex and extraordinary case of social location and social oppression. Such individuals represent two socially disadvantaged populations. Theorists in the CRT camp suggest that when an analysis is undertaken, and one or more of the underprivileged facets of an individual's makeup is not taken into full account, there is a tendency to replicate the fundamental patterns of social exclusion that were initially sought to eradicate.

Complicity Theory

A man stripped, beaten, and robbed was discovered by a priest and Levite, yet was left by both to suffer and die. A Samaritan came upon him, and when he saw him he pitied him, and he went up to him and dressed his wounds... and took care of him. (1939, p. 66)

Jesus' parable is a worthy illustration of two themes: complacency and change. The priest and Levite embody complacency, the apathetic acceptance that not only sees wrong, but does nothing to right the wrong. The Good Samaritan, conversely, embodies the ideal of human kindness and compassion. He is not only aware of the wrong, but is willing to do what is necessary to change what is wrong. In Martin Luther King, Jr.'s book, *Strength to Love*, the

Reverend warned those who dare to tolerate what is wrong due to apathetic acceptance, are merely contributing to, if not becoming a part of the problem (King, 1963). King: “we must learn that passively to accept an unjust system is to cooperate with that system, and thereby to become a part of its evil” (p. 18).

Hecht, Jackson and Ribeau (2003) advised that "social rules and laws govern behavior and become guideposts for acceptable and normal interaction" (p. 244). When these guideposts, however, are unethical, unlawful, or immoral, social change is compulsory. Complicity occurs when there is knowledge of social ill, yet this knowledge is countered with apathetic acceptance. McPhail (1996) continued that complicity is the neglect to question institutional policies and practices that create disproportional injustice or imbalance. In other words, by apathetically accepting the status quo, collusion is being preferred over change.

Complicity Theory specifically “examines how assumptions can inhibit the desires called forth by policy because there is a failure to question and acknowledge those institutions that can prohibit revolutionary change from occurring” (Patton, 2000, p. 42). The theory “requires people to examine and reflect upon how they tacitly maintain privileged spaces and discourses, and how their behavior affects or maintains a situation” (Patton, 2004, para. 29). CT not only attempts to create awareness of inequality, but it also endeavors to scrutinize suppositions that restrain change. As Patton challenged, it is not enough to be conscious of disparity, there must also be a push to “question and acknowledge those institutions that can prohibit revolutionary change from occurring” (p. 42). Such a process can be ignited, Zoller (2000) contended, through meaningful dialogue: "dialogue asks us to hear the voices of those whose language, meaning, systems and social locations are different from our own" (p. 193).

There is also a self-examination element within CT. Individuals that are willing to objectively explore and scrutinize their personal perceptions, behaviors, and privilege, and determine how these can not only ambiguously support, but can also become integral parts of the problem, is a necessary process within CT doctrine. Using Jesus' parable again, it can be seen that the priest and the Levite are not a part of the original problem; they did not rob or beat anyone. However, by not rendering aid, both, through apathetic collusion, become a part of the greater problem.

Although CT has been applied to several disciplines (e.g., socioeconomics, socio-history, business, criminal justice and law, etc.), when applying this theory to education, it is used to illuminate educational inequities and marginalizations caused by indifferent acceptance of educational procedures and practices (conscious and unconscious) (McPhail, 1996). For example, educators that are not only aware that such inequities and marginalizations, such as the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education exist, but allow such grievances to continue, represents a classical example of complicity. "The complexities become apparent when we begin to recognize the infinite ways in which marginalizations become normalized and naturalized through communication and action" (Patton, 2004, para. 1). Allen referred to this naturalizing process as the "barriers" that have been erected to "insure the perpetuation of a status quo rooted in an unfair system of racial stratification" (p. 42). Allen (1992) furthered this idea and argued that such environments "seem to be not only content with, but committed to, the current system of structured inequality, a system in which [for example] African Americans suffer grievously" (p. 42).

To counter such grievance intrinsic to complicity, CT suggests that educators become agents of change (Patton, 2004). Educators have the responsibility to be aware of the differences

in students, such as race, culture, socioeconomic status, and sex that cause inequitable or unlawful circumstances for students (e.g., overrepresentation of African-American males in special education, underrepresentation of African-American males in gifted talented programs, etc.) (Andersen & Collins, 2001). CT presents educators with the responsibility to see the entrenched culture of education that prohibits each and every student an equitable educational opportunity (Allen, 1992; Patton, 2004), and be willing to take the uncomfortable steps to right the wrong.

A Confluence of Contributing Factors

Cholewa and West-Olatunji (2008) suggested that there is a "confluence" of contributing factors that play a part in the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education phenomenon (para. 2). As previously mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, research has identified a myriad of factors that have contributed to the overrepresentation of African-Americans males in special education (Fore, Burke, & Martin, 2006). Teachers' perceptions of African-American males (Rouse, 2011), teacher gender and cultural bias (Herrera, 1998), disproportional disciplinary policies ("zero tolerance policies" and the "School-to-Prison Pipeline") (Kim, 2009; Kunjufu, 2005; Nichols, 2004; Skiba & Peterson, 2000) and student grouping/tracking (Ogbu, 2003), resegregation (Bankston & Caldas, 1996), urban school failure (Anderson & Summerfield, 2004; Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005), the achievement gap (Jencks & Phillips, 1998), cultural discontinuity (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008), and inappropriate and inaccurate assessment practices (Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001) are among the more common factors that have been identified as consistent contributors to the overrepresentation of minorities in special education.

Caucasian Female Culture

Blanchett (2006) contended that, due to such negative perceptions of African-American students, special education has become the “new legalized form of structural segregation and racism” (p. 25). As has been previously noted, most public education schools, particularly elementary schools, are dominated by Caucasian, middle-class, females (Kunjufu, 2005). Research conducted by Herrera (1998) asserted that a relationship exists between the number of African-American males referred to special education and the number of Caucasian female teachers working in a particular school district. This phenomenon has several causes, however, research has suggested that one cause for such a correlation can be attributed to the culture such teachers bring to the school environment (Jordan, 2005).

Sleeter (1996) examined teacher attitudes regarding diversity and social inequity, and found that many “enter the classroom with a considerably rich body of knowledge about social stratification, social mobility, and human differences based on their life experience” (p. 87). Teachers extract from their Caucasian, female, and middle-class experiences to create and support their personal views. Such views are often limited in scope and expose limited awareness of such social ills as institutional racism and systematic discrimination (Smith, 2009). These inequities often lead teachers to perceive African-American students’ academic inadequacies as products of “personal deficiencies” (Jordan, 2005, para. 36) rather than the effect of discrimination or racism.

Sleeter’s findings supported research conducted over 20 years ago by King (1991), who found that teachers often faulted the ethnic/racial inequities in American society for the academic failure of African-American students, and such social deficits can and should be transcended in the school setting. King suggested that such beliefs function to uphold and preserve Caucasian

privilege as they assume that ethnic/racial inequities can be surpassed if only the “right attitude” is applied (Jordan, 2005, para. 16). In other words, the myth suggests that social and cultural inequities can be transcended through determination and a good work ethic. This presumption negates the advantages Caucasian society has acquired from the discrimination and subjugation of subordinate African Americans (Jordan, 2005). The results “of 350 years of oppression are not suddenly undone,” (Aguirre & Turner, 2011, p. 101) by mere resolve and perseverance.

School-to-Prison Pipeline

Data have demonstrated that negative educational achievement patterns correspond with incarceration patterns (Kim, 2009). Conversely, as a student’s grade level attainment increases, the probability of becoming incarcerated decreases (Smith, 2009). For example, nearly 70% of all prison inmates do not have a high school diploma, 75% of incarcerated juveniles do not complete 10th grade, and a third of this same population do not read on a 4th grade reading level (Smith, 2009). Students that dropout of high school are “three-and-a-half times more likely to become incarcerated than high school graduates” (Smith, 2009, para. 10).

The school-to-prison pipeline has been used by researchers to represent ways in which public schools have failed to appropriately educate minority (and/or poor) students (Robbins, 2005). Such failure, researchers have claimed, may ultimately lead to a student’s eventual incarceration (Tulman & Weck, 2009). The focus of such failure has typically centered on two commonly disparate trends related to race/ethnicity in public education: discipline and tracking.

Due to legislative trends that swept through the country in the mid to late 1990s, several states, and subsequently school districts, adopted zero tolerance disciplinary policies to counteract the upsurge of violence in schools (Glanzer, 2005). Although statistics do

demonstrate that violence in schools decreased (Archer, 2009), such policies have created a rise in suspensions and in-school arrests (Archer, 2009).

Zero tolerance discipline policies are not, however, the only contributing factor to the school-to-prison pipeline; tracking has also demonstrated causality. Tracking relates to “the practice of separating students into homogenous ability groups such as ‘gifted’ and, by implication, ‘not gifted,’ in order to provide particularized academic instruction” (Smith, 2009, para. 5). Such tracking, however, often results in lowering teacher expectations of students’ abilities (Ogbu, 2003), and affording “not gifted” students substandard and/or inequitable curricula (Smith, 2009, para. 5).

More poignantly, however, is the demographic incongruities that have emerged through zero tolerance and tracking policies. For example, African-American male students are more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to (a) be referred for behavioral discipline (Kunjufu, 2005; Nichols, 2004; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Skiba et al., 2008), (b) receive harsher punishment for similar disciplinary issues (Kunjufu, 2005; Skiba, 2002), (c) receive corporal punishment (Smith, 2009), (d) be tracked into lower academic classes (Bonner, 2009; Kearns, Ford, & Linney, 2005), and (e) receive special education referral (Rashid, 2009). Smith (2009) claimed that such ethnic/racial discrepancies “push” students of color out of school and into the criminal justice system (para. 12).

There is little wonder that African Americans are both overrepresented in prisons and Death Row. Table 4 denotes the population, by total and percentage, of African-American males in the U.S. as compared to Caucasian males in 2000, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008. Table 5 and Table 6 denote the population, by total and percentage, of African-American males in U.S. prisons and Death Row, as compared to Caucasian males in 2000, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008.

If the percentage of African Americans in the 2008 U.S. population is compared to the percentage of African Americans in prison or on Death Row for the same year, then the overrepresentation of African Americans in prisons and death row can be established at roughly 38% and 44% respectively.

Table 4

U.S. Population: Caucasian and African American

Year	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total Population	281,421,906	295,753,151	298,593,212	301,579,895	304,374,846
Caucasian/Male Population	112,753,933	117,433,373	118,413,433	119,428,080	120,365,606
Caucasian/Male Percentage	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%
African American/Male Population	16,971,124	18,016,728	18,243,900	18,484,030	18,716,457
African American/Male Percentage	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%

U.S. Census Bureau (2011a): Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2012

Table 5

U.S. Prison Population: Caucasian and African American

Year	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total Male Prison Population	1,246,234	1,364,178	1,401,317	1,427,064	1,495,594
Caucasian/Male Population	398,795	436,537	448,421	442,390	478,590
Caucasian/Male Percentage	32%	32%	32%	31%	32%
African American/Male: Population	437,569	505,746	532,500	556,555	568,326
African American/Male: Percentage	38%	37%	38%	39%	38%

U.S. Census Bureau (2011b): Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2012

Table 6

U.S. Death Row Population: Caucasian and African American (and other)

Year	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total Male Death Row Population	3,601	3,245	3,233	3,215	3,207
Caucasian/Male: Death Row Population	1,989	1,802	1,806	1,806	1,798
Caucasian/Male: Death Row Percentage	55%	56%	56%	56%	56%
African American (and other)/Male: Death Row Population	1,612	1,443	1,427	1,409	1,409
African American (and other)/Male: Death Row Percentage	45%	44%	44%	44%	44%

U.S. Census Bureau (2011c): Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2012

Resegregation

Although *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) intended to end legal segregation in public schools, urban schools in this country often represent institutions of resegregation (Altenbaugh, 2003). The term resegregation has been used to characterize the division of racial and ethnic groups, educational opportunity, social class, money, and power (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Oakes, Wells, Jones, & Datnow, 1997; Orfield, 2001). Though there are several aspects to contemporary public schools that have demonstrated positive renovation over the last 50 years, social and educational practices and policies continue to aggravate the full intent of desegregation (Blanchett, Mumford et al., 2005; Doyle, 2005; Tatum, 2007). Desegregation is further exasperated by school districts taking a laissez faire approach to *Brown* compliance. Wilkinson (1979) identified such sentiment by noting stages of school desegregation: (1) absolute defiance, (2) token compliance, (3) modest compliance, (4) massive integration, and (5) resegregation.

In public schools, resegregation is prevalent and has fueled a series of debates in academia on the level of efficacy African Americans are afforded in integrated schools (Morgan, 2001). There have been two schools of thought that have emerged in this debate. One side has

argued that segregation places African-American students at a disadvantage, while another has suggested that segregation does not harm African-American students and may well be considered beneficial to them (Bankston & Caldas, 1996).

Bankston and Caldas (1996) revealed that racial segregation negatively impacts academic performance of African-American students. Their study included 42,000 students in 342 public secondary schools in the state of Louisiana. Data from the 1990 Graduation Exit Examination (GEE) were analyzed. The researchers focused on six research problems pertaining to the association between composition of African-Americans in schools and their GEE performance. Analyses looked into the relationship between socio-economic status and frequency of African Americans enrolled in schools. They found that most of African-American students had low test results. Seventy-one percent of African-American students obtained scores below the median compared to Caucasian-American students whose performance rating was better, as 66% of them scored above the median.

Heath and Mickelson (1999) concluded that racial segregation negatively affected academic performance among seniors in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, whose school system is known for *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971). This particular case became pivotal in the annals of desegregation in the U.S. public school system, as it made way for busing as a solution to desegregation in schools (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). The study was designed to investigate the association between segregation and achievement levels of African-American students. Data collected were from students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School (CMS) system, school archives, and interview responses among the faculty and administration.

Heath and Mickelson (1999) noted that segregation in the CMS school system was of two types, between and within. When school and individual factors were controlled, the authors

found that attendance in a segregated elementary school had little negative effect on secondary school grades; the greater the duration of time enrolled in a racially segregated institution, academic performance in a high school suffered. An analysis of the data discovered that attendance to a “segregated minority elementary school had a direct negative effect on high school track placement” (p. 577). Additionally, the researchers concluded that the probability of placement in college was negatively influenced by attending an elementary school that was highly segregated.

Orfield and Lee (2006) concluded that educational outcomes improve as racial and ethnic diversity increased. Trent (1997) examined data from three studies namely National Longitudinal Survey of the High School Class 1972, National Longitudinal Survey of Youth Labor Force Participation, and High School and Beyond. He concluded that “desegregated schooling has important long-term benefits for minority students, especially in terms of its ability to open up economic opportunities for them” (p. 257).

Urban School Failure

Often African Americans, other minorities, and poor Caucasian families are concentrated in large urban or metropolitan communities (Blanchett et al., 2005). While many of such description gravitated toward urban areas to secure employment and opportunity, due to the overall decline in urban areas caused by a continual regression in industrialization and middle and upper class money, power and influence, such areas have become the site of economic failure and social decay (Anderson & Summerfield, 2004; West, 1994).

Urban schools often reflect the economic, social, and political climate prevalent in urban areas (Alston, 2002). Such schools that are predominantly attended by African-American or Hispanic students are frequently “high-poverty schools” that experience anomalous teacher

attrition rates, lack of equitable instructional and extracurricular opportunities, inadequate technology, and decrepit physical environments (Blanchett et al., 2005, p. 72). These researchers also intimated that “with the implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, such schools are more likely to be identified as ‘failing schools’ despite the obvious lack of financial, human, and educational resources” (p. 73). Conversely, non-urban, predominately Caucasian schools are adequately funded and are frequently considered “high-performance” schools (p. 73). Such schools often have teachers that reflect the racial dynamic of the student body, often hold graduate-level degrees, and incur “higher salaries. The physical buildings are often new or newly renovated, clean and safe environments, and frequently have access to state-of-the-art technology and science labs” (p. 73).

While IDEA has created greater accountability and equity in schools, such ideals have yet to abolish the iniquitous and negligent challenges that are seemingly intrinsic to urban schools (Losen & Orfield, 2002). Although there have been many attempts to encourage local, state, and federal lawmakers to financial respond to the needs of inner-city children and schools, funding remains inadequate (Tatum, 2007). Researchers have claimed that the lack of appropriate funding for urban schools relates directly to a general lack of ownership or responsibility for the failure of these schools (Caldas & Bankston, 2005; Losen & Orfield, 2002).

Researchers have also suggested that lawmakers are unaware and/or completely apathetic to the urban school dilemma as they and their children are not affected by the problems that besiege such schools and metropolitan areas (Irvine, 1991; Tatum, 2007; Thomas, 1994). Politicians often view urban schools as educational wastelands, void of any real aptitude or capacity (Dayton & Dupre, 2004). Such unscrupulous sentiment regarding inner city schools gives reason for lawmakers’ criticism, marginalization, and lack of financial support (Blanchett

et al., 2005). Conversely, policymakers ensure that their predominately Caucasian-middle-class schools are appropriately funded. Lawmakers' unwillingness to adequately fund urban schools coupled with their readiness to ensure the success of predominately Caucasian schools demonstrates overt discrimination and may demonstrate institutional racism (Brantlinger, 2004; Irvine, 1991; Tatum, 2007; Weinberg, 1983).

Aside for the obvious inequities that urban schools experience, these schools are habitually bastions for overrepresented African-Americans males in special education (Jordan, 2005). Blanchett et al. (2005) asserted that "failure to provide students in urban settings, a disproportionate number of whom are poor and students of color, with a high-quality, equitable education has been identified as a major contributing factor to the overrepresentation of students of color in special education" (p. 73). Researchers have also held that the inept nature of urban schools often leads to high volumes of students being referred to special education (Jordan, 2005; Watkins & Kurtz, 2001). This is caused in part by schools incapable or reluctant to provide students with their general education needs (Blanchett et al., 2005). Another problem that is often cited is that urban schools often demonstrate low behavioral and academic standards for their students, particularly African-American students (Gay, 2000). Aronson (2004) noted that minority students are constantly stereotyped to be academically poor.

Achievement Gap

Research related to the academic achievement gap in public schools among African-American and Caucasian students is clear, "African-Americans currently score lower than Caucasian students on vocabulary, reading, and mathematics tests, as well as on tests that claim to measure scholastic aptitude and intelligence" (Jencks & Phillips, 1998, p. 1). Although the achievement gap was narrowed during the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s witnessed resurgence in

the gap once again (Lee, 2002). Numerous factors have been tied to the achievement phenomenon (Williams, 2003). Studies have identified family, school, socioeconomic, and structural factors relevant to the academic performance gap between of African-American and Caucasian students (Ogbu, 2003).

Jencks and Phillips (1998) performed studies controlling occupation, educational attainment, and socio-economic status, the gap on academic achievement between Caucasian and African-American students narrowed, yet remained present. However, Orr (2003) revisited this Caucasian and African-American achievement gap debate by including wealth in his analysis. His conclusion stated, “wealth has a positive effect on achievement [and] explains a portion of African American-White differences in achievement” (p. 295).

Research has also been conducted that has observed the negative perceptions some African-Americans might have toward the educational setting and the backlash such students may endure if they are accused of “acting White” (Tyson, 2002, p. 1182). Tyson (2002) suggested that “acting White” is a characterization applied to certain African-American students, by their African-American peers, for attempting to succeed in their academic endeavors (p. 1182). Tyson studied 56 middle-class African-American students and concluded that the more negative attitudes students have toward school, the lower their academic performance becomes. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) noted that often African-American students are culturally opposed to achievement because of the perception of their peers that they are “acting White” (p. 177). Jencks and Phillips (1998) revealed that the fear of acting White could not account for the low scores of African-American students; however, it may explain an absence of motivation.

Cultural Discontinuity

Cholewa and West-Olatunji (2008) asserted a link exists between the cultural discontinuity and the overrepresentation of African Americans in special education. Due to this possible connection, exploring the tenets of cultural discontinuity for the purpose of this research becomes imperative. Cultural discontinuity refers to “a mismatch between salient features cultivated in the African-American home and proximal environments and those typically afforded within the U.S. public educational system” (Edeh & Hickson, 2002, p. 7).

Tharp (1989) expounded upon the commonly accepted definition of cultural discontinuity and contended that the cultural mismatch in public schools is often further aggravated by such social ills as stereotyping, discrimination, racism, and low socioeconomic status. Ramsey, Williams, and Vold (2003) added that legal exclusionary forces have also caused greater aggravation regarding the cultural discontinuity in public schools. These researchers suggested that such legal issues as the “the 1994 vote in California to disenfranchise and exclude illegal and legal immigrants is a vivid illustration of the strength of these exclusionary forces” (p. 66).

Public schools in the U.S. are based predominately on Eurocentric tradition, ideals, mores, etc. (Marri, 2005). Educators habitually neglect to appreciate the behaviors and traditions relevant to their non-Caucasian students (Nieto, 2004). Such neglect often causes students to view their own academic abilities in a negative manner (Garcia, 1993). Cholewa and West-Olatunji (2008) supported this idea by stating that “students from culturally dominated groups consistently receive and internalize negative messages regarding their culture, ethnic group, class, gender, or language” (para. 10). Any student representing a culture outside the Euro realm initiates and endures their educational experience at a cultural disadvantage (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). Conversely, any student that identifies with this tradition has an immediate

scholastic advantage (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Such a contrasting phenomenon creates unfair conditions that are almost certainly discriminatory (Ancis, 2004).

One of the more remarkable aspects of the cultural discontinuity relates to its persistent nature in U.S. public schools regardless of teachers' cultural background. Ladson-billing (1994) proposed that the tendencies for educators to prefer Eurocentric culture, traditions, etc. over any other cultural convention are present despite the cultural circumstances of the teacher. In other words, African-American teachers may demonstrate Eurocentric preference in their classrooms, as this is the predominate tradition in the U.S. public school system.

Kearns, Ford, and Linney (2005) proposed that cultural discontinuity is often linked to educators' lack of cross-cultural competence. Blocher (2000) asserted that cross-cultural competence refers to the desire to gain and appreciate the "knowledge and understanding of other cultures" as an asset rather than a deficiency (p. 242). This includes the traditions, history, customs, language, and values of the cultural backgrounds of all children (Blocher, 2000; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). Culturally diverse students are often subjected to instructional practices that are counterintuitive to their culture and are often counterintuitive to their academic success (Tyler, Boykin, Miller, & Hurley, 2006). While all students experience some degree of cultural discontinuity in the school setting, the extent that culturally diverse students suffer from this phenomenon is often more severe (Ogbu, 1982).

For their inquiry, Kearns et al. (2005) conducted a mixed quantitative and qualitative study to determine the perspectives of 151 specialist-level school psychologists regarding their level of cross-cultural competence and how this may influence the overrepresentation of African-American students in special education. The researchers found that the participants perceived cross-cultural competence as critical for making sound psycho-educational decisions for African-

American students (Cajigas-Segredo, & Nahari, 1999; Henning-Stout & Brown-Cheatham, 1999). However, the school psychologists' scores averaged approximately 66% (based on 100-point scale) for cross-cultural competence. The researchers explained the discrepancy between the perceived importance of cross-cultural competence and the psychologists' actual cross-cultural competence was related to a general lack of "knowledge, skill, and confidence" in working with African-American students (para. 45).

Kearns et al. (2005) also found that the school environment "did not seem to embrace or validate African-American culture in ways that would help such students and families feel welcome or safe" (para. 53). Schools often lack the cultural sensitivity, and general support, to enable African-Americans to academically succeed, let alone excel (Cooper, 2005; Floyd, 1996). This suggests that the school environment is often counterintuitive to culturally diverse students' success.

Ladson-Billings (1995) highlighted the notion of deficit ideology. This concept implies that academic failure can be directly related to the idea of students, such as African Americans, living and learning outside the cultural standard commonly accepted in schools. In other words, since African-American culture is not the norm generally recognized and exercised in U.S. public schools, such students will not exhibit similar academic achievements as Caucasian students who enjoy the benefits of an Eurocentrically dominated environment.

Assessment Practices

Wehmeyer and Schwartz (2001) asserted that although there are several causes for the disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education, one factor that continues to aggravate this phenomenon is related to discrimination and cultural bias prevalent in special education assessment practices. The assessment process often used by schools to

ascertain the need for special education services is frequently "inconsistent and often inaccurate" (Macht, 1998, p. 3). This is of particular note when such assessment practices are used to determine the need for special educational services for African-American males. Researchers have noted that many factors can demonstrate the lack of unbiased assessment practices in education: gender bias, cultural bias, I.Q., discrimination, and subjectivity (Marbley, Bonner, & Berg, 2008). English (2002) wrote,

The low success rate of minority students in our schools has too often been portrayed as individual failures of students instead of instructional failures of the system based on false notions of objectivity shrouded in the mantle of impartial tests of 'ability. (p. 307)

The motivation behind the initial legal issues concerning the disproportionate number of African Americans being placed in more exclusive, special education environments focused on the bias nature of Intelligence Quotient (I.Q.) (*Diana v. State Board of Education*, 1970; *Larry P. v. Riles*, 1979). School districts often used a discrepancy model that measured the difference between a student's I.Q. and his/her norm-referenced achievement tests (Fore, Burke, & Martin, 2006). For instance, when a student demonstrated an average or above average intelligence, yet his/her achievement was measured below the predictable performance, then the student was routinely determined in need of special education services (Shinn, Good, & Parker, 1999). However, the accuracy and appropriateness of this process has been disputed (Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Hosp & Reschly, 2004).

African Americans routinely score 15 points lower on I.Q. assessments than their Caucasian counterparts (Flanagan & Ortiz, 2001). While there is some debate related to the cause of this point discrepancy, many researchers agree that cultural bias does play a part (Agbenyega & Jiggetts, 1999; Arnold & Lassman, 2003; N. Cabrera & G. Cabrera, 2008; Dykes, 2008; Hilliard, 1997; Marbley, Bonner & Berg, 2008; Patton, 1998; Wehmeyer & Schwartz,

2001). Although federal law no longer permits schools and districts to establish special education eligibility using the I.Q. and norm-referenced achievement test discrepancy model (20 USC § 1414(b)(6)), there is little doubt that this long-standing practice had far-reaching influence on educators' negative perceptions of students who demonstrated such a discrepancy (Macht, 1998). Districts presently rely primarily on Response to Intervention (RtI) systems that incorporate comprehensive, empirically-based, student-specific, instructional interventions that incorporate high levels of accountability when determining the necessity of special education placement (Gersten & Hitchcock, 2008; Reeves, Bishop, & Filce, 2010).

Although the RtI process is preferred to the I.Q. and norm-referenced achievement test discrepancy model for identifying students for special education services (Kavale, Holdnack, & Mostert, 2005), assuming this process unconditionally addresses the overrepresentation phenomenon would be erroneous. The RtI process relies on quality teachers and instruction, unbiased analysis of student performance data, and a supportive and culturally responsive administration and staff. As previously mentioned, often African Americans are attending urban schools that are underperforming due to the lack of such resources and proficiencies.

All adaptations and editions of traditional assessments have been under scrutiny: Wechsler tests (WISC-IV, WAIS, and WPPSI), the Binet tests (Stanford-Binet, Binet-IV), Otis Lennon School Aptitude Test, and Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Bracken & Naglieri, 2003). The debate has focused primarily on the presence of cultural bias, while some discussion has spotlighted possible gender bias (Sattler, 2001). Bracken and Naglieri (2003) suggested non-verbal assessments to limit cultural (and gender) bias; however, these researchers also advised that such assessments do not completely rid the assessment process of bias.

Gender is of particular interest when determining the influence teachers' perception has on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education, since there is a common gender difference between the students being assessed, and those that are assessing (Kunjufu, 2005). Gender bias occurs when one gender is given preferential treatment over another (Diller, Houston, Morgan, & Ayim, 1996). Kunjufu contended that there are differences in the ways girls and boys act, learn, and demonstrate intelligence; thus, such differences must be taken into full account when equitably assessing each gender. He further suggested that schools often lack tolerance for boys' learning style, intelligence, and behavioral patterns (e.g., short attention span, impulsivity, sensitive ego, etc.). Such lack of tolerance creates an air of deficiency; by being different, boys in turn become deficient (Kunjufu, 2005). This deficiency, Kunjufu argued, is simply an example of schools unwillingness to accept and appreciate boys' abilities. For example, boys are often more active than girls (Noble & Bradford, 2000) and frequently demonstrate greater kinesthetic intelligence (Loori, 2005). Unfortunately, however, such intelligence is rarely given equal status as other intelligences such as linguistic or logical-mathematical (Kunjufu, 2005).

Another factor that contributes to the inequitable assessment practices of many public schools and districts is related to race, ethnicity, and culture. (Connor & Ferri, 2005; Williams, 1997). Marbley, Bonner and Berg (2008) asserted that there is an augmented concentration related to the "feasibility and validity" of the assessment practices and instruments relied upon when assessing the academic needs of non-Caucasian children (para. 1). The focus of such interest is specifically related to the bias nature assessment instruments and practices often engender (Harry & Anderson, 1994; Hosp & Hasp, 2001). Central to the cultural bias debate is assessment of African-American students (Hilliard, 1991; Kim, Baydar, & Greek, 2003).

The assessment practices of most schools and districts lack any true cultural awareness or knowledge of racial and ethnic differences (Marbley, Bonner, & Berg, 2008). Hernandez (1994) contended that “conducting evaluation and assessment in a nondiscriminatory manner is further confounded because there are few assessment tools for many of the large established minority populations” (p. 270). Most assessments “are created by and for White middle-class populations, they typically reflect the dominant, White middle-class culture” (N. Cabrera & G. Cabrera, 2008, p. 677; Elliott & Fuchs, 1997; Kim, Baydar, & Greek, 2003). This inequity was brilliantly demonstrated by Adrian Dove’s now famous *Dove Counterbalance Intelligence Test* (1967) and its abbreviated form, *The Chitling Test* (1968) (N. Cabrera & G. Cabrera, 2008). These assessments demonstrated the cultural bias intrinsic to many of the assessment tools used by educators.

Summary

Research has identified a copious of factors that have contributed to the disproportionality of African-Americans males in special education (Fore, Burke, & Martin, 2006). Chapter Two detailed issues related to perception and the historical, legal, and theoretical frame that have affected the perception of African-American males in this country. Chapter Two also discussed the causes that are commonly referenced as culpable contributors to the disproportional phenomenon: teachers’ perceptions of African-American males (Rouse, 2011), Caucasian female privilege (Harry & Anderson, 1994), student grouping/tracking (Ogbu, 2003), disproportional disciplinary policies (Kunjufu, 2005; Nichols, 2004; Skiba & Peterson, 2000), cultural discontinuity (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008), urban school failure (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005), and inappropriate and inaccurate assessment techniques (Hosp & Reschly, 2004).

Chapter Three contains information related to the methodology for this study. The chapter justifies the qualitative ethnographic case study's methodology selected by the researcher to optimally study the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education phenomenon. Chapter Three also addresses the selected research design, the site of the study and participants, the data collection and analysis procedures, trustworthiness, ethics, and the role of the researcher.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the influence Caucasian female elementary teachers' perceptions of African-American male students have on the overrepresentation of this student population in special education. The primary participants of this study were Caucasian female elementary teachers working in schools located in the northeastern Texas area (Region 10). Primary participant selection was based on the following criteria: (a) female, (b) Caucasian, (c) currently employed as an elementary teacher, (d) has referred at least one African-American male to special education in the last year, and (e) works in the northeastern area of Texas (Region 10).

Chapter Three contains detailed information related to this qualitative ethnographic case study's methodology. This chapter also contains an explanation of the selected research design, the site of the study and participants, data collection and analysis procedures, trustworthiness, and ethics. The role of the researcher is also discussed in this chapter.

Research Method

Qualitative research methods attempt, through a naturalistic approach, to determine and/or explain phenomena in context-specific settings (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010). Patton (2001) added that qualitative research occurs within a "real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (p. 39). This method of research seeks to "understand human and social behavior as it is lived by participants in a particular social setting" (Ary et al., 2010, p. 420).

The qualitative research method has further been defined as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Qualitative research conclusions are based on

interactions and interpretations that are made in natural settings where the "phenomenon of interest unfold naturally" (Patton, 2001, p. 39). Unlike quantitative researchers who seek causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings, qualitative researchers are concerned with context and meaning, naturally occurring settings, descriptive data, and inductive analysis that seeks to interpret, illuminate, and understand (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell, 2008; Hoepfl, 1997).

Research Design and Appropriateness

Attempting to understand teachers' perceptions of African-American male students and the overrepresentation of that population in special education in a completely objective (quantitative) manner may render limited or incomplete results. For example, determining what causes a Caucasian female elementary teacher to refer an African-American male student to special education using a quantitatively independent method does not take human, mental, and subjective motivations into full account. Hara (1995) asserted that "there are psychological dimensions of human beings which are impossible to represent numerically" (para. 13) and can at times only be explained using a qualitative method.

Smith (1983) suggested that quantitative research underscores discoverable data by utilizing "neutral scientific language" (p. 9), which is based on a "subject-object relationship" (p. 8). This enables the researcher to completely remove his/her subjectivity from the research and establish the reality or truth. Conversely, the purpose of qualitative research is to "discover universal value" (Hara, 1995, para. 5), as opposed to empirical truth. Universal value, Hara claimed, relates to the capacity of qualitative discovery to be "universally applicable regardless of time, place, culture or other factors" (para. 5).

Although quantitative research has “dominated the research conducted...there is increasing recognition of the importance of qualitative research” (Duffy & Chenail, 2008, para. 2). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), there are suggestions that qualitative research methods have been effectual when researching the experiences of people excluded from the mainstream. Since this study was exploring the influence Caucasian female elementary teachers’ perceptions, a historically and predominantly included group, of African-American males, a predominately and historically excluded group, the methodology employed to guide this study was most appropriate.

Merriam (2009) suggested that qualitative research can be characterized as individuals attempting to “construct reality in the interaction with their social world” (p. 21). Constructionism, Merriam proposed, maintains that learning through discovery can occur most effectively when individuals are actively pursuing tangible objects in the real world to discover meaning, and added that this is the basic motivation of all qualitative study. Meaning, Crotty (1998) contended, does not exist in the object; “meaning is constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (p. 42). The primary intent is to assess the manner in which individuals understand their lives and experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Types of Qualitative Research Studies

Merriam’s (2009) description of qualitative research only addresses the general characteristics of this type of research; more specific types of qualitative research include the following: (a) grounded theory, which seeks to understand a phenomenon, but more importantly, the goal is to build or create a substantive theory about the phenomenon of interest (Ary et al., 2010), (b) narrative analysis, which focuses on individuals’ stories. These stories are thoroughly analyzed to establish meaning of individuals’ experiences (Merriam, 2009), (c) phenomenology,

rooted in philosophy, “develops an understanding of a subject’s perceived reality” (Leedy, 1997, p. 161) and “investigates an individual’s or group’s perception of reality as he/she constructs it” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23), (d) case studies, intend to understand “why the individual does what he/she does” (Ary et al., 2010, p. 457), and (e) ethnographies, which are concerned with cultural patterns and perspectives of a specific group within a culture or social group (Ary et al., 2010). Since the researcher’s intent was to specifically address why Caucasian female elementary teachers’ refer African-American male students to special education and understand the culture or shared beliefs, values, concepts, practices, and attitudes of a specific group, an ethnographic case study was selected as the most appropriate strategy to address the research objectives.

Case Study

A case study is the optimal format to understand processes while discovering “context characteristics” that “shed light” on an issue (Merriam, 1998, p. 33). A qualitative case study strategy undertakes a detailed analysis of a phenomenon (Yin, 2009). This strategy begins with a choice of an object to be studied (Stake, 1995) and specifically relates to a researcher’s attempt to define or interpret a phenomenon in its natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Yin (2009) stated that “the more that researchers’ questions seek to explain some present circumstance, the more that the case study method will be relevant” (p. 4).

Case studies function to uncover patterns and linkages to theoretical conceptions to generalize concepts and incorporate varied theoretical and methodological frameworks (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Ary et al. (2010) suggested that when, conducting a case study, the researcher must take into account the participants’ present state of mind, past experiences, current environment, and how these factors relate to one another. Case studies can also be used to understand the point of view of a group (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 2009),

such as Caucasian female elementary teachers. Most importantly, case studies attempt to understand “why the individual does what he/she does” (Ary et al., 2010, p. 457), such as why Caucasian female elementary teachers refer African-American male students to special education.

Ethnographic Study

Ethnography, rooted in anthropology, involves the in-depth study of naturally occurring behavior within a group (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell, 1994). The most essential question to address in an ethnographic study is, “What are the cultural patterns and perspectives of a group in its natural setting” (Ary et al., 2010)? Ary et al. proposed that ethnographic research has proven to be very valuable in the educational setting, especially when researching issues related to minority groups; this type of research enables educators to better understand students’ cultural background and the discontinuity that may exist between minority students and school culture. Spindler and Hammond (2000) suggested that this type of research “can help teachers separate their personal culture values from those of their students in order to see both themselves and their students more clearly” (p. 4).

Merriam and Simpson (2000) defined a “sociocultural analysis of a single social unit or phenomenon” as an ethnographic case study (p. 109). This method increases the understanding of ethnographic issues of philosophical, political, spiritual, and aesthetic elements (Clair, 2003). Orlikow and Young (1993) contended that the institution of education could benefit from ethnographic case studies, preparing educators to be better equipped for cultural diversity through challenging assumptions and encouraging dialogue and tolerance between teacher and student cultures.

In ethnographic research, “the researcher is typically an observer or a participant observer” (Creswell, 1994, p. 11). This is important to note as it allows the observer to interpret the data. Merriam and Associates (2002) defined ethnography “not by how data are collected, but rather by the lens through which the data are interpreted (p. 9).

Ethnographic Case Study

Given the purpose of the study was to understand how Caucasian female elementary teachers’ perceptions of African-American male students might influence their overrepresentation in special education, the researcher developed a case study, using the ethnographic research approach. Since Caucasian female elementary teachers in the northeastern Texas area (Region 10) can represent a culturally bounded system with a “finite quality” in terms of time and space (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 128), this case study was ethnographic as it attempts to describe and interpret the culture of Caucasian female elementary teachers as a community with shared social and cultural perspectives and practice. The ethnographic case study “primarily uses research techniques such as journals and interviews to discover the cultural knowledge that people hold in their mind” (G. Spindler & L. Spindler, 1992, p. 70). Inferences can be made from what people say and the way people act (Spradley, 1979).

Population

When conducting an ethnographic case study, the initial step in identifying the participants is to describe the population of interest (Ary et al., 2010). This can be accomplished by purposive and homogeneous sampling, which results in the thoughtful choice of participants that enable the researcher to learn or understand the study interest (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell, 2005; Daymon & Holloway, 2002). In qualitative research it is important to note that the

essential element of the research is people, selected on the basis of experience and relevance (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

To appropriately select individuals for this study, participants “must represent individuals who have the characteristics being considered by the investigation” (Arcury & Quandt, 1999, para. 2); thus, participant selection was determined using the following data:

1. 80% of all students referred to special education are referred by teachers (Kunjufu, 2005);
2. Caucasian females make up 83% of elementary teachers in the U.S. (Kunjufu, 2005);
3. Approximately 20% of all teachers in the U.S. account for 80% of all special education referrals (Kunjufu, 2005);
4. The largest group of students receiving special education services ranges from 6 to 11 years; thus, most special education referrals occur during the elementary school years (Drame, 2002);
5. Caucasian teachers refer African-American students more frequently than Caucasian students (Hosp & Reschly, 2003); and
6. McIntyre and Pernell (1985) along with other researchers (Morrison & Epps, 2002) reported that, "teachers tend to recommend students for special education placement who were racially dissimilar from themselves." (p. 112)

Accordingly, Caucasian female elementary teachers are the most logical population to interview when attempting to determine the influence that these participants' perceptions have on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education (Delpit, 2006; Park, Park, & Choe, 2005). Six teachers were interviewed for this study (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). The teachers selected for this study were chosen based on the following criteria:

1. The teacher must be female.
2. The teacher must be self-identified as Caucasian (White).
3. The teacher must be currently employed at an elementary school.
4. The teacher must have referred at least one African-American student to special education within the last year.
5. The teacher must work in the northeastern area of Texas (Region 10).

Sampling Frame

Contrary to the representative, rigid, and random sampling techniques of quantitative inquiry, qualitative research sampling is rarely rigid or random, but purposive, purposeful, and is based on the specific intent of the research (Ary et al., 2010; Daymon & Holloway, 2002). The researcher selected teachers using a homogeneous sample. This sampling type “consists of individuals who belong to the same subculture or group and have similar characteristics” (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 161). Using this sample type enabled the researcher to interview a very specific, highly significant, purposive sample that shared similar attitudes, experiences, and perceptions (Ary et al., 2010).

Although there is no universal rule regarding the number of participants to include in a qualitative study, many variables should be taken into account when establishing a sample size, and the appropriate size is typically based on the research approach used in the study (Ary et al., 2010; Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Marshall & Rossmann, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Researchers have recommended as few as three to six participants (Sanders, 1982) and as many as 12 to 22 (Kuzel, 1999), and as varied as four and 40 (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). However, most researchers agree that the sample size should be numerous enough to create data saturation; a redundancy of data that exhaust any new information (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell 2002;

Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Since the researcher used a homogeneous sample, research suggests the optimal sample size is “six to eight data units” (participants) (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 163). Therefore, the researcher, using the participant selection determination data established above and considering the optimal sample size, selected six Caucasian female elementary teachers as primary research participants. Table 7 provides demographic information for all primary research participants (i.e., experience, education level, and grades taught).

Geographic Location

The Texas State Legislature has established 20 educational regions in the state. Region 10, located in the northeastern Texas area, represents more than 700,000 students in 80 public school districts, 31 Charter Schools, and numerous private schools in eight different counties (Region 10, 2011). The region also represents approximately 15% of the total student population in the state of Texas (Region 10, 2011). Region 10 (northeast area of Texas) was chosen as the venue for this study as the student and teacher ethnic/racial dissection in the region demonstrates similar ethnic/racial trends, by percentage, to those of the nation as a whole.

In 2007-2008, the total number of teachers working in all public schools (elementary and secondary) in the U.S. was 2,969,200 (U.S. Department of Education, 2011a). From that total, the distribution of teachers by ethnicity was: (a) Caucasian—83%; (b) African American—7%; (c) Hispanic—7%; (d) Asian/Pacific Islander—1%; (e) Native American—(<1%); and (f) 1% identified as “Two or more races, non-Hispanic” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011a). Female teachers represented 77% of the total number of teachers working in all U.S. public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2011a). In that same year, the ethnic distribution of students in all U.S. public schools was: (a) Caucasian—56%; (b) African American—17%; (c) Hispanic—21%; (d) Asian/Pacific Islander—5%; and Native Americans—1% (U.S. Department

of Education, 2011b). African-American male students represented approximately 8% of the total number of students in U.S. public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2011b).

In 2009-2010, the total number of teachers working in the Region 10 area of Texas was 50,383 (Region 10, 2011). From that total, the distribution of teachers by ethnicity was: (a) Caucasian—35,245 (70%); (b) African American—8,016 (16%); (c) Hispanic—5,976 (12%); (d) Asian/Pacific Islander—865 (2%); and Native Americans—281 (<1%). Female teachers represent 77% (38,673) of the total number of teachers working in Region 10 (Region 10, 2011). In that same year, the ethnic distribution of students in Region 10 was: (a) Caucasian—17,453 (44%); (b) African American—8,029 (20%); (c) Hispanic—11,552 (29%); (d) Asian/Pacific Islander—1,268 (6%); and Native Americans—215 (1%). African-American male students represented approximately 8% (3934) of the total number of students in the Region 10 (Region 10, 2011).

Instrumentation

Algozzine, Spooner, and Karvonen (2002) suggested that researchers list the data collection instruments used to support the purpose of the study. In this study the researcher utilized: (a) human as instrument and (b) *NVivo10*. In a qualitative inquiry, the human as instrument is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data (Ary et al., 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Janesick, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2001; Shindler & Case, 1996). The concept of human as instrument emphasizes the distinctive role that qualitative researchers play in their inquiry (Ary et al., 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002).

Although quantitative researchers rely on objective data collection techniques such as surveys or statistical analysis, qualitative researchers take advantage of the subject-to-subject nature of qualitative inquiry by locating themselves in the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This is

advantageous to qualitative researchers as their inquiry relates to “human experiences and situations...researchers need an instrument flexible enough to capture the complexity of the human experience, and instrument capable of adapting and responding to the environment” (Ary et al., 2010, p. 424).

Using software in the data analysis process can enhance the rigor of qualitative research (L. Richards & T. Richards, 1991). Although the researcher acted as the primary instrument in the collection of data, an analysis of the interviews was also conducted using the qualitative research software *NVivo10* (DataSense, 2011). After the interview responses were completely transcribed utilizing *Dragon-NaturallySpeaking* software, the text was imported into *NVivo10*, where the data were coded and categorized, then entered into a text file to highlight data of significance (Welsh, 2002). The program was then used to analyze codes, categories, and narratives to determine themes and concepts germane to the study (Bazeley, 2009). This process also allowed the researcher to “use objective and systematic counting and recording procedures to produce a quantitative description of the symbolic content in the text” (Neuman, 2003, p. 311).

The Researcher’s Role

A qualitative study related to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education cannot be investigated without bias, in a completely objective and detached manner (Ary et al., 2010). Hara (1995) noted that “in contrast to quantitative research in education, qualitative research recognizes that the researcher's subjectivity deeply affects the research; thus, it accepts the researcher's viewpoint as a crucial factor of the research” (para. 6). Patton (2001) went further to suggest that the researcher's involvement and immersion into the research is essential, as the subjective and real world is in constant flux; thus, qualitative

researchers should be involved to record the changes that transpire. Researcher immersion may cause bias; however, bias of this type may not be problematic if the researcher “brings preconceived beliefs into the dialogue” (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005, p. 7).

Value judgments are made by the researcher throughout the research, which creates a "subject-subject relationship" (Smith, 1983, p. 8). Value judgments and the subject-subject relationship are evidenced as soon as the researcher selects the subject he/she wants to investigate. Hara (1995) asserted, “...what a researcher chooses to study is related to his/her value judgment” (para. 7). Additional evidence of researcher bias can be determined through selective observations, discriminatory hearing, personal attitudes and preferences, and other prejudicial flaws that can inadvertently affect the apposite interpretation of data (Ary et al., 2010). Although bias exists in qualitative study, “the research facts and researcher's value judgments of the research cannot exist separately” (Hara, 1995, para. 7). Qualitative research in education maintains that the researcher's subjectivity is vital; the researcher is considered to be an insider to the research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

Personal Experience

To help defuse the inherent bias related to qualitative research, Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994) contended that researchers, relying on personal and/or professional experiences, draw conclusions and present evidence that specifically support their personal contentions. As a high school special education teacher and administrator over the last 10 years, the researcher has witnessed many cases that appear to demonstrate teacher cultural and gender bias as correlating with the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education programs. The researcher's special education classroom was dominated by African-American males, several of whom the researcher believed to have been inadequately assessed and inappropriately placed.

This suggests that, consciously or unconsciously, educators, administrators, diagnosticians, and/or special education facilitators may be in violation of federal law (IDEA) as it pertains to inadequate referrals, assessments, identification, and student retainment practices at both the site and district level. This is the foundation of the researcher's interest in the subject concerning the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education.

Epoché

Another way the researcher attempted to limit bias and value judgments was through the utilization of epoché or bracketing. Epoché specifically relates to the "suspension of belief" (Ary et al., 2010, p. 473). The concept, as it pertains to qualitative research, relates to the researcher actively setting aside his/her experiences and values to enable a new perspective, based on data collected from persons who have experienced the phenomenon (Ary et al., 2010). Although the researcher served as the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data to fully exploit opportunities for collection and production of meaningful data (Merriam, 1998), epoché or bracketing was applied to reduce researcher bias and induce empirically obtained data (Ary et al., 2010, Clarke, 2005; Creswell, 2005; Prestonsoto, 2005). To assist the researcher with epoché or bracketing, the researcher analyzed data using Moustakas' modified van Kaam method, and descriptive and experiential journals were annotated during or after each interview.

Data Collection

The researcher used interviews and journals as the principal data collection resources for this study. There were two specific types of interviews used by the researcher: (1) the initial interview-pilot and (2) the research participant interview. The researcher also utilized two types of journals: (1) descriptive and (2) experiential.

Initial Interview-Pilot

An initial interview-pilot was performed before interviews were conducted with the primary study participants. Pilot participants were not used as primary research participants. The focus of the pilot was to (a) verify the overall feasibility of the study, (b) check procedures for obvious flaws, (c) check for the appropriateness of the data-collection methods, and (d) hone and refine interview questions (Ary et al., 2010). The initial interview-pilot was also used to offer the researcher a more holistic view of the research phenomenon (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005). Initial-pilot participants were afforded the opportunity to offer suggestions to the researcher related to any study and/or interview protocol changes they deemed necessary.

Although the primary interview participants were female and Caucasian (homogeneous sample), the initial interview-pilot participants were not limited to either criterion. The researcher utilized both gender and racially diverse sampling techniques during the initial pilot interviewing process to obtain a more inclusive and complete expression of the research phenomenon (Creel, 2010). Pilot participants were selected based on their ability to offer expertise and greater understanding of the primary study interest (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell, 2005; Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Additionally, all pilot participants were selected from the northeastern Texas area (Region 10). The researcher performed the initial interview-pilot using the interview protocol (Appendix A) and an unstructured interviewing format (Ary et al., 2010). The questions were open-ended to allow the participants optimal latitude in offering rich detail related to the research topic.

The pilot was completed when redundancy in data had been established (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell 2002; Daymon & Holloway, 2002). The interview protocol was modified to (a) include changes suggested to the researcher by the pilot participants and (b) accommodate themes and

patterns revealed to the researcher during the pilot. The interview protocol was viewed as a dynamic document; questions could be altered, omitted, or added by the researcher at any time during the interview process to facilitate greater insight and understanding regarding the research phenomenon.

Research Participant Interviews

The interviewing process was the principal source for the collection of data for this study. The primary research participants were selected through purposive sampling. This sampling practice is a non-probability sampling technique. Purposive sampling requires the researcher to consciously select specific participants that represent certain characteristics relevant to the study (Ary et al., 2010).

Regarding the initial qualitative interviewing requirement, Seidman (2006) proposed three levels of hearing: (1) hearing what the interviewee is saying, (2) hearing the unguarded responses that are not targeted to an external audience; and (3) hearing while taking into account non-verbal information (e.g., body movement, voice level/pitch, and facial expressions). H. Rubin and I. Rubin (2005) described this as "the art of hearing data" (p. 1).

Ary et al. (2010) contended that, although interviews require a great deal of time to conduct and later to transcribe, this research instrument "has the advantage of supplying large volumes of in-depth data rather quickly" (p. 439). Interviews can provide insight on the participants' perspectives, the meaning of previous behavior or speech, information about the site, and possibly information related to unanticipated issues (Ary et al., 2010). Interviews also allow immediate follow-up and clarification of participant's responses.

Interviews allow the researcher to "investigate, in critical ways, participants' comprehensions of their experiences and beliefs" (Dilley, 2004, p. 128). Through qualitative

interviews the researcher can “understand experiences and reconstruct events that were not anticipated” (H. Rubin & I. Rubin, 1995, p. 1). To conduct interviews effectively and efficiently, the researcher must select the optimal interview format based on the needs of this research study. Ary et al. (2010) contended that there are three basic types of interviews: (1) unstructured, 2) structured, and 3) semi- or partially structured. Each of the three aforementioned interview types offers certain advantages.

An unstructured interview, which is a conversational type of interview, relies on questions to “arise from the situation” (Ary et al., 2010, p. 438). The interviewer has general questions that he/she wants to ask, however, allows the interviewee to lead the interviewer to the next question. This type of interview is considered the most data-dense, as it allows the interviewer to ask questions as the opportunity arises. However, this interview type does not allow the interviewer to control the direction of the interview (Ary et al., 2010).

A structured interview relates to an interview type that relies on very specific questions that are asked of each participant. Each question is prepared ahead of time, and each interviewee is asked the same set of questions, often in the same sequence. The list of questions is commonly limited in length and most questions cannot be answered with yes or no or limited word responses (Ary et al., 2010). The disadvantage of this interview type is that it does not allow the interviewer the ability to take advantage of opportunities to inquire in greater depth when an opportunity may be presented.

Seidman (1998), however, suggested that interviews should be structured, yet enough latitude should be available to the interviewer to ask different questions in different ways, which in turn promotes greater understanding.

What are needed are not formulaic approaches to enhancing either validity or trustworthiness but understanding of and respect for the issues that

underlie those terms...doing our best to increase our ways of knowing...avoiding ignorance, realizing that our efforts are quite small in the larger scale of things. (Seidman, 1998, p. 20)

Utilizing the best aspects of the structure and unstructured interviews, the researcher conducted semi- or partially structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews begin with prepared interview questions, yet the interviewer was given the latitude to modify the questions during the interview process. In using a semi-structured format for asking questions, the researcher used an interview protocol to probe for a deeper understanding of responses to questions, “to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 341) and to “find out from them those things we cannot directly observe” (p. 340). Question modification occurred if the interviewer deemed it necessary to obtain greater depth (Ary et al., 2010).

Interview Protocol

The purpose of the semi-structured, researcher-constructed, interview protocol was to align the research questions with the qualitative study (see Appendix A). The questions focused on factors which may contribute to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education. The questions created to support the first research question (R1) were adaptations of questions developed by the Virginia Department of Education (2000) for a study on practices leading to student success.

R1. What perceived factors contribute to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

Q1. What can you tell me about the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

Q2. In the categories listed below, check the ones that you feel have the greatest impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education.

- ☐ Achievement Gap
- ☐ Biased Disciplinary Practices
- ☐ Teacher Training Deficiency
- ☐ Special Education Referral/Assessment Practices
- ☐ Cultural Bias
- ☐ Racism/Discrimination

Upon the interviewee's completion of this task, the researcher asked the following question for any categories selected:

“Why do you believe ‘Cultural Bias’ (for example) causes such an impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?”

For any categories that are not selected, the researcher asked the following question:

“Why do you not consider ‘Biased Disciplinary Practices’ (for example) as one of the factors that causes the greatest impact on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?”

Q3. In the categories listed below, check the ones that you have the greatest level of competence.

- ☐ Disability Awareness
- ☐ Intervention Strategies
- ☐ Cultural Awareness
- ☐ Student-Centered Instruction
- ☐ Special Education Referral Process
- ☐ Special Education Assessment Practices/Procedures

Upon the interviewee's completion of this task, the researcher asked the following questions for any categories selected:

“What is your understanding of ‘Cultural Awareness’ (for example)?”

“How do you demonstrate ‘Cultural Awareness’ in your classroom?”

R2. *How are African-American males perceived by Caucasian female elementary teachers?*

Q1. How do you perceive African-American boys differently from other students in your classroom?

Q2. What is your understanding of cultural/race awareness and how it relates to education?

Q3. What is your understanding of the term colorblindness and how it relates to education?

R3. *How does cultural/race bias affect the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?*

Q1. How comfortable are you with teaching African-American boys?

Q2. What obstacles do you encounter when teaching African-American boys?

Q3. What types of strategies do you implement to assist African-American boys in their educational endeavors?

Q4. What types of strategies do you implement to assist African-American boys who are struggling in your classroom?

R4. *What perceived effect does gender difference (teacher/student) have on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?*

Q1. How do you teach boys and girls differently in your classroom?

Q2. What obstacles do you encounter when teaching boys as opposed to girls?

R5. *What is the perceived influence of multicultural and/or diversity training (pre-service and/or professional development) in the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?*

Q1. What diversity/multicultural training have you received (pre-service and/or professional development) to enhance your understanding about the educational needs of African-American boys?

Q2. How has diversity/multicultural training influenced the way you teach African-American boys?

Data Recording Techniques

The researcher utilized three data gathering techniques during research interviews: (1) audio-recording, (2) notes taken during interview, and (3) notes taken after interview (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005). Audio-recordings enabled the researcher to create an accurate verbal history of the dialogue that ensued between the researcher and the interview participants (Moss & Mazikana, 1986). The notes taken during the interviews were descriptive in nature (Denscombe, 2003). These notes were used to record aspects of the interview that could not be audiotaped (e.g., non-verbal communication). The notes taken after the interviews were experiential. These notes afforded the researcher the latitude to reflect upon the interview; to record the researcher's thoughts and reactions regarding the interviews (Hansen, 2006).

Audio-recordings

The necessity for audio-recordings was based on the idea that the human memory is unreliable and "prone to partial recall, bias and error" (Denscombe, 2003, p. 175) as a research instrument, and that it is virtually impossible to write down exactly what is spoken while at the same time listening and responding appropriately (J. Lofland & L. Lofland, 1995). During the interview process, keeping an audio record is essential when attempting to acquire a pristine record of the interview participants' words (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Thus, all interviews in this study were audiotaped. The researcher utilized two forms of audio recording

equipment to ensure that all interview data were accurately and completely transcribed: (1) *Dragon-NaturallySpeaking 11.5 Home Bundle* and (2) *HT Professional Recorder* (iPhone application). *Dragon-NaturallySpeaking* is speech recognition software (talk-to-text) that enabled the researcher to accurately dictate and transcribe the interview participants' spoken words into written text (Nuance, 2011). The *HT Professional Recorder* was also used to ensure accuracy of talk-to-text dictation and as a backup to the dictation software in the event that computer and/or software complications were experienced during the participants' interviews. This process prevented any loss of data such as the narrative itself, inflection, nuance, and sequence (Hermanowicz, 2002), that could have occur if the researcher merely depended on notes taken during the interviews.

Journals

While conducting interviews, Denscombe (2003) asserted, "Most researchers rely on audio tape-recording backed up by written documentation" (p. 176). Sanjek (1990) contended journals are a fundamental qualitative recording technique, even if the researcher is also using an audio-recording device. The researcher used two types of journals to assist with the interview process: (1) descriptive and (2) experiential. The descriptive journal was used by the researcher during the interview to annotate aspects of the interview that could not be captured using audio-recording. Audio-recordings only capture speech and neglect to record non-verbal communication and visual signals which occur during the interview (Denscombe, 2003). This journal included information related to context, location, climate, and atmosphere in which the interview was conducted. More importantly, however, this journal was used to record affect, attitude, and non-verbal communication. This journal was also used to record any points of emphasis as deemed relevant to the interviewer.

An experiential journal was used to record thoughts soon after the interview was completed. This journal was used to annotate "subjective information" (Hansen, 2006, p. 71), such as the researcher's perceptions regarding the participant's intent of statements during the interview (Denscombe, 2003). An experiential journal allowed the researcher to immediately annotate impressions regarding the interview session. This process also allow the researcher time to scrutinize not only what the participants said but also their expressions, questions, and hesitations, which provided vital information for analysis (Hycner, 1985; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Additionally, an experiential journal allowed the researcher to step away from the interview, recall and reflect; the researcher was able to consider the statements of the participant in a more holistic manner (Denscombe, 2007).

Data Analysis

Ary et al. (2010) asserted that "data analysis is the most complex and mysterious phase of qualitative research" (p. 481). This process entails extracting usable data from voluminous interview transcripts and journals. According to Ary et al. this is a "messy and nonlinear" process (p. 481) that involves reducing and organizing data, synthesizing, searching for significant patterns, and discovering what is essential for the research study. Creswell (2007) proposed a data analysis spiral technique should be used when analyzing data. This technique, upon collecting the data, requires the researcher to organize and familiarize, code and reduce, and interpret and represent the data in a repetitive nature until conclusions can be accurately attained. The two primary methods for analysis were transcription and the van Kaam modified method.

Transcription

Slembrouck (2007) and ten Have (2007) opined that transcription involves a translation or transformation of sound from recordings to text. Ochs (1999) suggested that transcription is theoretical in nature. Duranti (2007) more specifically proposed that transcription is the “selective process of reflecting theoretical goals and definitions” (p. 44). However, the most common definition relates to transcription as a theoretical, selective, interpretive, and representational process of creating text from sound (voice) (Duranti, 2007).

In recent decades, technological advancements have made many aspects of transcription easier and faster (Ary et al., 2010). Researchers can now rely on technology to simplify the most difficult aspects of transcription (Matheson, 2007). The researcher used *Dragon-NaturallySpeaking* and *NVivo10* software to accurately record and transcribe all participant interviews (see Instrumentation).

Van Kaam Modified Method

Patton (1990) contended that qualitative data should be presented in such a way that it is both understandable and allows others to draw conclusions. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that the data analysis should be a direct representation of the actual text. The data analysis process enabled the researcher to code and sort manageable units into thematic categories (Moustakas, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The researcher used numbers to represent the study participants to protect the anonymity of each participant; the researcher then analyzed data using Moustakas’ modified van Kaam method, as follows:

1. List and group all relevant experience.
2. Reduce and eliminate extraneous data.

3. Cluster and thematize to identify core themes of the experience.
4. Identify and verify against the complete record to ensure relevancy and compatibility.
5. Construct individualized textural description of the experience based upon the verbatim transcripts using relevant and valid themes.
6. Construct individual structural description of the experiences based upon individual textural description and imaginative variation.
7. Construct for each participant a textural-structural description of the meaning and essence of the experiences.
8. Textural-structural descriptions were then used to cultivate a composite description of meaning and essence of the experience representing all participants. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121)

Familiarize and Organize

To become familiar with the data, the researcher became immersed in the data (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). This was achieved, as Ary et al. (2010) recommended, by reading over the researchers' journals, listening to audio-recordings, and reviewing the researcher's comments in a repetitive nature. Creating transcripts also helped the researcher become more familiar with the data, but also allowed the data to be further scrutinized through the coding process (Ary et al., 2010). During transcription, audio-recordings were directly transcribed to avoid researcher bias (Creswell, 2002). The transcriptions included the researcher's notes which annotated non-verbal data (e.g., body language, physical emotion, etc.).

Once familiarization had been achieved, the researcher began to organize the data. The data were organized by interview. All hardcopies (e.g., researcher's journals notes and data

recording forms) were photocopied, and were organized by interview. A copy of all data was saved on the researcher's main drive and on a separate *Maxtor OneTouch* mini-hard drive.

Code and Reduce

Coding is an essential element to a qualitative research design (Miller & Brewer, 2003). Strauss and Corbin (1998) described this process as the “building blocks of theory” (p. 101). Coding enables the researcher to identify and classify important themes that emerged during the data collection process. This process enables the researcher to denote similar passages of text for easier identification and retrieval for further comparison and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and simplifies searches which therein enable the researcher to process the data for comparisons, patterns, and further inquiry (Ary et al., 2010). More specifically, open-coding assists the researcher in establishing the mutual and distinctive aspects of the data (Miller & Brewer, 2003). Researchers highlight and code the exact words from the participants' transcripts to create thematic units to represent various themes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). Creswell and Plano Clark referred to this process as “in vivo” coding (p. 153).

An extensive analysis, using open-coding, was applied to all data obtained in this research. To assist with this process, the following technologies were utilized: voice-to-voice or voice recognition software and *NVivo 10* software. Voice-to-voice enabled an immediate and precise transcription of all interviews. *NVivo 10* assisted in restructuring data graphically to investigate emerging themes and patterns (DataSense, 2010).

Miles and Huberman (1994) established a data reduction method to assist researchers with this process. Data reduction begins by matching patterns and categorizing; displaying data in the form of matrices, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The researcher was able to create a coding scheme that involved abbreviations, key words, and phrases (Ryan & Bernard,

2000). Larger categories were formed by combining codes that shared common relationships. From these categories, themes began to emerge. The researcher used these emerging themes to compare to the theoretical framework of the study.

Interpret and Represent

When the researcher deemed the data to be completely coded and reduced, the researcher began interpreting the data. Ary et al. (2010) suggested that this stage of the analysis process involves “reflecting about the words and acts of the study’s participants and abstracting important understandings from them” (p. 490). Although there are no set rules to follow when interpreting qualitative data, during this stage the researcher: (1) confirmed information already known (or presumed), (2) questioned what was presumed, and eliminated misconceptions; and (3) extracted new insights (Ary et al., 2010). All new insights were supported by data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Credibility

Bradley (1993) described credibility as the adequate representation of the constructs of the social world being studied. A recommended set of activities are recommended in order to secure the credibility of the research results, such as peer-review and member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher established credibility by conducting peer-reviews and member-checks.

Peer Review

Evidence of credibility can be partially established by employing the assistance of a proficient and informed colleague (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ary et al. (2010) contended that the researcher can base evidence on consensus; an “agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematic” (Eisner 1998, p. 112) processes are

accurate. This practice in qualitative research is commonly referred to as peer-review (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Patton (1990) referred to this procedure as a form of investigator triangulation. A peer-review is the appraisal and evaluation of the research process and the data obtained during the investigation by an objective individual who has demonstrated knowledge and expertise in the chosen research field (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell and Miller (2000) added that the peer-reviewer “provides support, plays devil’s advocate, challenges the researchers’ assumptions, pushes the researchers to the next step methodologically, and asks hard questions about methods and interpretations” (p. 129). To confirm this type of credibility, the researcher enlisted the assistance of a competent peer-reviewer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dr. Bentley Parker holds a Ph.D. in Special Education from Texas Women’s University and is a district-level special education administrator in the northeastern Texas area (Region 10) (Cresswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Acquiring the knowledge and expertise of Dr. Parker for this research was appropriate as his position as a special education administrator requires that he “provide and supervise the provision of specially designed instruction that meets the unique needs of students with disabilities” (TEA, 2002, p. 14). He is also responsible for ensuring that the Annual Review and Dismissal (ARD)/Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) process is in compliance with Federal, State, and Local requirements (TEA, 2002). Dr. Parker’s education, coupled with his position as a special education administrator in the Region 10 area, places him in a position of knowledge, expertise, and leadership for all issues concerning special education at the site and district level (Ary et al., 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member Checks

Cohen and Crabtree (2006) described member checks as the process wherein different members in the research group would verify the data, interpretations, and conclusions of the

study. Daymon and Holloway (2002) suggested that member-checking refers to the researcher checking “the understanding of the data with the people studied, by summarizing, repeating or paraphrasing their words and asking about their veracity and interpretation" (p. 95). The process can be done in formal and informal settings because member checks can be done throughout the research period (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member-checking enabled the researcher to establish the validity of the research and was a crucial technique for ensuring the credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher conducted member-checking with all of the interview participants to assess intentionality, correct factual errors, and to offer an opportunity for participants to add additional information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through this method, participants were able to describe and explain the intentions for their actions and their responses. This also allowed participants the opportunity to correct errors or to challenge research perceptions or incorrect interpretations of data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Trustworthiness

Although quantitative researchers are concerned with consistency of behavior (reliability), qualitative researchers expect variability as the contexts of studies change. Consistency, Ary et al. (2010) advised, “is viewed as the extent to which variation can be tracked or explained” (p. 502). Rather than seeking reliability, qualitative researchers seek consistency and trustworthiness. A variety of methods can be used to increase the trustworthiness of a study. Amid the more commonly used procedures include member-checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 1998), explained above.

The fundamental intent of trustworthiness is to propose that the study’s findings are “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). The most important aspect of

trustworthiness that the researcher needed to establish is that the methods used for the study were both consistent and can be duplicated, and that “external evidence can be used to test conclusions” (Ary et al., 2010, p. 502). The necessity for such detailed methods is based on the standard use of researcher created instruments and interpretive analysis, rather than the objective and scientifically validated instruments available to quantitative researchers (Creswell, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Transferability

External validity, which refers to the generalizability of the research findings, is a principle concern for quantitative researchers (Ary et al., 2010); in qualitative inquiry, transferability is the focus. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that transferability refers to the extent by which the researcher’s working hypothesis could be re-applied to another research context. The study is transferable upon the generation of data and descriptions that are rich enough for the reader or researchers to make judgments about the findings’ transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The researcher achieved transferability through a detailed description of the methods employed for this study. Additionally, the researcher maintained the comprehensive collection of data analysis documents on file, and the data are available upon request. The collection includes all photocopied documents, transcriptions, coding, reflexive responses, and theme generation. The document trail affords future researchers the capability to transfer the findings or the procedures of this research to future research inquiries.

Dependability

Quantitative researchers seek to explain a phenomenon through the reliability in their research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hoepfl, 1997). Joppe (2000)

defined reliability as “the extent to which results are consistent over time and are an accurate representation...the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology” (p. 1). However, qualitative researchers are less concerned with “explaining” and more concerned with “generating understanding” (Stenbacka, 2001, p. 551); thus dependability, rather than reliability, is sought in their research.

Bradley (1993) described dependability as the coherence of the internal process and the method that the researcher recorded and reported changing conditions in the phenomenon. A primary way to secure dependability is through sufficient audits of the research processes and findings. Dependability, according to Bradley, is determined through consistent checking throughout the study process.

The researcher addressed dependability using intra-rater and inter-rater agreement strategies (Ary et al, 2010). To achieve intra-rater dependability the researcher used the code-recode strategy. This strategy required the researcher to code the data, leave the analysis for a period of time, recode the data, and then compare the two sets of coded material (Ary et al. 2010). Inter-rater or inter-observer agreement methods for addressing dependability were utilized by coding the material, then allowing the researcher’s peer-reviewer to code the interview transcripts using the coding labels previously identified by the researcher; however, the peer-reviewer was able to add additional codes as deemed appropriate.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the quantitative researcher’s concept of objectivity (Ary et al., 2010). This rigor requires the researcher to remain neutral throughout the research inquiry. Qualitative research assumes that the researcher introduces a certain level of subjectivity into the study (Hara, 1995); limiting bias and predeterminism is essential to the confirmability of any

qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that a principle condition in establishing confirmability is the extent to which the researcher admits his/her own predispositions. So while quantitative researchers are concerned with objectivity, qualitative researchers are concerned with the degree to which the results of a study can be confirmed or substantiated by others (Patton, 2002).

A number of strategies are available to researchers for enhancing the confirmability of a research method or results (Ary et al., 2010). The researcher utilized the following strategies to establish confirmability:

1. The researcher used a peer-reviewer to review the study's method, process, and results (Ary et al. 2010), and determine the potential for bias or predeterminism (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000).
2. The researcher employed epoché, which refers to the setting aside of personal experiences and values to enable a new perspective, based on data collected from persons who have experienced the phenomenon (Clarke, 2005; Creswell, 2005; Prestonsoto, 2005).
3. The researcher used the process of member-checking, which enabled each of the research participants to review and critique interview transcripts for accuracy and meaning (Ary et al., 2010), and review and critique final results of the study, which allowed the participants an opportunity to express issues concerning the research results.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount in qualitative inquiry (McGee-Brown, 1995).

When conducting research of any kind, it is important to understand that the same ethics apply to

all forms of exploratory inquiry involving human participants (American Educational Research Association, 1992). Although qualitative studies do offer some unique challenges when considering ethical issues of research, such as the “flexible and slightly unpredictable nature” (Hansen, 2006, p. 33) of qualitative inquiry, the same ethical principles apply. Qualitative research must be conducted in a manner that is both assiduous and trustworthy (Ary et al., 2010), keeping in mind that ethical practice must be present in every step of the process (American Educational Research Center, 1992):

Understanding ethics to involve trustfulness, openness, honesty, respectfulness, carefulness, and constant attentiveness means ethics is not treated as a separate part of the research...it is an implicit part of ethical practice thus involves the acknowledgment and location of the researcher within the research process. (Davies & Dodd, 2002, p. 281)

Consent

An initial concern when interviewing educators in early childhood education settings is identifying and following informed consent procedures (McGee-Brown, 1995). To facilitate sound ethical practice, the researcher provided each research participant with an informed consent letter. The informed consent serves as the door by which the researcher can enter into the research. The notion of informed consent “arises from the subject’s right to freedom and self-determination” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 51). Research participants have the right to be informed as to the intent of the research and any risks that may be involved with their participation (Ary et al., 2010). With the informed consent, Creswell and Plano Clark (2010) asserted, “the researcher guarantees protection of rights by stating them in writing and having the participants sign the consent before they provide data” (p. 176).

The informed consent details the following information: (a) study intent; (b) anonymity of participants (Hansen, 2006); (c) possible risks associated with the study (Ary et al. 2010); (d)

confidentiality (Cooper & Schindler, 2003); (e) information detailing the voluntary nature of participation (without coercion or inducement) (Hansen, 2006); and (f) information detailing that withdrawal from the study is possible at any time (Marvasti, 2004). Through this process, participants were assured, before giving their consent to participate in the research, the purpose of the study and the procedures that would be followed regarding their private information (Hansen, 2006).

The signed consent process can be somewhat arduous when applying it an ethnographic study, which often relies on face-to-face interviews to collect data (Hansen, 2006). This study utilized semi-structured interviews to extrapolate data from research participants. Using this type of qualitative data gathering technique can pose greater difficulty regarding confidentiality and privacy (Cutcliffe & Ramcharan, 2002) as it places the interviewer in very close and intimate proximity to the interviewee. Cutcliffe and Ramcharan also suggested that the researcher may want to interview participants more than one time. This may require the researcher obtain consent continuously throughout the data gathering process (Hansen, 2006). The researcher also took into account that the circumstances of the participants may change and data collection may take longer than the participant expected; the research did not automatically assume that participants' consent was ongoing (Lawton 2001).

Disclosure

In terms of the ethical considerations for the level of disclosure, it is important that the researcher openly state the identity and the purpose of the study (American Educational Research Center, 1992). As the project unfolds, the researcher can reveal the focus of the study (Ary et al., 2010). It is important not to be deliberately misleading about the research project, but at the

same time be careful that the divulgence does not affect the answers of the participants in the interviews (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005, p. 40).

Confidentiality

One of the most prominent concerns regarding qualitative research is related to confidentiality (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005). Confidentiality can be understood as the obligation of the researcher to protect any information that has been obtained so that it will not be used for any supplementary reason other than that for which it was given (American Educational Research Center, 1992). Confidentiality also refers to participant anonymity; “research participants cannot be identified in the research results” (Hansen, 2006, p. 33).

The researcher achieved anonymity by using numbers for people and pseudonyms for places. Any other identifiable information such as age or grade level taught was used with diligence and thought as to not fortuitously identify any participant by demographic information (Hansen, 2006). Qualitative research poses additional confidentiality issues as “the identities of research participants are usually known to the researchers and frequently also to the people transcribing the data” (Richards & Schwartz, 2002). Subsequently, the researcher may utilize additional strategies to ensure anonymity, such as “combining responses from different participants to form a composite or excluding certain pieces of data from the study because anonymity cannot be guaranteed” (Hansen, 2006, p. 34).

Administrative Procedures

Research participants (both pilot and primary) were obtained from a northeastern Texas (Region 10). The organization that was chosen as a venue to assist the researcher in identifying and selecting qualified participants for this study in the northeastern Texas area (Region 10) was

New Liberty Baptist Church (NLBC). NLBC is located in Garland, Texas and includes teachers that represent several public school districts in the northeastern Texas area (Region 10).

All research participants (pilot and primary participants) were recruited from NLBC. The Permission to Contact (Appendix B) NLBC members letter was sent to Dr. Ken Ashcock, Pastor of New Liberty Baptist Church. The researcher then contacted Dr. Ashcock by phone. Dr. Ashcock verbally granted permission to contact NLBC members. Upon receiving verbal permission to contact NLBC members for the study from Dr. Ashcock, the researcher requested a written and signed letter authorizing the researcher to contact NLBC members. Dr. Ashcock prepared and signed a Permission Granted to Contact (Appendix C) letter and sent it to the researcher. After gaining access to NLBC, the researcher obtained Internal Review Board Approval from Liberty University to conduct the proposed research (Appendix D).

To target prospective educators for this study, the researcher addressed potential research participants by making requests for participation announcements (Appendix E) during NLBC announcements. The researcher provided a sign-up sheet (Appendix F) during each announcement. The sign-up sheet asked for the participants' name, ethnicity, grade level, experience, phone number, and email address.

Upon completion of the requests for participation process, the researcher selected initial interview-pilot participants. The initial interview-pilot participants consisted of any willing participant that did not meet the primary participant criteria. The initial interview-pilot was performed before interviews were conducted with the primary study participants. Pilot participants were not used as primary research participants. The focus of the pilot was to (a) verify the overall feasibility of the study, (b) check procedures for obvious flaws, (c) check for the appropriateness of the data-collection methods, and (d) hone and refine interview questions.

The initial interview-pilot was also be used to offer the researcher a more holistic view of the research phenomenon.

Although the primary interview participants were female and Caucasian, the initial interview-pilot participants were not limited to either criterion. The criteria for selecting pilot participants were primarily based on their ability to offer expertise and greater understanding of the primary study interest. Using a diverse sampling technique allowed the researcher a broader view of the phenomenon from educators of varied professional positions, experience, and ethnic/racial background. The researcher was able to perform the initial interview-pilot using the interview protocol (Appendix A) and an unstructured interviewing format. The questions were open-ended to allow the pilot participants optimal latitude in offering rich detail related to the research topic. The pilot participants were also afforded an opportunity to suggest any changes deemed necessary to the research questions or the study in general.

When the researcher completed the initial interview-pilot process, the primary research participants were selected. Their selection was based on the primary participant criteria. The researcher obtained contact information using the contact information sheet (Appendix F). The researcher then attempted to make contact with the potential research participants. When contact was made, the researcher ensured that the potential participant met the primary participant criteria and used the request for participation outline (Appendix E) as a guide to inform the potential participant about the purpose of the study. Individuals interested in the study were sent an information packet that contained the following (a) Introductory Letter (Appendix G) and (b) Informed Consent (Appendix H or I). Once the researcher received the Informed Consent signed by the research participant, the researcher then scheduled a day/time for each interview.

Preceding all interviews, the researcher assured all research participants that their confidentiality was assured and how the interview would be recorded. The researcher acquired permission from the participant to auditorily record the interview. The researcher assured each participant that their participation was completely voluntary and reaffirmed their right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time.

Additionally, the participants were afforded the opportunity to review the interview protocol. When the participants felt ready to proceed, the researcher began the interview. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes. The interview protocol acted as a guide through the interview process. Each participant was assured that their opinions could be expressed freely throughout the interview. Adhering to the member-checking protocol (Appendix J), each participant was informed that they would receive a copy of the interview transcript.

Additionally, they were told that when the interview transcript was received, they would need to verify the transcript for accuracy, and make any changes to the transcripts they deem necessary. Once all transcripts had been verified and returned, the coding process began. All research data, created or collected, written or auditory, was saved on the researcher's personal computer and a separate *Maxtor OneTouch* mini-hard drive for backup purposes. Access to all saved data on the researcher's computer requires a password. The *Maxtor OneTouch* mini-hard drive is being kept in a locked safe, and only the researcher has access. All research data will be destroyed three years after the completion of this study.

Pilot Interview Responses

The pilot interview participants consisted of one African-American general education administrator, one Caucasian special education facilitator, one Caucasian special education diagnostician, one Caucasian special education teacher, one Hispanic special education teacher,

and one African-American general education teacher. The general response from the initial-pilot interviews was that no considerable modifications were needed to the primary participant interview protocol. However, the pilot participants suggested the following minor changes:

1. Add introductory questions, such as, “Why did you become a teacher?” and “What problems to you see with the public education system?”
2. Provide the research participants with a printout that includes the lists embedded in R1 Q2 and Q3.
3. Consider using the word “boy” and “boys” in place “male” and “males.” The word “male” may be too formal and sterile when relating it to elementary students.
4. Be flexible during the interviews to allow the participants latitude and freedom to completely express their thoughts and feelings.
5. During the interview, provide transition statements between questions, such as, “I’m now going to change the topic.”
6. Consider using the racial/ethnic identifiers “Black” and “White”, rather than “African American” and “Caucasian,” as these racial/ethnic identifiers are more commonly used and accepted in northeastern Texas (Region 10).

The researcher adjusted the interview protocol to accommodate all recommended changes suggested by the initial-pilot interview participants, with the exception of suggestion number six. This issue was broached during the researcher’s Proposal Defense. The researcher’s dissertation committee suggested that “African American” and “Caucasian” be used in the dissertation rather than “Black” and “White.” With these changes, the initial-pilot interview participants believed the interview protocol to be appropriate and effectual when attempting to address the research study’s focus. The initial-pilot interview participants also

suggested that the interview protocol, after suggestions had been completed, created a platform that would create a more fluid line of questioning during the interview process.

Primary Participant Selection

The researcher obtained contact information from the contact information sheet (Appendix F). The researcher, using the request for participation outline (Appendix E) as a guide to inform the potential participants as the purpose of the study, contacted the potential research participants. If contact was made, the researcher confirmed, using homogenous-purposive sampling requiring a very selective common subgroup, that the potential participant met the primary participant criteria. This process was continued until six teachers fully met the primary research participant criteria: (a) female, (b) Caucasian, (c) currently employed as an elementary teacher, (d) has referred at least one African-American male to special education in the last year, and (e) works in the northeastern area of Texas (Region 10). Twenty potential research participants were excluded from the research based on the following:

- Eleven potential research participants indicated that they had not referred any African-American male students to special education within the last year.
- Six potential research participants indicated that they were not interested in participating in the research study.
- One potential research participant indicated that she was not Caucasian.
- One potential research participant indicated that she had been teaching at the middle school level for the last seven years.
- The researcher was unable to contact one prospective research participant.

Primary Research Participants

The six teachers that were selected as the primary research participants represented varying years of experience, education level, and backgrounds. Tables 7 and 8 provide the research participants' professional and educational information and the participants' school ratings and demographics respectively.

Table 7

Participants' Professional and Educational Information

Participant	Experience (Years)	Degree	Grade Taught
P1	2	Bachelors	4th
P2	22	Masters	3rd
P3	9	Bachelors	K through 6th
P4	34	Masters	Pre-K through 8th
P5	43	Bachelors	K through 5th
P6	26	Masters	3 rd and 4th

Table 8

Participants' School Ratings and Demographics

Participant	State Rating	AYP Status	Student Population			
			African American	Hispanic	Caucasian	Other
P1	Exemplary	Met AYP	18%	27%	41%	14%
P2	Recognized	Missed AYP	19	23	46	12
P3	Acceptable	Met AYP	37	59	3	1
P4	Exemplary	Met AYP	13	29	44	14
P5	Recognized	Met AYP	49	41	<1	9
P6	Recognized	Met AYP	16	34	37	13

Participant Interviews

Once all primary research participants were identified, the researcher scheduled a date/time/place to conduct each interview. Scheduling was entirely based on the participants'

convenience. The introductory letter (Appendix G) and informed consent (Appendix H or I) were sent to the research participants via email, prior to the interview. The researcher also brought a copy of both the introductory letter and the informed consent to each interview and personally provided a copy to each primary research participant. Time was afforded to each participant before the interview to read the introductory letter, and to read and sign the informed consent.

Preceding all interviews, the researcher informed the primary research participants that their confidentiality was assured, that the interview would be auditorily recorded, and that the researcher would be taking notes during the interview. The researcher also assured each participant that her participation was completely voluntary and reaffirmed her right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time. Each interview participant was also given the opportunity to review the interview protocol before the interview began.

Preliminary questions were asked at the beginning of each interview, except for the P3 interview, because P3 mentioned that she had a limited time to conduct the interview. The preliminary questions were intended to not only establish a rapport with the participant, but also to obtain professional, educational, and school demographic information. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes to complete, with the exception of P3's interview, which took approximately 35 minutes. Throughout each interview, the researcher made every attempt to create an environment of trust and professional intimacy that would enable the participants to feel a sense of comfort during the interview process. Such an environment was paramount when attempting to extract participant responses that would ultimately contribute to the research study (Ary et al., 2010, Clarke, 2005; Creswell, 2005; Prestonsoto, 2005). Upon completing each

interview, the researcher informed each participant that a transcript of the interview would be sent to her for final approval.

Data Tracking

All research data created or collected, written or auditory, were saved on the researcher's personal computer and a separate *Maxtor OneTouch* mini-hard drive for backup purposes. All research participants were assigned a participant number (e.g., P1, P2, P3, etc.). The researcher established a key that permanently linked each participant to her assigned number. The participant key was saved in an independent file on the *Maxtor OneTouch* mini-hard drive and was separate from all other research data, to further secure participants' anonymity. The researcher maintained all participants' data and communication in files that were created and named using the participants' numbers (e.g. P1, P2, P3, etc.). Additionally, all digitally recorded and transcribed interviews were saved in the participants' individual file.

Interview Transcription

The researcher used the *Dragon-NaturallySpeaking 11.5 Home Bundle* to assist with the transcription process. *Dragon-NaturallySpeaking* is speech recognition software (talk-to-text), which was used to accurately record and transcribe the interview participants' spoken words into written text (Nuance, 2011). The software requires a 10-minute voice recognition process, during which the person (research participant) reads certain statements to allow the software to adjust to the individual's voice patterns. The researcher found two inherent challenges with this software. The initial problem was with its accuracy. The *NaturallySpeaking* software accurately transcribed the participants' speech approximately 80-85% of the time. The additional problem was with punctuation. The software is unable to ascribe punctuation in the transcription. Although the researcher knew this going into the transcription process, the researcher did not

anticipate how time-consuming it would be to go back and insert punctuation. Correcting the *NaturallySpeaking* text approximately 15-20% of the time and inserting the appropriate punctuation created a laborious process that, in retrospect, may have been avoided had the researcher used the conventional method of transcription (e.g., record, playback, transcribe). Overall, the transcription process for all participants' interviews took the researcher approximately three weeks to complete. Once the transcription process had been completed, the researcher sent the transcribed interviews to the research participants for their final approval.

Analysis Procedures

To become familiar with the data, the researcher read over the researcher's journals, listened to the audio-recordings, and read through the transcripts in a repetitive manner. This process was essential to gaining greater understanding into the thoughts and statements of the interview participants. Equitable value was afforded to each statement made by the interview participants and every attempt was made to limit the researcher's bias.

Although the researcher served as the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data, to fully exploit opportunities for collection and production of meaningful data (Merriam, 1998), epoché or bracketing was applied to reduce researcher bias and induce dispassionately obtained data (Ary et al., 2010, Clarke, 2005; Creswell, 2005; Prestonsoto, 2005). Epoché specifically relates to the "suspension of belief" (Ary et al., 2010, p. 473). The concept, as it pertains to qualitative research, relates to the need for the researcher to actively set aside personal experiences and values to enable a new perspective, based on data collected from the research participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Ary et al., 2010).

Once completely familiarized with the data, the researcher began the analysis, using a three-step process. The researcher relied upon the data reduction methods of Miles and

Huberman (1994) to conduct an analysis of the data. In the first step of the analysis process, the researcher reviewed each interview transcript and highlighted information germane to the study's focus. The researcher then began categorizing and pattern matching (Appendix K). A coding scheme was developed by the researcher that involved highlighted colors (Appendix L) that mark passages in the transcripts (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Codes that shared relationships and content were combined, which formed larger categories.

To achieve intra-rater dependability, the researcher used a code-recode strategy. This strategy required the researcher to code the data, leave the analysis for a period of time, and then recode the data. The researcher then compared the two sets of coded material and made appropriate changes as deemed necessary (Ary et al. 2010).

The second step in the analysis process was to employ the assistance of a peer-reviewer to ensure that the data retrieved from the interview transcripts by the researcher were credible (Bradley, 1993), often referred to as inter-rater dependability. This process required the researcher to code the material, then to allow the researcher's peer-reviewer to code the interview transcripts using the coding labels previously identified by the researcher; however, the peer-reviewer was able to add additional codes as deemed appropriate. After this had been completed, concepts began to emerge, which warranted further analysis. Dr. Bentley Parker provided assistance as the peer-reviewer. Dr. Parker "provided support, played devil's advocate, challenged the researcher's assumptions, pushed the researcher to the next step methodologically, and asked hard questions about methods and interpretations" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129). Essentially, his role was to objectively appraise and evaluate the research process, as well as the data obtained by the researcher during the investigation.

The third and final step of the analysis process was to employ *Nvivo10* software to code and reduce the data. The *Nvivo10* software enabled the researcher to identify and classify important themes that emerged during the data collection, in a completely objective process. The transcribed interviews and journals were exported to *NVivo10*, where the data were coded and categorized, then entered into a text file to highlight data of significance (Welsh, 2002). Codes for data analysis were developed based on themes and categories that demonstrated significance. The assortment of codes represented condensed descriptions of the participants' responses to each interview question. Similar participant responses were linked to descriptive codes. This process also simplified searches and enabled the researcher to process the data for comparisons, patterns, and further inquiry (Ary et al., 2010). The *NVivo10* software also assisted in restructuring data graphically to investigate emerging themes and patterns (DataSense, 2010). The *NVivo10* data analysis uncovered a total of 252 codes. These codes were compared to coded material prepared by the researcher and the peer-reviewer.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to understand how Caucasian female teachers' perceptions of African-American male students might influence their overrepresentation in special education. This chapter contained detailed information related to the qualitative ethnographic case study's methodology. Chapter Three also contained an explanation of the selected research design, the site of the study, participant selection, data collection and analysis procedures, trustworthiness, and ethics. Chapter Four presents the emerging themes resulting from the transcripts and textual representations of the participants' interviews and the researcher's journals.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the influence that Caucasian female elementary teachers' perceptions of African-American male students may have on the overrepresentation of this student population in special education. This chapter details research that was conducted and data collected over a 3-week period in September of 2013. All research questions were addressed using the interview protocol (Appendix A). The following research questions were used to guide the researcher throughout the research process:

- R1. What perceived factors contribute to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?
- R2. How are African-American males perceived by Caucasian, female elementary teachers?
- R3. How does cultural/race bias affect the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?
- R4. What perceived effect does gender difference (teacher/student) have on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?
- R5. What is the perceived influence of multicultural and/or diversity training (pre-service and/or professional development) on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

Research Participants' Response Summary

The transcripts for all interviews can be referenced in Appendix K. The summary of the research participants' responses to the research questions, provided below, is based on the mutual or common responses shared by each participant. Discrepancies to the shared responses are noted as well. The following is the summary of their responses:

R1: What perceived factors contribute to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

The researcher addressed the first research question (R1) by asking the participants a series of three sub-questions. The first question attempted to establish the degree in which the participants were knowledgeable regarding the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education. Each participant initially responded to this question in a similar manner by loosely defining overrepresentation. P2, P3, P4 and P6 indicated that they believed there was an overrepresentation problem. However, P1 and P5 indicated that no such overrepresentation problem exists, as follows:

P1: I don't think it's a problem here...I must admit, I don't really understand what the problem really is...I mean, if a child needs special education services, regardless of race, what does it matter? I would hate to deny a kid special education services based on the fact that he is African American or there are already too many African Americans in special education.

P5: We have to get away from counting how many of any group is in special education. We need to look at the number of students that need special education and compare it to the number of students in special education that don't need it. That's where you could find a problem.

For the second question that addressed R1 the researcher provided each participant with a sheet of paper that listed the following categories:

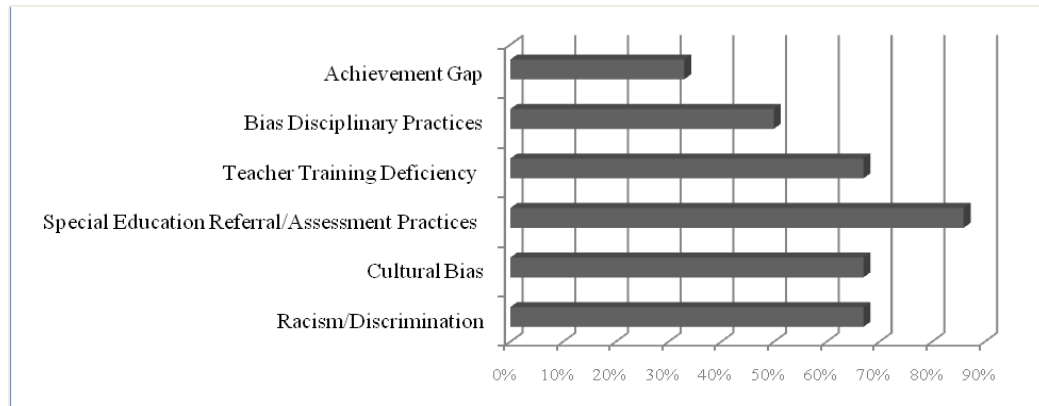
- Achievement Gap
- Biased Disciplinary Practices
- Teacher Training Deficiency
- Special Education Referral/Assessment Practices
- Cultural Bias
- Racism/Discrimination

The research participants were then asked to check the categories they believed had the greatest impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education. The results from this question are provided in Figure 1. P3 responded to this question verbally indicating

initially that none of the categories applied, but then later stated that “they all apply in one way or another.” P5 proposed that, “the categories you’ve provided assume that there is an overrepresentation problem, I’m not completely certain there is a problem...I just don’t know.”

Figure 1

Research Question 1: Q2 Results



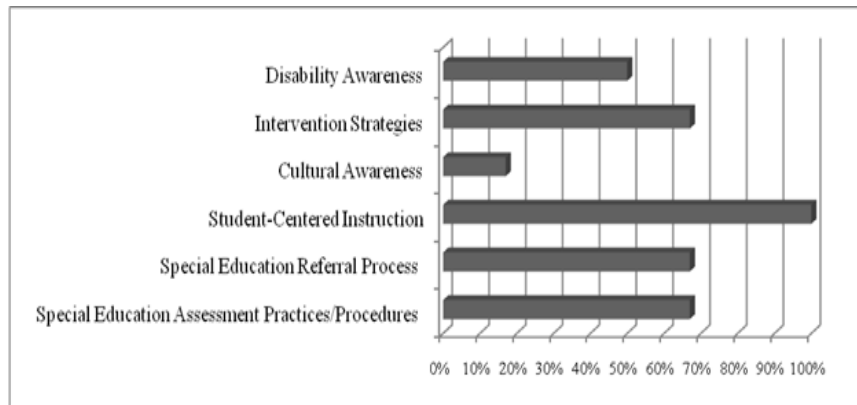
The third question that addressed R1 was formatted similarly to the previous question. The researcher gave the participants a sheet of paper that listed the following categories:

- Disability Awareness
- Intervention Strategies
- Cultural Awareness
- Student-Centered Instruction
- Special Education Referral Process
- Special Education Assessment Practices/Procedures

The researcher then asked the participants to check the categories in which they believed they had the greatest level of competence. The results are provided in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Research Question 1: Q3 Results



R2. How are African-American males perceived by Caucasian female elementary teachers?

The second research question (R2) attempted to address the perceptions that Caucasian female elementary teachers possess regarding African-American males. The researcher again used three sub-questions to address R2. The participants' responses to these questions varied greatly. The initial question in the R2 series related to how the participants perceived African-American boys differently from other students in their classroom. P1, P2, P3, and P6 suggested that their perceptions are influenced by the distinctive and dissimilar cultural norms of African-American boys that differ from the norms of the school environment. P1 indicated that she has a "hard time relating to some African-American boys." This difficulty, as she described it, is directly related to the cultural differences that exists between her and African-American boys.

P1: African Americans respond to the educational setting differently than other students. This difference at times comes in conflict with school rules...They need to understand that to be successful in this culture, certain customs have to be accepted.

P2: I think they enter the educational setting with almost everything stacked against them...The culture of our school, although effective and appropriate for

our White students, is at times in direct conflict with our African-American students.

Although P3's response to this question also indicated that her perception of African-American boys was influenced by the difference in culture, she denoted a "general lack of respect for authority" for teachers and education that resides within the African-American community. She stated that she believes that African Americans "come to school from less than ideal situations than many of their peers." In her opinion, this is caused by many within the culture viewing education as "something that has to be done; it's not viewed as an opportunity." She went further to indicate that many African-American families place greater importance in athletics than they do education.

P6 indicated that there may be a general lack of understanding concerning the African-American culture in the educational environment, and this may influence her perception of this student population. She further detailed that she harbors some fear of African-American males in the school environment. This fear is caused by, in her opinion, a general lack of confidence within the educational institution that African-American males are being offered what they need in the educational environment.

P6: I don't know that I perceive [African-American males] differently...honestly. I think the issue is me. I think there is a little fear. Not fear of the students. I'm afraid that I'm not going to give them what they need, in the way that they need it. I'm afraid that they see me as a part of the problem; just another person within the institution who really doesn't want to see their color, their difference, what makes them unique.

The second sub-question in the R2 series attempted to address the participants' understanding of cultural/race awareness and how it relates to education. The prevailing response to this question related to the need for educators to be aware of the cultural differences their students bring to the classroom. Another predominate response to this question related to

the need for educators to embrace the idea of accommodating the needs of their African-American students through appreciating their difference, creating a culturally relevant educational experience, and supporting these students' character, motivations, academic ability, etc.

P4: We need to be aware of the differences of our children. They all come to school with their best. We need to see that. Believe that. And be willing to work with that.

P5: We should be aware of the cultures and races that are represented in our classrooms. This gets back to the idea that we need to make our lessons culturally relevant. We have to be able to change with our students. If they change, we must change.

P6: We as educators must be conscious of our students. What I mean by this is we must know who they are, what motivates them, what angers them, what their background is, what their family is like....are they supportive, are they abusive or neglectful. We need to know as much as possible. If we pursue our students in this manner we will have a better idea as to their learning capacity.

The third and final sub-question in the R2 series attempted to ascertain the participants' understanding of the term colorblindness and how it relates to education.

P1, P3, P4, and P5 answered this question very similarly. These participants believe that the term colorblindness in education relates to the idea that teachers must view their students in the same way, being virtually oblivious to their students' *color*, or ethnic/racial makeup. However, P2 and P6 indicated that the term colorblindness relates to the idea of wanting to see, treat, and teach all students in the same manner. This approach, P2 and P6 suggest, negates the ability to see beauty in the differences amongst the students, and views difference as a weakness in the classroom rather than a strength.

P2: I think if a teacher is truly colorblind, they're taking away the beauty of difference in their class. Embrace difference...difference equals varying experience... If you're colorblind, you can't see [African-American students and/or students other than Caucasians]. Colorblindness to me equals White.

What we're really saying is that we want something without color, void of difference... White.

P6: [...] it's really people blindness. It means you're not truly seeing the person... I mean truly seeing them... We need to stop trying to make all of our students learn the same way, have the same interests, talk the same, look the same... Let's embrace difference once and for all. Let's start placing greater value in diversity.

R3. How does cultural/race bias affect the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

The researcher used a four-question series to address the third research question (R3). These questions were intended to address the comfort level these teachers have when teaching African-American boys, the obstacles that they have encountered, and the strategies they use to assist African-American boys in their classrooms. The initial question in this series related to the comfort level the participants have teaching African-American boys. In response, all of the teachers suggested that they do possess a certain level of comfort teaching African-American boys; however, most of the participants also suggested that uneasiness exists as well. The participants explained that this uneasiness is related to their lack of understanding, training, and school/district support.

P2: I wish I had more of a background with these students... more training... I wish I knew what really worked with these students. I'm guessing most of the time... I mean, I have experience now... so I'm not guessing all of the time... I just wish I had more experience... more training.

P4: I guess I've never really thought about it. On one hand I'd say that I'm very comfortable teaching any student. I think most teachers are. I mean, at the beginning of the year, I don't think, "Oh my gosh, I have 6 African-American students in my class." I don't really care. They're children, and I love them all the same. I will teach them all the same. The student's race has no relevance to me. But, I would like to know how to relate better to my minority students. For the most part, it has been trial and error.

The researcher then asked the participants to talk about the obstacles that they encountered when teaching African-American boys. P1, P2, and P6 addressed this question in a very similar fashion. These teachers indicated that the obstacles they encountered were related to either personal issues within themselves that prevented them from effectively educating African-American boys, or as P6 indicated, “The obstacles that I have faced are related to the system not the kids.”

P1: There does seem to be a cultural divide...I have thought that there are times when I'm probably being more effective with my Caucasian students than I am with my African-American students...I've had that thought...That's my problem though, not theirs.

P2: The biggest obstacle is proving to them that you're there for them...gaining their trust. We...our schools send them the wrong message. They don't trust us...I'm speaking generally, of course. Once you gain their trust...they see that you really care about them...their difference...they culture...the obstacles are gone, for the most part.

There was a stark difference, however, in the responses R3, R4, and R5 offered when addressing the question related to the obstacles that they encountered when teaching African-American boys. These teachers' response to this question related more to a general lack of regard for education. P3 indicated that there is a general lack of respect and “good home training” within the African-American community. She also indicated that African-American boys lack positive role models.

P3: We just need to be open and honest, some kids are worse than others. Some kids don't know how to behave. Some kids do not care about their education. Most often these kids will be Black...more times than not, the kids that lack basic social norms are Black kids.

P4 and P5 responded to the obstacle question in a similar way, yet, far different from the rest of their counterparts. These teachers suggested that, within the African-American community, there exists a general lack of confidence in the educational establishment. These

families lack confidence and trust for teachers, schools, districts, etc. Moreover, this lack of confidence by the parents negatively affects their children's perception of school and education.

P5: What we see is Black students with families who either don't care or don't respect the system. Now, is that all Black families? Of course not. There are White families that are the same...But, you'll often see a Black family...a student who has little regard for education or rules, or whatever. Here's the really crazy part, their parents are the same.

The third and fourth question in the R3 series related to the strategies that the teachers implement when teaching African-American boys, in particular boys that are academically struggling in their classrooms. All of the participants answered the question similarly. With little variation, all of the participants indicated that they did not use different teaching strategies for African-American boys, regardless if the student was struggling or not. Each of these teachers suggested that good teaching strategies work for all students regardless of ethnic/cultural makeup. Although P2 and P6 agreed with this sentiment, they did offer the additional strategy of embracing genuine compassion and love for each student.

P2: The best strategy...the one that works every time is showing them that you care about them. Once they really believe that...success can happen. I know that sounds really basic, but it works. Show a student you love them...you love the fact that they are different from all of your other students...and that you truly love that difference...true academic success can occur.

P6: I think the best strategy is to show you care about them. Try to break away from how they view you...as another part of the system that just doesn't give a damn. A part of a machine that wants them to fit into the same mold that any other student, particularly White students, fit into.

R4. What perceived effect does gender difference (teacher/student) have on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

The researcher used two sub-questions to address the fourth research question (R4). These questions were related to the gender difference between the research participants and their male students. These questions were specifically intended to establish (a) the difference between

teaching boys and girls and (b) the obstacles encountered when teaching boys as opposed to girls. The participants' responses to these questions were very analogous. When addressing the opening question in the R4 series, the teachers uniformly chose to initially describe elementary boys, their behavior and temperament. The teachers generally describe boys as being more physical, aggressive, assertive, and distractible than their female counterparts. P2 suggested that they have more energy and often seem more anxious than girls. Regarding behavior issues, P3 added, "behavior problems are 99 percent boy problems."

After briefly describing boy behavior and temperament, the teachers described how boys and girls are taught differently. The participants' responses were very similar. Most of the participants described their approach to teaching boys as being more hands-on and attentive to personal needs. The general sentiment was boys require a greater amount of structure and routine than do girls. P4 stated, "Boys aren't worse than girls or anything like that, they just need more...attention...more direction...more everything." However, P3 advocated a more austere approach:

Boys are just tougher. They're headstrong. I view them like an untamed horse. You have to tame them to a point that is manageable in the classroom. Some teachers haven't mastered this ability....Usually by Christmas I have them under control...

The research participants also similarly described obstacles they encountered when teaching boys as opposed to girls. The broad sentiment was that, if the behavior and temperament of boys is left unchecked or unrestricted, behavior problems are almost always imminent. The teachers describe their need to focus their boys, demand their attention, and channel their energy and enthusiasm in a direction that can afford academic progress and achievement.

P2: Boys, at this age, tend to be more anxious and have more energy...they're more active. I don't want to extinguish their enthusiasm...I just want to funnel it into something productive...

R5. What is the perceived influence of multicultural and/or diversity training (pre-service and/or professional development) on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

The fifth and final research question (R5) was addressed using two sub-questions. The initial question in the R5 series was specifically employed to identify the multicultural and/or diversity pre-service and/or professional development training the teachers had received before or during their teaching profession. The second question in the R5 series attempted to address how this training had enhanced their understanding of the educational needs of African-American boys.

P2, P3, P5, and P6 responded that they had not received any pre-service or professional development diversity/multicultural training before or during their teaching tenure, making the second question in the R5 series inapplicable. P4 indicated that she may have taken a multicultural class in college, but was uncertain. P1 was the only teacher that indicated that she had received pre-service and professional development training related to diversity/multiculturalism.

P1 attended a diversity class in college. After becoming a teacher she also attended mandatory diversity/multicultural training through the district in which she works. She indicated that the training was presented by *Wordsmooth*, a diversity and multicultural training group that offers diversity workshops to businesses and school districts predominantly in the Region 10 area.

Most of the teachers indicated a need and desire to achieve greater understanding regarding their African-American male students at some point during the interview. This sentiment was consistent throughout most of the teacher interviews. The teachers suggested that there was a training void in their pre-service and/or professional development training. Some of the teachers suggested disappointment, even anger towards their districts not offering such training.

P6: The district just hasn't offered it. I don't even think I had to take a class that included diversity training. That's crazy, isn't it? That shows you that we are telling our kids [that] we just don't care what works for them. That really angers me.

The only real exception to this sentiment was P3:

I haven't received any training. But please understand, I think this is part of the problem. Why should there be different training for African-American boys? I know I've said this...I don't mean to beat a dead horse here but I really do think we need to get away for this line of thinking. Let's treat our kids the same. I've received training on the best practices for students...not for African-American boys. I mean, can you think of training that would help me relate better to Black boys that wouldn't help me relate to any kid in my class? If there's anything you're going to get from this interview is that I want us to start treating our kids the same. If we continue down this road, I really think issues like the gap and the overrepresentation problem will continue.

Emerging Themes

Using the three-step analysis process detailed above, the researcher established the following themes from the transcripts, related to the perceptions that the research participants had regarding the overrepresentation of African-Americans males in special education:

1. Cultural disconnect between teacher and student,
2. Lack of multicultural and/or diversity training,
3. Perception of colorblindness,
4. Lack of understanding regarding special education and RtI,

5. Gender bias between teacher and student and lack of male, specifically African-American male, teacher representation in elementary schools, and
6. Low academic/behavior expectations.

Cultural Disconnect

As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, cultural discontinuity refers to “a mismatch between salient features cultivated in the African-American home and proximal environments and those typically afforded within the U.S. public educational system” (Edeh & Hickson, 2002, p. 7). According to Cholewa and West-Olatunji (2008), a link exists between cultural discontinuity and the overrepresentation of African Americans in special education. Due to this connection, exploring the tenets of cultural discontinuity for the purpose of this research became imperative.

At some point in the interview, all primary research participants commented on the cultural disconnect that exists between them (Caucasian female teachers) and their African-American male students.

P1: African-American kids do not respond to me and my instruction the same way my Caucasian kids do...I have noticed over time that the way they respond to me is different.

P2: These [African-American] students are being taught in a culture that is different from their own.

P3: [...] the school culture is predominantly White. But, I don't think this culture is in direct conflict with the African-America culture. Just because it's different, doesn't make it conflicting...I've never understood that assumption. It is as if we just accept the idea that White and Black have to be at odds...there must be a conflict. African-American kids can be, and have been, may I add, successful in a White culture and environment.

P4: [...] there is a teacher culture that is different from our student culture. If a student does not feel comfortable in that culture...it has to cause them problems. These problems would manifest into academic trouble and maybe behavior problems.

P5: Our culture is important...our students' culture is relevant too. But since we are in this country, our culture must win out. Can our culture change? Absolutely. But not to the point of it becoming their culture.

P6: The cultural disconnect between Black boys and White teachers, I think there's something there. I mean I see African-American boys...they seem a little disconnected from teachers and school. I think this can add to a lot of problems in schools. Let me also say, teachers are often disconnected from African-American boys; truthfully speaking. This should come at no surprise really. Most teachers are White and female. It should be no surprise that these teachers are not going to connect with African-American boys...

Although all of the teachers mentioned the cultural disconnect between them and their African-American males students, promisingly, most of them suggested that a need exists to be connected to these students in a more significant way.

P1: We need to be responsive of the different cultures that our students are bringing into the classroom. This is one of the fun aspects of education. I love hearing about our students' cultural backgrounds...the ones that, of course, are different from our own....It's not about how I like to teach or what I like to teach, it's about how they learn and what they need to learn...it's important to know where our kids are coming from....what motivates them...

P2: I think this is the most important aspect to student-centered instruction. We have to find ways to teach to what they enjoy...the things that are relevant to their lives.

P4: That's why I think the cards are stacked against them. Can you imagine if you had a school that all the teachers were Hispanic...or they were African-American? Can you imagine if the students were predominately White? Then could you imagine half of these students having trouble in class? How fast do you think those teachers would be fired?

P5: We have to be able to change with our students. If they change, we must change.

P6: [...] what the problem is teachers, more specifically White teachers, teaching in a way that is conducive to their history, their experience, and what worked for them and what works for people like them.

Lack of Multicultural and/or Diversity Training

All of the teachers interviewed acknowledged that there is a common lack of training that directly relates to educating African-Americans in general and African-American males more specifically. P1 and P4 were the only teachers that mentioned multicultural and/or diversity training. P4 stated that “I think I may have taken a multicultural educational class in college, but that was eons ago. As for professional development, there has not been any.” P1 was the only teacher that underwent specific professional development training that she had completed through the Alpha School District. She mentioned the benefits and the deficient components to the district’s training.

P1: The point (of *Wordsmooth* training) was how we...as teachers... make presumptions about people based on the way they look.

When asked if she thought teachers make such presumptions based on students’ race or cultural background, she responded, “Absolutely...we all do. We all prejudge students based on the way they look.”

P1 indicated that the *Wordsmooth* training was conducted over a two-session format. The initial session was led by a *Wordsmooth* representative, and was very structured and helpful. The second session, conducted a month or two later, was led by a school administrator “wasn’t nearly as good.” The administrator did not have the information or expertise to present the material and little was gained from the second session.

However, when asked if the *Wordsmooth* training had influenced the way in which she taught, P1 suggested that “more than anything else it has allowed me to accept the idea that I prejudge everyone I meet...including my students. What’s important...what I got from the

presentation, is you have to allow people the opportunity to change your preconceived notions about them...I have to allow them the opportunity to change whatever thought I initially had.”

Perception of Colorblindness

As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, the concept of colorblindness refers to the inability to see color or difference (Brown et al., 2003). This concept suggests that educators and schools do not see color, race, or difference; in other words, all children are viewed the same; they learn the same. Most of the teachers indicated that little distinction could be made between African-American and other students. When asked how they perceive African-American boys differently, many responded to this question in a similar way, indicating sameness over difference; colorblindness. The teachers suggested that they harbored no perception differences between African-American boys and other students.

P1: I don't know if there are a lot of differences (between African-American boys and other students) [...] As educators we have to be colorblind. I think I do a good job at this...being colorblind...we have to be. I love my kids all the same. It doesn't matter, like I said, what their color is, I love them and want to teach them just the same. I can honestly say that I really don't see color in my class. I don't see a student's skin color.

P3: As teachers we have to be colorblind.

P4: I guess I don't think of African-American boys differently [...] I will teach them all the same. The student's race has no relevance to me.

P5: We teach and treat all of our students the same. We do a good job of this... I see all of the students the same. I treat them the same. I love them the same.

P2 and P3 responded to this question by referring to the difference between the school environment and African-American culture.

P2: I think they enter the educational setting with almost everything stacked against them...The culture of our school, although effective and appropriate for our White students, is at times in direct conflict with our African-American students. So, how do I perceive these students differently? They struggle in this environment.

P3: How do I perceive African-American boys differently...Well, I know that many African-American boys have difficulty in our schools. This is a problem. But you asked how I perceive them differently. Well, I feel sorry for them. They are disadvantaged...some of them...many of them...but I think some of this is preventable.

Additionally, when asked about what types of teaching strategies are implemented specifically to assist African-American boys in their educational endeavors, most of the teachers' responses indicated sameness over difference. They suggested that different teaching strategies between African-American boys and other students were unnecessary.

P1: I think, for the most part, what works for one struggling student works for another. I've been teaching for 8 years and I have found this to be true. Yes, there are visual learners and kinesthetic learners and learners who learn by listening... that aside, good teaching practices and strategies...will help any learner...

P3: Good teaching practices and strategies are good teaching practices and strategies. I'm not saying what works for one, works for all, but I am saying what works from one, works for most.

P4: I don't know that I have any strategies that I specifically use for only African-American students. I probably should...

P5: I don't know that I have any strategies that are just for my African-American students. Most good teaching strategies are good regardless of the color of a student's skin.

P2 indicated that the best strategy for teaching African-American boys related to her demonstrating how much she cared and loved her students.

P2: The best strategy...the one that works every time is showing them that you care about them. Once they really believe that...success can happen. I know that sounds really basic, but it works. Show a student you love them...true academic success can occur.

P6's also indicated that demonstrating true emotional concern for African-American students was the best strategy for these students. However, she also again alluded to the difference between African-American culture and the school environment.

P6: I think the best strategy is to show you care about them. Try to break away from how they view you...as another part of the system that just doesn't give a damn. A part of a machine that wants them to fit into the same mold that any other student, particularly White students, fit into.

Lack of Understanding Regarding Special Education and RtI

The teachers contended that there is a general lack of understanding regarding special education and the RtI process. They also suggested that there is a lack of confidence in the RtI and special education process. Several of the teachers suggested that both processes are flawed and mistakes related to special education identification will inevitably occur as a result.

P1: I don't really understand the process. I know there is testing involved...I know that we follow the RtI process...but I don't have a good understanding of the entire process and how a student is actually selected for special education services. We have been told that the testing is what determines whether or not a student will receive special education services. We have also been told that we can't send a student to special ed. based on testing results alone. We have also been told that the entire process really depends on whether or not the student responds to interventions. I mean, so what is it? ...I mean, I'm not alone here. Most teachers are in the lurch like me. It seems that we're constantly being told something different. It's hard to really get to a point where you're like, "ok, I understand this"...something else that has been frustrating is the RtI process itself. I mean, does this mean that all students now have an IEP? I don't get that.

P2: I think they (special education and RtI process) are inherently flawed. If we're not going to go into the process with an open mind, then the system will not work appropriately, and you'll have problems, like the overrepresentation of minorities in special education...the majority of SST meetings I have attended have been formalities at best. The attitude is "let's get this done...we know this student needs special education...document...document...then refer to special ed." That is simply wrong. I know for a fact that interventions have been suggested and documented that teachers know will fail. This is done to support the opinion that the student needs special education services. The SST process needs to be more fact-based.

P3: I really don't know how this (the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education) is determined. I guess it's by percentage...the percentage of the African-American boys in your general population should match the percentage of African-American boys in special education.

P4: I hate to admit this but I don't feel comfortable with the special education process at all. We have been told different things at different times...special

education is an enigma to me...I try to stay as far away for the special ed. thing as possible.

P5: We have to come up with a way to determine, an objective way to determine, who needs special ed. and who does not.... What I'd advocate for is better testing...objective testing that could accurately determine the need for special education.

P6: [...] special education is a little confusing, or should I say complex. I think I have a good handhold on it, but I went to school for it, and it's still a little confusing to me...unless the process is understood completely by everyone concerned, mistakes can occur.

Gender Bias

As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, gender bias occurs when one gender is given preferential treatment over another (Diller, Houston, Morgan, & Ayim, 1996). Kunjufu (2005) contended that there are differences in the ways girls and boys act, learn, and demonstrate intelligence; thus, such differences must be taken into full account when equitably assessing each gender. Five of the six interview participants indicted some level of gender bias.

P1: Boys have more energy...they're rougher...If I'm going to have a student that has behavior problems, typically this will be a boy. The girls at this age are...well, they just don't seem to want to...they are good students...for the most part. Like I said, the boys are rougher, they play hard, they always have more energy...If there is going to be a problem on the playground, often it will be between boys.

P2: I think gender and race difference have everything to do with the disproportional number of African-American boys in special education.... Boys, at this age, tend to be more anxious and have more energy...they're more active. I don't want to extinguish their enthusiasm...I just want to funnel it into something productive...Girls will stay on task...boys are constantly looking for something to entertain them...they create projects for themselves if they get too bored.

P3: African-American boys...tend to break the rules more often. They also...like I mentioned earlier...come to school with several social deficiencies.... Boys tend to be more difficult, so you have to get on to them more often. You have to stay after them. Your behavior problems are 99 percent boy problems. The other 1 percent probably has something to do with boys. They're headstrong. I view

them like an untamed horse. You have to tame them to a point that is manageable in the classroom.

P4: girls...act the way you want your students to act...well, most of the time. Boys are rowdy and rough. Both need attention, but boys tend to like the attention they get after doing something wrong. Girls like getting attention for doing something right. I guess that's the difference. I always like having boys in my class; they're the ones that make the day interesting. The girls make it rewarding.

P5: Teachers hate to admit this but we find boys to be harder to teach. That doesn't mean that we do like boys or we don't want them in our class, it just means what I said, they're harder...for the most part, you have to earn a boys respect; it's rarely given. This isn't true for girls; they automatically trust you and respect you.

P6 suggested that gender bias had less to do with the interaction between teacher and student, yet related more towards school districts' hiring practices. P6 proposed that districts are not actively pursuing male elementary teachers. Moreover, P6 suggested that males are more appropriate teachers for boys than female teachers.

P6: Gender bias is certainly a problem. It's a problem when teachers are hired and it's a problem when you relate it to the difference in gender between a teacher and students. As much as I hate to admit it, our boys need more male teachers. Now this is really hard for me to say, but men can handle boys better...most of the time. Boys look up to men; that's no secret. Often boys don't respect female teachers...not in a bad way...they just don't...fear female teachers, at least not at first. Male teachers get that initial respect.

Low Academic/Behavior Expectations

The researcher sought to determine if Caucasian female elementary teachers' perceptions of African-American males contribute to the disproportionate representation of this student population in special education. To determine the influence these teachers' perception of this student population may have on this phenomenon, it is essential to probe into the perceptions these teachers have of this student sub-population. The following are some interview excerpts

that help explain these teachers' academic and behavioral expectations and perceptions of African-American male students.

P2: [...] it's not just a cultural clash, it's an inability on their part. This, unfortunately, I have only seen with African-American and Hispanic students.

P3: African-American boys are referred to special education because of the deficiencies...academically...I know that many African-American boys have difficulty in our schools. This is a problem. But you asked how I perceive them differently. Well, I feel sorry for them. They are disadvantaged...some of them...many of them...but I think some of this is preventable.

[...] Sue the districts for allowing students to remain in the classroom that have little to no social skills.

P4: [...] you'll have trouble with a student that is in a minority group.

P5: Now we have behavior problems on a daily basis. I hate this. I hate that we have to spend so much time teaching students social skills. Parents expect that. Here's the problem, though...if they couldn't teach them, how are we going to? This change occurred when the students' demographics started to change.

P6: I do think that there are certain teachers that have low expectations for certain students. Actually, you see that a lot. You see teachers respond to...minority students in a way that is less than desirable when you're looking at the students' potential. What I'm trying to say is that teachers often react negatively to certain students. It's not overt, and it's not like, "I don't like that kid because he's Black." Instead it's like, "That kid's Black so he is not going to be the smartest kid in the class." Now, I don't think this is a conscious decision on their part; it's subconscious. Based on experience this is a presumption that is made.

[...] I hear it most of the time; I don't see it. A teacher will say something like, "I have so and so in my class, and he's really going to struggle to keep up with whatever." This is a statement made before the fact. More often than not, statements like these will not be made about White students, they seem to always be made about Black students...

P1 provided an opposing view. This educator suggested that, although she is aware of her prejudices, which often assume certain negative aspects of an individual's academic and social abilities, such prejudices could be alleviated. P1 proposed that, by taking the time to understand and accept the students for who they really are, prejudices can be mitigated.

P1: There have been several times when my first impression of a student has been bad...or good, for that matter...but it's through my daily interaction with that student that my true perception of them is developed. I think what is important is, although we all prejudge based on the way we perceive a certain individual...it's important that we allow that person...that student...an opportunity to prove who they really are.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand how Caucasian female teachers' perceptions of African-American male students might influence their overrepresentation in special education. Chapter Four explained the research that was conducted and analyzed over a 3-week period in September of 2013. All research questions were addressed using the interview protocol (Appendix A). The in-depth interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for common themes. The analysis results, a detailed description of each case, emerging themes within the data, and evidence are explained for this embedded qualitative case study. Chapter Five will provide a brief summary of this study that will include the purpose of the study, the research questions, a brief review of the relevant literature, the methods used to gather the data required for this study, and the findings that emerged from the data analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this ethnographic case study was to understand how Caucasian female elementary teachers' perceptions of African-American male students may influence these students' overrepresentation in special education. The primary participants were six Caucasian female elementary teachers working in schools located in the northeastern Texas area (Region 10). The teachers included in the study were chosen based on the following criteria: (a) female, (b) Caucasian, (c) currently employed as an elementary teacher, (d) has referred at least one African-American male to special education in the last year, and (e) works in the northeastern area of Texas (Region 10). This chapter includes a brief summary of the research findings, an analysis of those findings, a discussion of the research findings' implications, and recommendations for the future. This chapter also highlights the emerging themes, how such themes compare to the literature review, and the themes' relationship to the theoretical framework provided in Chapter Two.

Research Question 1

The first research question was, "What perceived factors contribute to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?" This question is answered primarily by what Cholewe and West-Olatunji (2008) referred to as a "confluence" of contributing factors (para. 2). As mentioned in Chapter Two, a host of factors have been identified in previous research as contributors to the overrepresentation of African-Americans males in special education (Fore, Burke, & Martin, 2006). Some results of this study align closely to findings in the literature. The factors that emerged in this research as contributors to the overrepresentation of African-American males phenomenon were: (a) cultural disconnect between teacher and student, (b) lack of multicultural and/or diversity training for teachers, (c)

teachers' perception of colorblindness, (d) lack of understanding by teachers regarding the special education and RtI process, (e) gender bias between teachers and students and the lack of male, specifically African-American males, as teachers in elementary schools, and (f) low academic/behavior expectations teachers have for African-American male students.

Cultural Disconnect

All of the research participants indicated that cultural discontinuity exists between them (Caucasian female teachers) and their African-American male students (Theme 1). Theme 1 is consistent with research conducted by Cholewa and West-Olatunji (2008), which concluded that cultural discontinuity existed in public education as it relates to African-Americans students. P6 supported this idea by suggesting that there is a “cultural disconnect between Black boys and White teachers [...] It should be no surprise that these teachers are not going to connect with African-American boys.” These results also support the findings of Edeh and Hickson (2002), who concluded that a “cultural mismatch exists between the salient features cultivated in the African-American environments and those typically afforded within the U.S. public educational system” (p. 7). P6 further stated that White teachers teach in a way that is “conducive to their history, their experience, and what worked for them and what works for people like them.” However, although all of the research participants mentioned the cultural disconnect between them and their African-American males students, all of the teachers, except P3, also suggested that a need exists to be connected to their students.

Social Dominance Theory (SDT) may offer a theoretic explanation for the cultural disconnect between Caucasian female teachers and their African-American male counterparts. As stated previously, SDT suggests that dominant groups (e.g., male, Caucasian, Protestant, etc.) experience and maintain an unbalanced amount of social benefit (e.g., wealth and power) while

subordinate groups (e.g., female, African American, Catholic, etc.) suffer from a disproportionate amount of social detriment (e.g., poverty and imprisonment) (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999); this can be accomplished with purpose or lacking premeditation. Furthermore, dominant groups can maintain power by disengaging and/or dismissing subordinate groups. Such institutional tradition enables the dominant group to retain its position in society (Elliott & Fuchs, 1997; Fore, Burke, & Martin, 2006; Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Kim, Baydar, & Greek, 2003).

Teacher Training

When given a list of possible causes for the overrepresentation of African-American in special education, four of the six research participants indicated that “Teacher Training Deficiency” (Theme 2) was a contributing factor. Moreover, during the interview, all of the research participants indicated that there is a common lack of multicultural and/or diversity training that directly relates to educating African-Americans in general and African-American males more specifically. Only two of the six participants, P1 and P4, indicated that they had received some multicultural training. This research finding supports contentions made by Jordan (2005) and Kunjufu (2005) that little is done in contemporary public education environments to ready Caucasian teachers to educate African-American male students.

Complicity Theory (CT) provides an explanation for a lack of training in education regarding African-American students. CT not only attempts to create awareness of inequality, but it also endeavors to scrutinize suppositions that restrain change. As Patton challenged, it is not enough to be conscious of disparity, there must also be a push to “question and acknowledge those institutions that can prohibit revolutionary change from occurring” (p. 42). Furthermore, individuals must question the status quo, and actively pursue change. Although all of the

research participants, except P3, suggested that additional training was desired, there had been no attempt by any of the research participants to actively pursue such experience.

Classical-view Theory can also be applied to this research theme. This theory suggests that there are common ways African-American males are referred to special education. The usual method of identifying a student for placement in a special education program begins primarily with the recommendation of a general education classroom teacher. For this the referral process to work objectively, educators must be privy to the cultural traditions of their students. If this cultural understanding is absent, students of culturally diverse backgrounds may not benefit from the referral process (Fore, Burke, & Martin, 2006).

Perception of Colorblindness

Most of the teachers indicated that little distinction could be made between African-American and other students. When asked how they perceive African-American boys differently, many responded to this question in a similar way, indicating sameness over difference, i.e. colorblindness (Theme 3). As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, this creates two dilemmas. The first dilemma is related to colorblindness its inability to see an individual. By removing a student's color, educators perceive that all children are the same; culture and ethnicity are given little to no value. The second dilemma created by the colorblindness approach negates difference; thus discounting such socio-historical aspects as Caucasian-privilege.

The teachers intimated that they harbored no perception differences between African-American boys and other students. P1 indicated that she was unaware of differences between African-American boys and other students. She went further to add that educators must be colorblind. She detailed, "I think I do a good job at this...being colorblind...we have to be... It

doesn't matter, like I said, what their color is...I can honestly say that I really don't see a student's skin color." This supports what Kunjufu (2005) suggested regarding the absence of color or difference in public education. "The only color that often can be seen is White" (p. 19). This idea also supports Jordan's (2005) assertion that "the invisibility of Whiteness and its relationship to power and privilege serve to maintain the myth of meritocracy, and, in effect, leave teachers seemingly unaware of the structural biases, the power relations, and ideologies that produce and reproduce racial inequality" (para. 39).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) can be applied to illuminate the contradictory nature of colorblindness. CRT challenges such social ideals as objectivity, neutrality, and colorblindness of policy, tradition, practice, and law. The research participants indicated that they made little distinction between African-American and other students. Most of the teachers regarded sameness over difference as preferable. The teachers suggested that they harbored no perception differences between African-American boys and other students. However, CRT suggests that such colorblindness permits the choice of excluding race; thus, negating neutrality, which colorblindness often is argued to support.

Lack of Understanding Regarding Special Education and RtI

When given eight specific choices and an "Other" category to identify what they believed had the greatest impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education, five of the six research participants indicated that a general lack of knowledge regarding the special education and RtI process was a contributing factor (Theme 4). Significantly, the research participants chose this category more than any other category. P1 suggested that she "really doesn't understand the process" and although she understood that there was an RtI process to follow, she doesn't have "a good understanding of the entire process and how a

student is actually selected for special education services.” She went further to suggest that this is a systemic issue by stating, “I’m not alone here. Most teachers are in the lurch like me. It seems that we’re constantly being told something different.” Such findings support the research conclusions of Hosp and Hasp (2001), that there are several contributing factors related to the special education assessment, intervention, and referral process, which further exacerbate the overrepresentation phenomenon.

As stated above, all of the research participants indicated a lack of understanding regarding the special education referral process and/or the RtI process. However, the teachers had not actively pursued greater understanding regarding the systems in place for special education referral. Such indifference is can be related back to Complicity Theory (CT). CT not only attempts to create awareness of inequality, but it also endeavors to scrutinize suppositions that restrain change; CT also entails a self-examination element. Individuals that are not willing to actively explore and willingly change their understandings, knowledge, etc. become integral parts of the systemic phenomenon.

Gender Bias

All of the research participants, except P3, indicated that gender bias (Theme 5) among female elementary teachers does exist and does contribute to the overrepresentation phenomenon. P2 suggestion that “Boys...tend to be more anxious and have more energy...they’re more active” indicates that boys’ behavior is seen as different and possibly unfavorable to deal with in the classroom. P2 went further to indicate that such behavior needs to be “funneled into something productive.”

P1 may have best summarized this idea by stating that, “boys tend to struggle more often than girls...if I’m going to have a student struggle with reading or math or whatever...more than

likely it will be a boy.” Two conclusions can be drawn from such an assertion: (a) there is a biological difference between boys and girls at this age that gives girls an academic and social advantage over boys and/or (b) there are perceived differences between boys and girls at this age that may or may not exist. The initial assertion related to biological differences between elementary boys and girls is supported by research conducted by Wehmeyer and Schwartz (2001) and the U.S. Department of Education’s Report to Congress (2002). The second assertion is supported by a plethora of research suggesting that teachers harbor perceived gender differences in student ability regarding academic and social ability (Armendariz, 2000; Brand, Glasson, & Green, 2006; Jordan, 2005; Kunjufu, 2005; Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010).

Another issue associated with this the topic of gender bias is related to the hiring practices of elementary schools; there is a disproportional ratio of female to male teachers working at the elementary level. Herrera (1998) and Kunjufu (2005) contend that the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education can be attributed to the general lack of male teachers in elementary schools. Three of the research participants brought this issue up during the interview process on their own accord:

P2: I wonder if we’d have so many African-American boys referred to special education if their teachers were African-American male teachers?

P4: There is no doubt that boys respond to men better than they do women [...] you can see a boys demeanor, attitude....everything changes when a man enters the room.

P6: As much as I hate to admit it, our boys need more male teachers [...] so many of our students really don’t have good male role models.

Social Dominance Theory (SDT) offers a suggestion as to a cause for this research theme. As previously stated, social groups that retain power often maintain such power through institutional or systemic discrimination and/or prejudice. The premise of SDT is that such

discrimination is a function of intent, even necessity (Sidanius, 1993). In other words, it is sensible for Caucasian females to discriminate against African-American males as they may benefit from this phenomenon (Sidanius, Levin, Liu, & Pratto, 2000). Additionally, institutions preferring Caucasian female candidates, as opposed to actively pursuing African-American male candidates, for elementary teaching positions, may benefit from this preference by simply maintaining the status quo.

Low Academic/Behavior Expectations

The final emerging theme relates directly to the idea that often teachers' expectations or perceptions of their African-American students may not be commensurate to the academic expectations of their Caucasian students. As previously mentioned, Yoltson (1996) suggested that perception is formed by proceeding experience, either positive or negative. When an individual has a positive experience, typically a positive perception is formed. Conversely, when an individual has a negative experience, a negative perception follows. Often Caucasian teachers harbor negative beliefs and assumptions regarding the ability of their African-American male students (Irizarry, 2009) (Theme 6). These beliefs and assumptions are typically deficit-laden and gross overgeneralizations that presume differences as synonymous with deficiencies, and place culturally less common peoples in jeopardy of "being viewed as less capable, less cultured, and less worthy" (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Five of the six research participants indicated that their perception of African-American males' academic/behavior ability contained some deficit-thinking:

P2: [...] it's not just a cultural clash, it's an inability on their part. This, unfortunately, I have only seen with African-American and Hispanic students.

P3: [...] Sue the districts for allowing students to remain in the classroom that have little to no social skills.

P4: [...] you'll have trouble with a student that is in a minority group.

P5: Now we have behavior problems on a daily basis. I hate this. I hate that we have to spend so much time teaching students social skills. Parents expect that. Here's the problem, though, if they couldn't teach them, how are we going to? This change occurred when the students' demographics started to change.

P6: You see teachers respond to...minority students in a way that is less than desirable when you're looking at the students' potential.

P1 provided an opposing view. This educator suggested that although she is aware of her prejudices, which often assume certain negative aspects of an individual's academic and social abilities, such prejudices can be alleviated:

P1: There have been several times when my first impression of a student has been bad...or good, for that matter...but it's through my daily interaction with that student that my true perception of them is developed. I think what is important is, although we all prejudge based on the way we perceive a certain individual...it's important that we allow that person...that student...an opportunity to prove who they really are.

Classical-view Theory can also give reason for this research theme. This theory addresses the deficit thinking of teachers regarding African Americans. The theory suggests that teachers often negate the full learning potential of minority students. Subsequently, teachers often harbor the tendency to place limits on their instructional delivery (Delpit, 2006). Students experiencing instructional limits to their education will often demonstrate low rates of performance; thus, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy effect (English, 2002).

Research Question 2

The second research question was "How are African-American males perceived by Caucasian female elementary teachers?" Most of the research participants indicated that African-American male students enter the educational environment with certain deficiencies, and such deficiencies cause school failure, both socially and academically (Irizarry, 2009).

P3: African-American boys are referred to special education because of the deficiencies...academically...I know that many African-American boys have difficulty in our schools. This is a problem. But you asked how I perceive them differently. Well, I feel sorry for them. They are disadvantaged...some of them...many of them...but I think some of this is preventable.

P3's responses support King (1991) and Sleeter's (1996) findings that teachers often fault the academic failure of African-American students on their (the students') assumed social deficits. King suggested that such beliefs function to uphold and preserve Caucasian privilege as they assume that ethnic/racial inequities can be surpassed if only the "right attitude" is applied (Jordan, 2005, para. 16). In other words, the myth suggests that social and cultural inequities can be transcended through determination and a good work ethic. However, this presumption negates the advantages Caucasian society has acquired from the discrimination and subjugation of subordinate African Americans (Jordan, 2005).

There has been a plethora of research that has established a link between teacher perceptions and expectations, and student achievement (Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010; Rubie-Davies, 2006; Sanders & Horn, 1998; Scott & Bagaka's, 2004). Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968) referred to this phenomenon as a self-fulfilling prophecy; the student will rise or fall to the level of the teacher's perception/expectation. Grieshaber (2001) purposed that educators harboring such negative assumptions often believe that cultural deficiencies are counterintuitive in the educational environment and will cause students to be unsuccessful in the school environment.

There is a tendency for schools to embrace a Caucasian, female, middle-class culture, as this is the predominate description of most elementary teachers (Kunjufu, 2005). The research participants indicted that African Americans respond to the educational culture differently than other students. The culture, although effective and appropriate for most White students, is at times in direct conflict with African-American students' culture. Such cultural conflict,

according to the research participants, is demonstrated by African-American male students' "general lack of respect for authority" (P3) for teachers and education. Many of the teachers indicated that their African-American male students "come to school from less than ideal situations than many of their peers" which is caused by many within this culture viewing education as "something that has to be done; it's not viewed as an opportunity" (P3). Such thinking insinuates that the African-American students need to embrace the predominate Caucasian culture that makes up the school environment (Artiles, 1998; Blanchett, 2006; Landsman & Lewis, 2006; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Patton, 1998; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). With respect to such findings, this research both support and extends the existing literature related to Caucasian females' perception of African-American male students.

The second research question also attempted to address the participants' understanding of the term colorblindness and how relates to education. Most of the research participants believed that the term colorblindness in education relates to the idea that teachers must view their students in the same way, being virtually oblivious to their students' color, or ethnic/racial makeup. However, a couple of the research participants suggested that colorblindness related to the idea of needing to see, treat, and teach all students the same. As previously mentioned, these two divergent ideas create two dilemmas. The first dilemma related to colorblindness it its inability to see an individual. By removing a student's color, educators perceive that all children are the same; culture and ethnicity are given little to no value (Kunjufu, 2005). The second dilemma created by the colorblindness approach negates difference; thus discounting such socio-historical aspects as Caucasian-privilege. In other words, if color does not exist, then atrocious acts of brutality, such as slavery, have little to no relevance in contemporary thought. Jordan (2005) elaborated on this idea by proposing that "the invisibility of Whiteness and its relationship to

power and privilege serve to maintain the myth of meritocracy, and, in effect, leave teachers seemingly unaware of the structural bases, the power relations, and ideologies that produce and reproduce racial inequality” (para. 39).

Research Question 3

The third research question was, “How does cultural/race bias affect the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?” All of the teachers suggested that they do possess a certain level of comfort teaching African-American boys; however, most of the participants also suggested that uneasiness exists as well. The participants explained that this uneasiness is related to their lack of understanding, training, and school/district support.

P4: I guess I’ve never really thought about it. On one hand I’d say that I’m very comfortable teaching any student. I think most teachers are. I mean, at the beginning of the year, I don’t think, “Oh my gosh, I have 6 African-American students in my class.” I don’t really care. They’re children, and I love them all the same. I will teach them all the same. The student’s race has no relevance to me. But, I would like to know how to relate better to my minority students, for the most part, it has been trial and error.

The teachers also stated that obstacles exist when teaching African-American boys, and that these obstacles usually related back to culture difference.

P1: There does seem to be a cultural divide...I have thought that there are times when I’m probably being more effective with my Caucasian students than I am with my African-American students...I’ve had that thought...that’s my problem though, not theirs.

However, half of the participants also suggested that there was not only a cultural divide between them and their African-American male students, but there was also a general lack of respect and “good home training” within the African-American community.

P3: We just need to be open and honest, some kids are worse than others. Some kids don’t know how to behave. Some kids do not care about their education.

Most often these kids will be Black...more times than not, the kids that lack basic social norms are Black kids.

P4 and P5 suggested that there is a general lack of confidence in the educational establishment within the African-American culture.

P5: What we see is Black students with families who either don't care or don't respect the system. Now, is that all Black families? Of course not. There are White families that are the same...But, you'll often see a Black family...a student who has little regard for education or rules, or whatever. Here's the really crazy part, their parents are the same.

This researcher observed that the teachers often made contradictory statements relating to teaching African-American students. On one hand, most of the teachers indicated that there is a lack of understanding related to educating African-American students. On the other hand, the teachers stated that student-centered instruction and differentiated instruction were the areas in which they had the greatest instructional confidence. The teachers commonly suggested that good teaching strategies work for all students regardless of ethnic/cultural makeup. Further, P2 and P6 suggested that expressing genuine compassion and love for each and every student is a teaching habit they both practice on a regular basis.

P2: The best strategy...the one that works every time is showing them that you care about them. Once they really believe that...success can happen. I know that sounds really basic, but it works. Show a student you love them...you love the fact that they are different from all of your other students...and that you truly love that difference...true academic success can occur.

P6: I think the best strategy is to show you care about them. Try to break away from how they view you...as another part of the system that just doesn't give a damn. A part of a machine that wants them to fit into the same mold that any other student, particularly White students, fit in to.

Research Question 4

Research question number four asked, "What perceived effect does gender difference (teacher/student) have on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special

education?” The participants’ responses to these questions were analogous. When addressing the opening question in the R4 series, the teachers uniformly chose to initially describe elementary boys, their behavior and temperament. The teachers generally describe boys as being more physical, aggressive, assertive, and distractible than their female counterparts. P2 suggested that they have more energy and often seem more anxious than girls. Regarding behavior issues, P3 added, “behavior problems are 99 percent boy problems.”

After briefly describing boy behavior and temperament, the teachers uniformly described how boys and girls are taught differently. The participants’ descriptions paralleled each other. Most of the participants described their approach to teaching boys as being more hands-on and attentive to personal needs. The general sentiment was boys require a greater amount of structure and routine than do girls. P4 detailed, “Boys aren’t worse than girls or anything like that, they just need more...attention...more direction...more everything.” However, P3 advocated a more austere approach:

P3: Boys are just tougher. They’re headstrong. I view them like an untamed horse. You have to tame them to a point that is manageable in the classroom. Some teachers haven’t mastered this ability....Usually by Christmas I have them under control...

The teachers’ broad sentiment was, if the behavior and temperament of boys is left unchecked or unrestricted, inappropriate behaviors are impending. The teachers describe their need to focus their boys, demand their attention, and channel their energy and enthusiasm in a direction that can afford academic progress and achievement.

P2: Boys, at this age, tend to be more anxious and have more energy...they’re more active. I don’t want to extinguish their enthusiasm...I just want to funnel it into something productive...

Research Question 5

Research question five asked, “What is the perceived influence of multicultural and/or diversity training (pre-service and/or professional development) in the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?” Most of the participants suggested that they had not received any pre-service or professional development diversity/multicultural training before or during their teaching tenure, making the second question in the R5 series inapplicable.

At some point during the interview, most of the teachers indicated a need and desire to achieve greater understanding regarding their African-American male students. The teachers insinuated that there was a training void in their pre-service and/or professional development training. Some of the teachers suggested a great deal of disappointment, even anger, towards their school districts for not offering cultural and/or diversity training.

P6: The district just hasn’t offered it. I don’t even think I had to take a class that included diversity training.

Such findings support the previously reviewed literature. Kearns et al.’s (2005) research indicated that the school environment “did not seem to embrace or validate African-American culture in ways that would help such students and families feel welcome or safe” (para. 53). Additionally, Cooper (2005) and Floyd (1996) concluded that schools often lack the cultural sensitivity, and general support, to enable African-Americans to academically succeed.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are related to (1) researcher bias, (2) the number of participants included in the study, (3) the ethnic/racial and geographic homogeneity of the sample, and (4) the data collection technique utilized by the researcher. The first limitation relates to the researcher working as an educator in the northeastern Texas area (Region 10), which is the geographic location of the study. However, using bracketing and epoché, the

researcher was able to “suspend belief” (Ary et al., 2010, p. 473) and delimit personal bias from impacting the data obtained during this research study. The second limitation to this research was related to the sample size. Since the researcher used a homogeneous sample, research suggests the optimal sample size is “six to eight data units” (participants) (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 163); however, a larger sample size may have rendered different results. The third limitation of this research is related to the distinctive research demographic. The research findings are only relevant to female Caucasian elementary teachers working in the northeastern (Region 10) area of Texas. Although a review of the current literature on this topic was conducted, and an analysis of the contemporary issues discussed, this research specifically addresses the influence Caucasian female elementary teachers’ perceptions have on the overrepresentation of African-American male students in special education. However, disproportionality is not exclusively Caucasian female or African-American male, nor is disproportionality a trend restricted to elementary teachers or special education. The fourth limitation is related to the research data collection technique, semi-structured interviews. Although such interviews allowed the research participants to fully respond to each question, utilizing varying forms of data collection, such as classroom observations, could have afforded dissimilar data. Although the research participants were chosen based on their specific relevance to this research, teachers that do not fit into this specific demographic may have rendered divergent data.

Implications and Recommendations

The intent of this research was to create greater awareness as to the perceptions Caucasian female elementary teachers may harbor concerning their African-American male students and how such perceptions may influence the overrepresentation of this student

population in special education. Often teachers are unaware as to the perceptions and biases they harbor that may affect their students. The data from this research will provide educators with a critical view of perceptions that can lead to detrimental outcomes. Accordingly, this research can serve as an instrument that can exact change; challenging personal views and creating professional endeavors that will generate greater educational and social equality for all children.

Based on the research conducted and the themes that emerged from the data obtained from the research participants, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Teachers must be culturally responsive to their students. The initial emerging theme suggests that the research participants seemed to be culturally disconnected from their African-American male students. Delpit (2006) suggested that a contention exists between teachers and minority students in adjusting between culturally responsive and traditional instruction. This cultural mismatch can have detrimental effects on African-American students, specifically related to special education referral, as teachers' cultural attitudes and perspectives can influence the special education referral process and support personal biases. Research has shown that learning theory and process are both entrenched in culture (Bailey & Pransky, 2005; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006). Although the prevalent progressive pedagogies' such as "open classrooms, whole language and process writing" (Bailey & Pransky, 2005, p.20), claim to embody the optimal learning of all students, such practices often do not adhere to the learning needs of African-American students. Such progressive pedagogies are based on dominant culture norms

- and do not take into account the instructional needs of minority communities, specifically, African-American males (Delpit, 2006).
2. Teachers must be afforded and participate in more multicultural and/or diversity training. The second emerging theme suggests that teachers lack pre-service and/or professional development training specifically targeting multicultural and diversity training. The research participants seemed to lack efficacy regarding the instruction of their African-American students, as they had not received any specific training in the area of cultural competence. Hecht, Jackson and Ribeau (2003) advised that "social rules and laws govern behavior and become guideposts for acceptable and normal interaction" (p. 244). When these guideposts, however, are unethical, unlawful, or immoral, social change is compulsory. Complicity occurs when there is knowledge of social ill, yet this knowledge is countered with apathetic acceptance. In other words, by apathetically accepting the status quo, collusion is being preferred over change. Garcia and Guerra (2004) provide an instructional roadmap to confront the status quo and systematically expose educators to different ways of thinking and teaching. Such training challenges old norms and exposes educators to their deficit views and provides them with a new framework that refrains from placing the onus of education's shortfalls on the students or their culturally diverse backgrounds.
 3. Teachers must understand the application of colorblindness to the teaching of students with cultural differences. The third emerging theme suggests that teachers often view their students without difference; they are colorblind. The

concept of colorblindness in schools has been prevalent since the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Brown et al., 2003) and proposes that schools do not see color; in other words, all children are viewed the same. This idea, however, has enormous effect on teachers' perception of African-American students as it creates two divergent quandaries. The first is related to colorblindness it its inability to see an individual. By removing a student's color, educators perceive that all children are the same; culture and ethnicity are given little to no value. The second dilemma created by the colorblindness approach negates difference; thus discounting such socio-historical aspects as Caucasian-privilege. In other words, if color does not exist, then atrocious acts of brutality, such as slavery, have little to no relevance in contemporary thought. Jordan (2005) elaborated on this idea by proposing that "the invisibility of Whiteness and its relationship to power and privilege serve to maintain the myth of meritocracy, and, in effect, leave teachers seemingly unaware of the structural bases, the power relations, and ideologies that produce and reproduce racial inequality" (para. 39). Teachers must be made aware of the importance of understanding and embracing cultural differences, rather than masking them as simply one in the same. Only then will education be truly tailored to each student, regardless of cultural background.

4. Teachers must have a greater understanding of the RtI and special education process. The fourth emerging theme suggests that teachers have little understanding regarding the RtI process and/or special education. Teachers should be required to attend yearly special education training. Such training

should include changes that occurred over the last calendar year regarding educational and special education law. Training should also include information regarding the RtI and referral process, factors to consider when evaluating whether a referral is appropriate, information regarding disabilities, and the ARD process. Traditionally there has been a great deal of attention afforded to the goal of restricting the number of students identified as needing special education services; however, very little attention has been given to the cultural background of those who are identified as needing special education services (Salend, Duhaney, & Montgomery, 2002). Thus, training should also include issues related to disproportionality, how cultural differences affect special education referrals, and culturally relevant teaching strategies that may benefit minority students.

5. African-American male teachers should be actively recruited for elementary teaching positions. The fifth emerging theme purposes that a gender bias exists between female teachers and male students. Gender bias occurs when one gender is given preferential treatment over another (Diller, Houston, Morgan, & Ayim, 1996). All but one research participant indicated a certain level of gender bias, preferring girl students to boy students. Additionally, most of the research participants suggested that male teachers would have a greater instructional impact on their male students. Since approximately 50% of all elementary students are males and Caucasian females make up 83% of elementary teachers in the U.S. (Kunjufu, 2005), logic indicates that it would be beneficial to actively pursue more African-American male teachers.

6. Teachers must understand that their perceptions of students have a direct impact on their student's academic and behavioral performance. The sixth and final emerging theme proposes that teachers have low academic and behavioral perceptions regarding African-American male students. Research has indicated that teachers' perception of students, positive or negative, directly correlates with students' success or failure (Armendariz, 2000). This correlation is especially noteworthy when paring it with Pringle, Lyons and Booker's (2010) research that found Caucasian teachers often have negative views of African-American students (2010). Understanding such perception and misguided views can provide teachers with the knowledge to be cognizant of the effect of their academic and behavioral expectations of their African-American students, and how adjustment of these expectations may influence their students' future performance.

The above recommendations are derived from the six themes that emerged from the data obtained from the research participants. The intent of these recommendations is raise awareness amongst educators as to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education, the issues that exacerbate this problem, and reformations that may alleviate the phenomenon in the future. Additionally, these recommendations are provided to suggest pre-service and professional development topics in the areas of culturally responsive instruction, gender bias, special education services and referral, and optimal instructional practices for African-American males. It is the intent of this researcher that the recommendations further the agenda for social and academic equity for African-American male students, especially as it relates to special education.

Further Research

Those who serve in academia have the obligation to continue to conduct and employ research that targets the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education phenomenon. Future research should explicitly focus on the specific limitations to this study: researcher bias, the number of participants included in the study, the ethnic/racial and geographic homogeneity of the sample, and the data collection technique utilized by the researcher. Although qualitative study will always contain a certain degree of researcher bias, future researchers should investigate ways to limit such bias by limiting moderator and question bias.

As previously stated, a qualitative study cannot be investigated without bias, in a completely objective and detached manner (Ary et al., 2010). As Hara (1995) noted, “in contrast to quantitative research in education, qualitative research recognizes that the researcher's subjectivity deeply affects the research; thus, it accepts the researcher's viewpoint as a crucial factor of the research” (para. 6). Nevertheless, such bias can affect qualitative research; thus, future researchers are compelled to adopt research instruments and devices to limit such prejudice.

Future research should also attempt to increase the number of research participants. Although the researcher used a homogeneous sample, and research suggests the optimal sample size is “six to eight data units” (participants) (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 163), increasing the sample size may have rendered different, even contradictory findings. Additionally, altering the ethnic/racial and geographic homogeneity of the sample would have likely changed the findings dramatically. In other words, selecting African-American males and/or females as the primary research participants, and selecting such participants from different parts of the country, would have undoubtedly rendered different results.

Future research should explore different data collection and analysis techniques. If the researcher would have conducted teacher observations or student interviews, the data would have likely produced different findings. Although the researcher employed a peer-review to establish triangulation (Patton, 1990), using different data collection and review techniques, which would have established a stronger triangulation, could likewise produce different research findings. Such research could dispel or substantiate research findings that suggest gender and race bias are at the heart of the overrepresentation phenomenon.

Conclusion

The Caucasian female elementary teachers interviewed for this study articulated deficit-laden perceptions of their African-American male students (sixth emerging theme), suggesting a race-plus-gender influence on the overrepresentation phenomenon. The teachers of this study expressed low academic/behavior expectations for their African-American male students and related these expectations directly to negative assumptions regarding these students' cultural, academic, and social deficiencies. As previously cited in this study, research has demonstrated that a direct link exists between low academic/behavior expectations for students and special education referrals in contemporary public education.

This phenomenon is one that evokes repression and subjugation to levels that we, as a freedom-seeking, education-pursuing nation, simply cannot accept. However, merely being aware of this phenomenon is not enough. With the knowledge of this social ill, comes the responsibility to create change. We must be willing take the uncomfortable steps to right the wrong. As the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963) so eloquently stated, "we must learn that passively to accept an unjust system is to cooperate with that system, and thereby to become a

part of its evil” (p. 18). In other words, by apathetically accepting the status quo, collusion is being preferred over change.

A movement must be created that no longer consents to this phenomenon as a tolerable and unsolvable mystery in contemporary education. The movement must implore the unfulfilled promises of previous statutory and federal mandates and court decisions that have attempted to create a free and equitable education for all of our children (e.g., *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954; *Civil Rights Act*, 1964; *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*, 1975; *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, 1990; *No Child Left Behind Act*, 2001; *Voting Rights Act*, 1965; *etc.*). Such a movement must create a paradigm shift that precludes harmful perceptions and counter-productive beliefs and value systems; rather, creating a system in which high expectations are projected for all students and every child has the capacity to succeed in school and life.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviewee:
Degree Level:
School:
Grade Level:
Date:
Experience:
Time:
Place:

Interviewer: I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study concerning the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education. Please feel free to express your opinions, feelings, and concerns at any time. You will not be required to answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering. The interviewer will use the questions below to elicit discussion when needed. The participant may add topics he/she deems relevant. If the discussion wanders too far off topic, the interviewer will redirect when needed.

R1. *What perceived factors contribute to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?*

Q1. What can you tell me about the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

Q2. In the categories listed below, check the ones that you feel have the greatest impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education.

- ☐ Achievement Gap
- ☐ Biased Disciplinary Practices
- ☐ Teacher Training Deficiency
- ☐ Special Education Referral/Assessment Practices
- ☐ Cultural Bias
- ☐ Racism/Discrimination

Upon the interviewee's completion of this task, the researcher asked the following question for any categories selected:

“Why do you believe ‘Cultural Bias’ (for example) causes such an impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?”

For any categories that are not selected, the researcher asked the following question:

“Why do you not consider ‘Biased Disciplinary Practices’ (for example) as one of the factors that causes the greatest impact on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?”

Q3. In the categories listed below, check the ones that you have the greatest level of competence.

- _____ Disability Awareness
- _____ Intervention Strategies
- _____ Cultural Awareness
- _____ Student-Centered Instruction
- _____ Special Education Referral Process
- _____ Special Education Assessment Practices/Procedures

Upon the interviewee’s completion of this task, the researcher asked the following questions for any categories selected:

“What is your understanding of ‘Cultural Awareness’ (for example)?”

“How do you demonstrate ‘Cultural Awareness’ in your classroom?”

R2. *How are African-American males perceived by Caucasian female elementary teachers?*

Q1. How do you perceive African-American boys differently from other students in your classroom?

Q2. What is your understanding of cultural/race awareness and how it relates to education?

Q3. What is your understanding of the term colorblindness and how it relates to education?

R3. *How does cultural/race bias affect the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?*

Q1. How comfortable are you with teaching African-American boys?

Q2. What obstacles do you encounter when teaching African-American boys?

Q3. What types of strategies do you implement to assist African-American boys in their educational endeavors?

Q4. What types of strategies do you implement to assist African-American boys who are struggling in your classroom?

R4. *What perceived effect does gender difference (teacher/student) have on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?*

Q1. How do you teach boys and girls differently in your classroom?

Q2. What obstacles do you encounter when teaching boys as opposed to girls?

R5. *What is the perceived influence of multicultural and/or diversity training (pre-service and/or professional development) in the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?*

Q1. What diversity/multicultural training have you received (pre-service and/or professional development) to enhance your understanding about the educational needs of African-American boys?

Q2. How has diversity/multicultural training influenced the way you teach African-American boys?

APPENDIX B
PERMISSION TO CONTACT

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION TO CONTACT

Date: 6/4/2013

To: Dr. Ken Ashcock, Pastor, New Liberty Baptist Church, Garland, TX

From: Thomas Seaberry, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University – Dept. of Education

Re: Permission to contact New Liberty Baptist Church members for research participation

I am a doctoral student at the Liberty University. I am currently conducting a research study entitled *The Perceptions of Caucasian Female Elementary Teachers and the Overrepresentation of African-American Males in Special Education*. The focus of this phenomenological case study is to (1) explore the perceptions of Caucasian elementary teachers have regarding African-American male students, and (2) determine the effect such perceptions have on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education.

I am requesting permission to contact New Liberty Baptist Church (NLBC) members that meet the criteria for this study. This contact will be in the form of a brief presentation requesting the participation of qualified participants, and the eventual interviewing of such participants. The time, date, and details of the presentation and interviews will be arranged based on the convenience of the research participants.

In this research, there are no foreseeable risks to you or NLBC members. Every effort will be made to maintain the anonymity of all study participants and GEA. All the data gathered during this study will be kept strictly confidential. The results of this study may be published in journals or presented at professional meetings; however, the identity of the research participants and NLBC will be kept strictly confidential. Furthermore, *participation in this study is strictly voluntary*. Participants may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time.

If you have questions related to this research, you are encouraged to contact the researcher at 214-924-5520 or tscaberry@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's Liberty University advisor, Dr. Lucinda Spaulding at 434-582-4307 or lsspaulding@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher or the researcher's advisor, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

Questions regarding this matter may be directed to me at 214-924-5520.

Sincerely,

Thomas Seaberry
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX C
PERMISSION GRANTED TO CONTACT

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION GRANTED TO CONTACT



June, 4, 2013

Thomas Seaberry
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University - Department of Education

To Whom It May Concern:

I hereby authorize Thomas Seaberry, a Liberty University doctoral candidate conducting a study entitled: *The Perceptions of Caucasian Female Elementary Teachers and the Overrepresentation of African-American Males in Special Education*,

- to contact New Liberty Baptist Church (NLBC) members for the purpose of this study to act as research participants KA (please initial).
- I understand that allowing the researcher access to NLBC members is by no means endorsing such research or the research results KA (please initial).
- I understand that NLBC will not be identified at any time during this research. The researcher will use a pseudonym when referring to your organization in the dissertation KA (please initial).
- I understand that I am merely granting access to members of NLBC, participant involvement in this research is strictly voluntary, and participants may withdraw from this study without penalty at any time KA (please initial).

Sincerely,

Dr. Ken Ashcock
Pastor: New Liberty Baptist Church
333 W. Centerville Rd.
Garland, TX, 75041
972/278-8043

333 W. Centerville Rd. - Garland, TX 75041 - (972) 278-8043 - Fax (972) 278-8053 - www.newliberty.com

KEN ASHLOCK
Pastor

BRAD ROUNTREE
Associate Pastor

MARK CLEMENTS
Associate Pastor

TAMMY REESE
Pastor's Secretary

DEBBIE AINSWORTH
Financial Secretary

BYRON & SHARON TILTON
Children's Ministries

APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

APPENDIX D: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



The Graduate School at Liberty University

June 13, 2013

Thomas Seaberry
IRB Approval 1624.061313: The Perceptions of Caucasian Females and the
Overrepresentation of African-American Males in Special Education

Dear Thomas,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054



Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX E
REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION OUTLINE

APPENDIX E: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION OUTLINE

I am a doctoral student at the Liberty University. I am currently conducting a research study entitled *The Perceptions of Caucasian Female Elementary Teachers and the Overrepresentation of African-American Males in Special Education*. The focus of this ethnographic case study is to (1) explore the perceptions Caucasian female elementary teachers have regarding African-American male students, and (2) determine the effect such perceptions have on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education.

Participation in this study will require one interview that will last approximately 60-75 minutes in duration. The interviews will specifically address issues that are relevant to the study focus. The interviews will be conducted in person at a location based on the convenience of the interview participant, and will be auditorily recorded to allow a more accurate transcription.

In this research, there are no foreseeable risks to you. Every effort will be made to maintain the anonymity of all study participants. All the data gathered during this study will be kept strictly confidential. The results of this study may be published in journals or presented at professional meetings; however, your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time during the study without adversely affecting your relationship with me or Liberty University. You may ask any questions concerning the research either before agreeing to participate or during the research study. In the event that you want to withdraw from this study, please notify me, and all data gathered from you (e.g. field notes and audio recordings) will be destroyed within 24 hours of the withdrawal.

If you are interested in participating in this research or you know someone who may be interested, please sign the participation sign-up sheet and include all relevant information (name, contact information, etc.), or contact me at your earliest convenience:

214-924-5520
toseaber@garlandisd.net

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Thank you,
Thomas Seaberry
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University – College of Education

APPENDIX F
CONTACT INFORMATION SHEET

APPENDIX F: CONTACT INFORMATION SHEET

Name	Ethnicity/ Race	Grade Taught	Years Experience	Phone Number	Email Address

APPENDIX G
INTRODUCTORY LETTER

APPENDIX G: INTRODUCTORY LETTER

I am a doctoral student at the Liberty University. I am currently conducting a research study entitled *The Perceptions of Caucasian Female Elementary Teachers and the Overrepresentation of African-American Males in Special Education*. The purpose of this ethnographic case study is to (1) explore the perceptions of Caucasian elementary teachers have regarding African-American male students, and (2) determine the effect such perception have on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education.

Your voluntary participation in this study is being sought due to your experience as an elementary teacher. Your participation will involve a 60-75 minute auditorily recorded interview. During the interview you will be asked to answer questions regarding your experience as a teacher. All interviews will be transcribed for analysis. Each interview participant will be sent a copy of his or her interview transcription. This will enable each interview participant to review the interview transcription for accuracy.

Confidentiality/Anonymity will be maintained throughout the study process. All research participants will be assigned a number; places such as schools will be assigned a pseudonym. Any other identifiable information such as age or grade level taught will be used with diligence and thought as to not unintentionally identify any participant by demographic information. All information (e.g., audio tapes, transcriptions, consent forms, etc.) will be saved on the researcher's personal computer and a separate *Maxtor OneTouch* mini hard drive for backup purposes. Access to all saved data on the researcher's computer will require a password that only the researcher will know. The *Maxtor OneTouch* mini hard drive will be kept in a locked safe, and only the researcher will have access. All research data will be destroyed three years after the completion of this study.

If you agree to participate in this study, please initial, sign, and date the Informed Consent and return it to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at your convenience at any time before, during, or after the study.

Sincerely,

Thomas Seaberry
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX H

PILOT INFORMED CONSENT

APPENDIX H: PILOT INFORMED CONSENT

PILOT INFORMED CONSENT

The Perceptions of Caucasian Female Elementary Teachers and the Overrepresentation of African-American Males in Special Education

Initial Interview-Pilot Participant Interviews

Thomas Seaberry
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study related to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education. The researcher asks that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Thomas Seaberry, School of Education, Liberty University

Background Information: The overrepresentation of minorities, specifically African-American males, in special education has been, and continues to be, a troublesome issue within the public education system nationwide. Determining the cause(s) of the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education is the primary focus of this study.

The purpose of this study is to (1) explore the perceptions Caucasian elementary female teachers have regarding African-American male students, and (2) determine the effect such perceptions have on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education.

Procedures: This study will require one 60 to 75 minute auditorily recorded interview that will be conducted by the researcher.

If you agree to be in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following: participate in one, 60- to 75-minute, auditorily recorded interview with the researcher (no other individuals will be present for the interview). Upon completion of the interview transcription process, the researcher will ask the participant to review the transcript and make any changes desired by the research participant.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study: The researcher assumes the responsibility to anticipate any possible questions, answers, and/or outcomes of the research interviews that may create risk on the part of the research participants. The researcher will ensure that minimal risk is incurred throughout the interview/research process. The researcher does not believe there are any physical, financial, social or legal risks associated with this study.

The researcher believes that the risks associated with the research project are negligible and are no more than the risks research participants would encounter in everyday life; however, some risk is clear. The researcher assumes that the perception Caucasian female elementary teachers have regarding African-American males impacts the overrepresentation of this student population in special education. The researcher believes this may create some psychological risk to the research participants. For example, the data retrieved from this research may affect the research participants' self-perception. In other words, if the data supports the researcher's assumption, such data could suggest that the research participants have negative views concerning African-American males. Additionally, psychological risk may also be apparent due to the types of questions the research participants will be asked. For example, questions concerning ethnicity/race often provoke powerfully emotional and sensitive thoughts and responses. Participants may become angry, apprehensive or even offended during the interviews. Often when individuals become emotional, the answers that are offered are not completely thought out; the participants may not like the answers that were given during the interview. To limit participant risk, the researcher will: (a) ensure that all data retrieved from research participants is specifically related to the researcher's focus, (b) allow research participants to fully audit any/all responses upon completion of the interview transcription process, (c) ensure no

data contains personal identifiers, (d) keep all data locked and/or password protected, (e) not share any data improperly, and (f) conduct regular/periodic self- and participatory audits to ensure research focus is apparent.

The benefits to participation are: First, being a participant in the research may permit the participants to objectively evaluate their personal and professional attitudes, beliefs, practices, habits, etc. Being asked a question, processing a question, and answering a challenging question, will likely promote an evaluation process. Often people do not dispassionately consider their thoughts and actions until or unless they are allowed the time to appraise them appropriately. Second, being an actual part of the research process may create greater awareness of the research focus (the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education) and educational issues regarding ethnicity/race and gender. Additionally, in a very general manner, this research will contribute to society as a whole as it identifies the issue of overrepresentation of African-American males in special education. This is a troubling trend in contemporary education, one that demonstrates contemporary discrimination in schools, and must be included in the current discourse to hopefully reduce or abolish the phenomenon altogether. In a very specific manner, this research will contribute to society as it will attempt to illuminate how race and gender differences between students and teachers may contribute to the overrepresentation phenomenon.

Please note: Liberty University will not provide medical treatment or financial compensation if you are injured or become ill as a result of participating in this research project. This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence.

Compensation: No compensation of any kind will be offered for the participation in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that might be published, no information will be included that would make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Confidentiality/Anonymity will be maintained throughout the study process. All research participants will be assigned a number (P1, P2, P3, etc.); places such as schools will be assigned a pseudonym. Any other identifiable information such as age and grade level taught will be used with diligence and thought as to not unintentionally identify any participant by demographic information.

All information (e.g., audio tapes, transcriptions, consent forms, etc.) will be saved on the researcher's personal computer and a separate *Maxtor OneTouch* mini hard drive for backup purposes. Access to all saved data on the researcher's computer will require a password that only the researcher will know. The *Maxtor OneTouch* mini hard drive will be kept in a locked safe, and only the researcher will have access.

The researcher will establish a key that will permanently link all participants to their assigned number. The participant key will be saved in an independent file on the *Maxtor OneTouch* mini hard drive that is separate from all other research data to further secure participant anonymity.

All research data will be destroyed three years after the completion of this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researcher or Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

In the event that you decide to withdraw from this study, please notify the researcher immediately. All data gathered from the participant (e.g. field notes and audio recordings) will be destroyed within 24 hours of your withdrawal.

Contacts and Questions: Again, the researcher conducting this study is Thomas Seaberry. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact the researcher at 214-924-5520 or tseaberry@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's Liberty University advisor, Dr. Lucinda Spaulding at 434-582-4307 or lsspaulding@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher or the researcher's advisor, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. All questions that I had concerning this study were addressed to my personal satisfaction.

___Please initial here indicating that you understand that your interview will be auditorily recorded.

___Please initial here giving your consent that the spoken documentation that will be obtained during the interview may be used for the intent of the above described research.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers:

IRB Expiration Date:

APPENDIX I
INFORMED CONSENT

APPENDIX I: INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The Perceptions of Caucasian Female Elementary Teachers and the Overrepresentation of African-American Males in Special Education

Primary Research Participant Interviews

Thomas Seaberry
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study related to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education. The researcher asks that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Thomas Seaberry, School of Education, Liberty University

Background Information: The overrepresentation of minorities, specifically African-American males, in special education has been, and continues to be, a troublesome issue within the public education system nationwide. Determining the cause(s) of the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education is the primary focus of this study.

The purpose of this study is to (1) explore the perceptions Caucasian elementary female teachers have regarding African-American male students, and (2) determine the effect such perceptions have on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education.

Procedures: This study will require one 60 to 75 minute auditorily recorded interview that will be conducted by the researcher.

If you agree to be in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following: participate in one, 60 to 75 minute, auditorily recorded interview with the researcher (no other individuals will be present for the interview). Upon completion of the interview transcription process, the researcher will ask the participant to review the transcript and make any changes desired by the research participant.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study: The researcher assumes the responsibility to anticipate any possible questions, answers, and/or outcomes of the research interviews that may create risk on the part of the research participants. The researcher will ensure that minimal risk is incurred throughout the interview/research process. The researcher does not believe there are any physical, financial, social or legal risks associated with this study.

The researcher believes that the risks associated with the research project are negligible and are no more than the risks research participants would encounter in everyday life; however, some risk is clear. The researcher assumes that the perception Caucasian female elementary teachers have regarding African-American males impacts the overrepresentation of this student population in special education. The researcher believes this may create some psychological risk to the research participants. For example, the data retrieved from this research may affect the research participants' self-perception. In other words, if the data supports the researcher's assumption, such data could suggest that the research participants have negative views concerning African-American males. Additionally, psychological risk may also be apparent due to the types of questions the research participants will be asked. For example, questions concerning ethnicity/race often provoke powerfully emotional and sensitive thoughts and responses. Participants may become angry, apprehensive or even offended during the interviews. Often when individuals become emotional, the answers that are offered are not completely thought out; the participants may not like the answers that were given during the interview. To limit participant risk, the researcher will: (a) ensure that all data retrieved from research participants is specifically related to the researcher's focus, (b) allow research participants to fully audit any/all responses upon completion of the interview transcription process, (c) ensure no

data contains personal identifiers, (d) keep all data locked and/or password protected, (e) not share any data improperly, and (f) conduct regular/periodic self- and participatory audits to ensure research focus is apparent.

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All research data will be destroyed three years after the completion of this study.

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___Please initial here indicating that you understand that your interview will be auditorily recorded.

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Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers:

IRB Expiration Date:

APPENDIX J
MEMBER-CHECKING PROTOCOL

APPENDIX J: MEMBER-CHECKING PROTOCOL

- Interview Participant is provided a transcript of the interview.
- Interview Participant is provided an opportunity to review the transcript of the interview.
- Interview Participant is provided an opportunity to change/omit information in the transcript of the interview.
- Interview Participant is provided an opportunity to change/add information in the transcript of the interview.
- Interview Participant is provided an opportunity to correct perceived errors in the transcript of the interview.
- Interview Participant is provided an opportunity to challenge what are perceived as incorrect interpretations in the transcript of the interview.
- Interview Participant is provided an opportunity to assess preliminary results of the data as well as to confirm particular aspects of the data.

APPENDIX K
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

APPENDIX K: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Interviewee: P1

Degree Level: Bachelor's degree (Elementary Education)

School: [REDACTED]

Grade Level: 4th

Date: September, 23, 2013

Experience: 2 years

Time: 4:15

Place: home

African American **18%**
Hispanic **27%**
White **41%**
Status: Exemplary, Meets AYP

Tell me a little about yourself?

Well, let's see. I've been an elementary teacher for 2 years. I have only taught 4th grade. I can say that I really enjoy my job...I really enjoy teaching. I love the kids. I guess I always knew I was going to be a teacher. I remember telling mom when I was in the 2nd grade that I was going to be a teacher. I never seriously considered another profession. To this day, I really can't think of anything else I'd want to do. Actually, I think I'd like to teach high school before I retire. Most elementary teachers say they can't imagine teaching high school. I think it would be fun. We'll see.

Why are you a teacher?

I know it sounds stereotypical, but I love the kids. Take the kids away from teaching...wait, that doesn't make sense...take the kids away from my job and I would hate it. They are the reason I teach. Yes, I have had kids that have tested my patience ...but I'm always amazed at how even the most difficult kid comes back around and gives me enjoyment. I'm thinking of a particular student I had last; he tested me in every way imaginable. He seemed to enjoy other people's misery, more specifically, mine. I even considered getting out of education. I simply didn't enjoy it. All the things I tried to do to correct his behavior didn't work. I asked for his mother's help, I asked for other teachers' help, I even asked my husband for advice...he's a police officer in [REDACTED]...nothing seemed to work. I was exhausted. During Spring Break I told my husband that I couldn't do this again. My all-knowing husband told me that the he needed me.

The student?

Yes, I'm sorry, the student. (laughter) Yes, my husband needs me too...I hope. So...ok... (laughter)...the student needed me. My response to that was something like "whatever, what he needs is..." you can fill in the blank. He said, "No really, he needs you. Have you told him that you love him?" I can't tell you how angry that made me. I can't really explain why...but I knew he was right...I hate it when that happens. He's usually not the sentimental type. That helped me realize that there was more that I could do. I was giving up. I needed to...well...stop thinking about myself...think about what he needed. I can't say that there was this magical turning point, but for the next several weeks, every time he would do something...something that... you know, tested my patience I would tell him that I loved him. Slowly I saw him change. I remember him asking me one time, it was close to the end of the year, "Do you really?" I told him "Yes." "No you don't" I asked him why he didn't believe me. He said something like "Because I'm bad...no one loves me." I think about that student and that comment a lot...I cried when he said that...gosh that was hard...I remember smiling at him for a moment and then running to the restroom. That one statement made me realize that I may be the only one who's telling him on a regular basis...or maybe at all...that he's loved. It also made me realize how I needed to change as a teacher. It's not about me...it's about them. He thought that no one loved him. He changed me with that comment... (Interviewee became emotional)...well...I'm sorry... obviously I didn't quit teaching. I really believe that student taught me more than I taught him. Like I said, it's really not about me, it's about the kids...it's about the love I have for these kids.

What do you like about teaching?

Again, it's all about the kids. I love the kids. Every day is different. I think I may be a little ADHD. I need variety. The kids give me that every day...like I said, everyday is a new day. Sure, there are bad days...but, they're rare. Most of the time we have fun...me and the kids...I love that. I love seeing them learn. They get so excited...I get excited...that's fun.

What do you dislike about teaching?

One thing that is really bothersome is how everything is so standardized. I know why they do this, but it takes the fun...or the...what I'm trying to say is it takes the personality, I guess, out of teaching...the creativity. We're not allowed to individualize our lesson plans too often. When I was in school we were told over and over again to be creative when developing lesson plans. Now most of the lesson plans are developed for us by curriculum facilitators. I mean, I know why schools are doing this, but it's just not fun.

Why are schools doing this?

Like always, the few make it bad for the majority. Bad teachers were not teaching what they were supposed to be teaching. Instead of putting those teachers on a TINA or getting rid of them, they decided that they would have all of us teach the same thing the same way.

If you could change one thing about your job, what would that be?

Let me teach my kids the way I want to teach them. If I don't get the results you want, then tell me how to do it. I wish we could be more creative, offer the kids more variety. This one-size-fits-all mentality is boring....for the kids...it doesn't allow us to do what you've hired us to do...teach our kids the best way we know how.

What do you know about the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

Well, I know there are, theoretically, I mean, in some districts, there are too many African-American boys in special education. I know that we had an initiative a few years ago that attempted to address this issue in our district. I don't think it's a problem here...I haven't heard anymore about it since then. I must admit, I don't really understand what the problem really is...I mean, if a child needs special education services, regardless of race, what does it matter? I would hate to deny a kid special education services based on the fact that he is African American or there are already too many African Americans in special education.

What do you remember about the initiative?

Well, let's see, we were told that there were a disproportionate number of minorities in special education.

In the school or district?

In our district. And, if I remember correctly, they told us that they wanted us to be aware of this issue as it counted against us regarding the state.

Ok, so what do you remember about the initiative?

They told us that we had too many African-Americans in special education. Oddly enough, I think they said we had too many of another group...I can't remember, but I want to say that there were too many Asian students in special education. I know that sounds weird, but it was something like that. We were told...or maybe I was told, it's been too long ago, that this overpopulation was due to a particular family who had children who all needed special education services. I don't know if that was true or not. I think the district just wanted us to be aware of this issue...I remember that there were specific interventions that they wanted us to attempt before referring students for evaluation.

Do you recall when this was?

It seems like it was 6 or 7 years ago.

Do you recall the interventions that were recommended?

The one that stands out the most to me is they wanted us to try to target on African-American student that was currently in special education, to try to see if we could get him or her taken out. I guess the idea was that there were too many African-Americans in special education, and we needed to see if there were some that we felt didn't need special ed., or some that no longer needed it. To be completely honest, the process seemed a little weird to me.

You said that the district suggested that there were too many African-Americans in special education and too many Asian students in special education, correct?

Yes.

Ok, did the district outline a plan for the overrepresentation of Asian students in special education?

I think there was a general plan for decreasing the number of minorities in special education. I don't think there was a specific plan for Asian students.

But there was a specific plan for African-Americans, correct?

Yes.

Interviewer: Ok, do you recall any other interventions that were recommended?

I know...let's see...by then we were using the RtI process. You're familiar with that? Ok...I'm sorry...I'm trying to remember what...ok...no I guess we were already using the RtI process before the recommendations were made...before the initiative...but, they did say that **all of our decisions had to be based on data. No decisions could be made without data.** I think that's it.

Regarding the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education, what factors do you believe contribute to this phenomenon?

I really don't know. I mean, like I said earlier, **if a student needs special education services, then they should get it, regardless of the color of their skin.** That is what has been the weird part of all of this. I really don't understand what the problem is. **I think we need to get away from looking at kids through a racial scope.** In other words, **see them for who they are, not what racial characteristics they have.** If one of my students needs special education services, I'm going to do whatever it takes to get them what they need. I don't care if they're white, African-American, brown, green, chartreuse, or polka-dotted...Right? I mean, what is the point?

If I understand you correctly, you don't believe we should be concerned with how many African-American males are in special education?

No, I mean, don't get me wrong, I don't want teachers and schools just throwing African-American kids in special education just to get them out of their classes; but again, **if a student needs special education services, and just happens to be African-American, who cares?** I mean, by getting a student special education services, you're not getting rid of them anyway. **That's the whole idea of inclusion. They get the services they need, but they stay in class as much as possible.**

Ok...I see...however, why do you believe African-American males are overrepresented in special education?

I think there are probably many reasons...

Fair enough. I'm providing you with a list of categories, check the ones that you feel have the greatest impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education.

Gender Bias

Racism/Discrimination

Cultural Bias

Special Education Referral/Assessment Practices ✓

Teacher Training Deficiency ✓

Biased Disciplinary Practices

Achievement Gap

Other (Explain)

Ok, you've checked Teacher Training Deficiency and Special Education Referral/Assessment Practices. Starting with Special Education Referral/Assessment Practices, Why do you believe the referral and assessment practices have such an impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

Quite honestly, I don't really understand the process. I know there is testing involved...I know that we follow the RtI process...but I don't have a good understanding of the entire process and how a student is actually selected for special education services. We have been told that the testing is what determines whether or not a student will

receive special education services. We have also been told that we can't send a student to special ed. based on testing results alone. We have also been told that the entire process really depends on whether or not the student responds to interventions. I mean, so what is it? ...I mean, I'm not alone here. Most teachers are in the lurch like me. It seems that we're constantly being told something different. It's hard to really get to a point where you're like, "ok, I understand this"...something else that has been frustrating is the RtI process itself. I mean, does this mean that all students now have an IEP? I don't get that.

Why do you believe teacher training deficiency has such an impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

Well, two reasons really. First goes back to what I previously said, I just don't think there are too many of us that truly understand the special education referral process. We've been given mixed signals. We're constantly given information that seems to conflict with information that we were previously told. This is very frustrating. Tell me what you want to do...be consistent...and I'll get it right every time. The other reason has to do with the students you're asking about. I really don't know if I've ever been trained on the best teaching practices for African-Americans. This seems strange to me as a third of my students are African-American (Note: AA pop is 18%). I have noticed that my African-American kids do not respond to me and my instruction the same way my Caucasian kids do, for example. That's not to say they're not successful in my class, they are, but I have noticed over time that the way they respond to me is different. I would love to be trained on how to effectively...I mean...how to better reach these kids.

Why do you not believe gender bias has an impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

It doesn't exist... Well, I shouldn't say that...I mean...I've never seen gender bias. You mean a teacher treating a student unfairly ...based the student's gender? I haven't seen that. Teachers tend to treat their students the same, regardless of race or gender. Don't get me wrong, has this occurred?...I'm sure it has...I'm just saying that I haven't seen it. It has to be rare.

Why do you not believe racism or discrimination has an impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

So you're suggesting that a racist teacher may refer an African-American student to special education, why? Why would a racist teacher refer an African-American student to special education? Wouldn't it work the other way. Wouldn't the racist teacher want the student to fail?...which would happen if a student with special needs never received special education services. That doesn't make sense to me. Are there teachers that are racist? I'm sure there are. Are there teachers that discriminate against their students...probably. I think both are really rare, though. I personally have not seen that. And, I don't think teachers that do discriminate or are racist would try to get minority students into special education.

Why do you not believe biased disciplinary practices have an impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

I don't see a particular group of students disciplined any differently from any other group. Now what I have noticed is that African-American students seem to be disciplined more often. I am thinking of one student in particular, he's African-American, and is seemingly always in trouble. Obviously this is not because he's African-American; this is coincidental...it's been different in the past. What I mean is the most troublesome student or students are not always African-American. So...you asked why disciplinary practices is not a problem... we just don't have different disciplinary policies and practices for different racial groups. I think African-Americans respond to the educational setting differently than other students. This difference at times comes in conflict with school rules...so discipline becomes a necessary evil. For example, I've noticed that one of my African-American students...a boy...he always wears a cap to school. We don't allow caps to be worn inside the school. This particular boy will walk into my class...or the school every morning wearing a cap. He knows this is not allowed. He knows that I'm going to ask him to remove his cap. I'll say, "Mr. [REDACTED], please remove your cap." ...he'll laugh...or run from me. When I'm finally able to confront him face to face, he'll never really acknowledge me. What am I supposed to do? I have been warned not to remove the cap myself...I walk him to the office. This is almost a daily routine. I have spoken to his mother on several occasions about this...here's the funny thing, she drives him to school. So she knows he's wearing the cap...he's getting out of her car with the cap on. If she can't get him not to bring the cap to school, how am I going to get him to take it off when he's here? So, getting back to your questions, you see...it would appear

that this student, who happens to be African-American, is being disciplined more often...in reality...he's just not doing what he's supposed to be doing...

Why do you not believe the achievement gap has an impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

We do have an achievement gap here...at our school. This is not just with our African-American kids, but also our Hispanic kids as well...that's interesting...you know...I guess there could be something there. If our African-American kids are failing this actually may contribute to referrals made to special education...yea...I can see that.

I'm going to provide you with another list. Please put a check by the categories you feel you have the greatest level of competence.

Special Education Assessment Practices/Procedures
Special Education Referral Process
Student-Centered Instruction ✓
Cultural Awareness
Intervention Strategies
Disability Awareness

Ok, I see that you checked student-centered instruction. What is your understanding of student-centered instruction?

Student-centered instruction relates to the focus of your instruction. For me, it's all about the kids...what they need...how they learn. It's not about how I like to teach or what I like to teach, it's about how they learn and what they need to learn. This goes back to something I said earlier...we need to have more control over what is taught, and how it is taught in our classes. We...the teachers...we know best what our students need more than some facilitator who works off-campus does...who's never met our kids...so student centered instruction is about getting back to what is best for our kids.

How do you perceive African-American boys differently from other students in your classroom?

You mean, how do I think African-American boys are different? Ok...well, I don't know if there are a lot of differences. I mean, like I said earlier, we currently have a student, who happens to be African-American, that is testing all of our patience. I'm sure this fact influences my current state of mind...it's important to know where our kids are coming from...what motivates them...what their customs are. I remember getting angry...well, upset really...I mean...when I'd ask students to look me in the eye. This is something I was taught. You know...look at me when I'm talking to you (laughter)...that's the way I was taught. The problem is that most kids are not taught that anymore. I've notice that a lot of our...kids...just won't do it even if you ask them to. I have been told this is a cultural difference. I agree. The problem is that they will have to learn this eventually. I mean I love my kids but can you imagine these kids growing up thinking that they can ...I don't know...hold a meeting or something without ever looking others in the eye. I think this is where common sense has to prevail. We need to be ready to teach our kids what is socially practical. They need to understand that to be successful in this culture, certain...um...what am I trying to say?...certain...I guess customs have to be accepted.

How do you perceive African-American boys differently?

I guess I don't...I'm really trying to think...I want to be honest...I guess African-American boys seem to be the same...I mean there are some differences.

What are those differences?

Well, I don't know...maybe I'm the problem...I mean...there are times I have a hard time relating to some African-American boys. I mean, like I told you earlier...about the boy with the cap...I just haven't had that problem with other kids. Now to be fair, I don't know if that problem was with the kid, me, or the mom...I guess we're all responsible in some way. I don't know if I can really explain it...sometimes it seems I have a hard time relating to certain kids.

African-American boys?

Sometimes

What is your understanding of cultural and race awareness and how it relates to education?

We need to be responsive of the different cultures that our students are bringing into the classroom. This is one of the fun aspects of education. I love hearing about our students' cultural backgrounds...the ones that of course, are different from our own. We have a student this year that is from [REDACTED]. She has been a delight in class. The kids have been able to see pictures and clothes...we even...she brought authentic [REDACTED] food to class that the kids got to try. The kids love this kind of stuff. I really believe that this is where the true learning happens.

What is your understanding of colorblindness and how it relates to education?

As educators we have to be colorblind. I know in some of the answers I've given you I'm not sounding very colorblind...I'm just trying to be as honest as possible. I think I do a good job at this...being colorblind...we have to be. I love my kids all the same. It doesn't matter, like I said, what their color is, I love them and want to teach them just the same. If you're a student that has behavior problems or academic problems...well, this has nothing to do with color...I can honestly say that I really don't see color in my class. I don't see a student's skin color. I see their behavior...I see how they respond to my lessons...I see how they respond to their classmates and to me...yes, I'm colorblind...this is, I believe, essential to education.

How comfortable are you with teaching African-American boys?

Very...I'm comfortable teaching all students. Their race or whether or not they are a girl or boy doesn't matter to me. Boys have more energy...they're rougher, but for the most part, they aim to please. If I'm going to have a student that has behavior problems, typically this will be a boy. The girls at this age are...well, they just don't seem to want to...they are good students...for the most part. Like I said, the boys are rougher, they play hard, they always have more energy...but I like that...it doesn't bother me at all.

What obstacles do you encounter when teaching African-American boys?

Well, I don't know that I do...I guess there are some obstacles with boys in general, but that wasn't your question. There does seem to be a cultural divide...yea...I guess cultural divide...at times, I have thought that there are times when I'm probably being more effective with my Caucasian students than I am with my African-American students...I've had that thought...that's my problem though, not theirs. Gosh, I hate having that feeling...but it has definitely happened.

What types of strategies do you implement to assist African-American students in their educational endeavors?

Although all students learn, to some extent, differently, they basically learn the same. If you have a struggling student, the things that you can do with him are the same, regardless of race. Sound teaching practices and strategies are sound teaching practices and strategies. Period. In other words, they'll work for any student. If I have an African-American student that is struggling in reading, I'll use the same supportive strategies to help that student as I would any other student, African-American or White.

What types of strategies do you implement to assist African-American boys in their educational endeavors?

Again, I think, for the most part, what works for one struggling student works for another. I've been teaching for 8 years and I have found this to be true. Yes, there are visual learners and kinesthetic learners and learners who learn by listening...um...you know...auditory learners...that aside, good teaching practices and strategies, that really help learners, will help any learner...for the most part.

What effect do you think gender difference has on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

That is an interesting question...well, boys tend to struggle more often than girls...actually, what I mean is if I'm going to have a student struggle with reading or math or whatever...more than likely it will be a boy. So, naturally, I have referred more boys to special education than girls. I think in my 2 years of teaching I've only referred 1 girl to special ed. That's interesting...so... yes, gender does, to some extent, play a part.

What effect do you think your gender difference has on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

Oh, I see...what effect does me being a female have on possibly referring more boys to special education? I really don't think I have referred a boy to special ed. because he was a boy...I mean, boys just tend to need more help at this age than girls...or at least more frequently...let's see, what I mean is if there's going to be a student that needs help, likely it will be a boy. Do you know what I mean?

How do you teach boys and girls differently in your classroom?

Generally, I would say that I don't...but, your question previously is making me think. I guess I tend to give my boys more attention. They need it. Boys are more active and animated; they often have attention issues. My plan is to treat all my students the same. But, like I said, my boys tend to need more attention than my girls.

Interviewer: What obstacles do you encounter when teaching boys as opposed to girls?

I think the biggest obstacle is they, generally speaking, need for more attention. Like I said, they (boys) tend to be more physical and aggressive...not necessarily in a bad way though...they just...they're boys...their behavior requires more attention. If there's going to be a fight, it will be two boys. If there is going to be a student that acts out during class, it's going to be a boy. You understand what I'm saying? If there is going to be a problem on the playground, often it will be between boys...not to say girls don't have issues on the play ground...I'm just speaking in general terms.

Interviewer: What diversity/multicultural training have you received (pre-service and/or professional development) to enhance your understanding about the educational needs of African-American boys?

Yea, good question. I think I touched on this earlier...I really don't recall any training while I was in school...regarding African-American boys...or African Americans in general. I remember taking a cultural diversity class in college, but that was an elective, it wasn't even a required class...it wasn't in the education department...I think it was a sociology class, if I remember correctly. Honestly, though, I don't recall a lot about that class. After that, I can't remember any classes I took that would have specifically addressed African-Americans or any other minority group for that matter. As for professional development training...a few years ago the district brought in a group that presented diversity training. There were two sessions. The initial session was presented by a representative of the group. The group was called Wordsmooth, or something like that. I still have the packet, with my notes, that the presenter gave to us...in my desk. The program was called...something like Impressions or Personal Impression, or something like that.. This was probably the first, and only, diversity training I've ever received as a teacher. I loved the presentation. I remember one part of the presentation was...she gave...she showed pictures of several people. She...the presenter...also offered descriptions of each person...I remember you had to try to match the person to the description. Do you know what I mean?

So, the presenter showed you several pictures of random people, then you were asked to match the pictures of those people to certain written descriptions of each person?

Yea, I think so.

Ok, I think I understand. Can you give me an example?

Yea...so...for example...gosh, I wish I could remember an actual example, but...for example, she offered a picture of a guy that looked a little disheveled...or something...another person who looked really studious...with glasses or something...I'm not sure I'm doing a good job with examples, but nevertheless...another guy who was really young...and a lady with a shaved head, or something...(laughter)...do you get my point? ...ok...so there were like 6 to 8 pictures with 6 to 8 descriptions of these people. She asked us to match the descriptions with the right picture. I think I got one correct. The point was how we...as teachers...as humans really...make presumptions about people based on the way they look. I remember all the teachers around me missing most of their matches...you know, the pictures with the descriptions?...they didn't do too well either. This was a little eye-opening...I mean, I knew what the point was when she showed us the pictures...but we all did so badly. It was a strong point...we prejudge people all the time. When we do this, we may be negating their abilities...that may be hidden behind the way the look.

Do you think teachers do this with a student's race or cultural background?

Absolutely...we all do. We all prejudge students based on the way they look. I don't, however, let this influence what I...well...what I mean is...once I get to know the student, the initial way I judged the student wears away.

There have been several times when my first impression of a student has been bad...or good, for that matter...but it's through my daily interaction with that student that my true perception of them is developed. I think what is important is, although we all prejudge based on the way we perceive a certain individual...it's important that we allow that person...that student...an opportunity to prove who they really are...in other words, don't allow the way you initial judged a person to influence what you think about them once you get to know them. You know?

Ok, I'm sorry, to go back a little bit, you mentioned that Wordsmooth offered two training sessions; do you remember anything about the second session.

The second session was a few weeks...or a month or two later. It wasn't nearly as good. It was presented to us by our AP. She told us that she had been trained by Wordsmooth to train us...for the second session. Nothing against our AP...she's wonderful...she just didn't have the expertise...the information...honestly, we didn't take a lot from that session.

How has the Wordsmooth training influenced the way you teach African-American boys?

I think what it did for me more than anything else it has allowed me to accept the idea that I prejudge everyone I meet...including my students. What's important...what I got from the presentation, is you have to allow people the opportunity to change your preconceived notions about them...for good or bad. So, getting back to your question...specifically regarding African-American boys...it taught me to understand that I prejudge all of my students...but I have to allow them the opportunity to change my initial thoughts about them... I have to allow them the opportunity to change whatever thought I initially had.

Thank you so much for your time.

Thank you.

Interviewee: P2
Degree Level: Master's degree (Special Education)
School: [REDACTED]
Grade Level: 3rd
Experience: 22 years
Date: September 25, 2013
Time: 4:30
Place: home

African American **19%**
Hispanic **23%**
White **46%**
Status: Recognized, Missed AYP - Reading (Performance)

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about yourself?
Ok, what do you want to know?

Interviewer: Why are you a teacher?

Well, I wasn't planning on being a teacher. I originally wanted to be a [REDACTED]. I loved science...still do... and every since I can remember I wanted to be a [REDACTED]. I was a [REDACTED] and started teaching science classes to middle and high school students during the summer. I slowly started to realize that I really liked teaching. At that point, I was still planning to be a [REDACTED]. I was accepted into [REDACTED]...during my first year in [REDACTED], which was a killer; by the way, I met my husband. He was a [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] too. We met, fell in love, and married the summer after our first year. As we started getting ready for our second year, we decided that it would be best if only one of us was killing themselves in [REDACTED]. I decided that I would be a stay-at-home wife...hopefully...later...a stay-at-home mom. That lasted for about a year until I got so bored with it. During that time I thought about teaching. I mean, I loved teaching; maybe that's what I should do. I started taking certification classes. It took me about two years to complete all of the classes. My husband wanted to complete his [REDACTED]. So, knowing that we were probably moving to Dallas, I got a Texas teaching certification. My husband got into [REDACTED], we moved to [REDACTED], and here I am.

Interviewer: How long have you been teaching and what grade do you teach?
I've been teaching for 22 years and I am a 3rdgrade teacher.

Interviewer: What do you like about teaching?

Definitely my babies. They are so wonderful. They brighten my day every day. I can't imagine being [REDACTED] now. Seeing what my husband goes through every day. When we talk about our days together, his days are always so stressful, painful; restless...he's tired all of the time. He hates it when I tell him how much fun my days are; it drives him crazy (laughter). I always tell him that he can start teaching whenever he wants.

Interviewer: What do you dislike about teaching?

The pay (laughter). No really...I don't know. I really enjoy teaching. **I love my babies.** They're so fun and funny. They make me laugh every day.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about your job, what would that be?

That's easy...we need smaller classes. The district suggests that our student to teacher ratio is between [REDACTED]. That is very misleading. I think that includes all educators in the building. I had **21 students last year**. Now you could give me 30, but how good is their education going to be? That's something that the district and the state of Texas needs to take a seriously look at. It's just not fair for our students. I know that the state of education has really taken a huge hit financially due to the financial fallout of late, but we just can't let our little babies suffer for our greedy mistakes.

Interviewer: What do you know about the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

I know that African-American boys are disproportionately represented in special education. I also know this an issue that has been a problem in education for a long time.

Interviewer: Regarding the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education, what factors do you believe contribute to this phenomenon?

There are many. I don't think you can rule-out racism and bigotry. I know when we lived in [REDACTED] I saw a huge divide between white and African-American culture...their lives take on completely different realities. Most African-Americans lived in areas like [REDACTED], the area that was hit the hardest during [REDACTED]. We, my husband and I, saw first-hand how destructive that hurricane was. One of the most unfortunate aspects of that hurricane was that it completely devastated areas like [REDACTED], which is predominantly African-American. I only mention this...sorry, I'm getting a little off topic...I mention this because although the racial divide seemed more predominate in [REDACTED], it's prevalent here as well. Racism and bigotry are a part of the contemporary education system. It's unfortunate, but true.

Interviewer: So, you believe racism and bigotry have influenced the number of African-American boys in special education.

Absolutely.

Interviewer: Have you witnessed this?

Don't get me wrong, I think we have wonderful teachers in my school. Teachers that I have met from other schools in the district seem just as well-meaning. I think most teachers love their babies just as much as I do regardless of race. But, I also believe that some teachers cut some of their students short. What I have witnessed is what I refer to as displaced frustration. A teacher is teaching a certain concept and the student is just not getting it. The teacher, being the good teacher that she is, attempts to teach the concept a new or different way. However, the student is still not getting it. This is done over and over again, yet the student is not understanding the concept. Often the teacher will become frustrated with the student, instead of themselves. The teacher will often say something like, "Why isn't this student understanding this concept?" instead of asking themselves, "What can I do to teach this concept another way; a better way?" When this occurs, more often than not, the teacher, if they haven't already, will begin an RtI process. This student will be referred to special education. Now here's the problem, most of the students that fall into this scenario are minority students. Not just African-American students or Hispanic students, which are the students that we typically think of as being at-risk, but this scenario will play out with children from Asian families or Middle Eastern families or really any children from any cultural minority group. The problem is teachers typically have some difficulty teaching students from different cultural backgrounds. This is especially true when there is some kind of language barrier. I don't think this is racism, by the way, or bigotry. I think this is simply misfortune. These students are being taught in a culture that is different from their own. I'm sure the same would occur if you took your average American student and tried to teach him in China, using only Chinese to communicate. What I mean by that is, because their culture is different from the mainstream, there is a cultural clash. It's unfortunate, but true. The racism comes in when we say that such students are incapable of learning. So, it's not just a cultural clash, it's an inability on their part. This, unfortunately, I have only seen with African-American and Hispanic students.

Interviewer: What exactly have you seen?

Students, mainly African-American and Hispanic students, are told in different ways that they are incapable. Last year we had a student in the 2nd grade...he wasn't in my class, but I was on the SST...he was a struggling reader, and like many students that struggle with reading, he had demonstrated some behavior problems. After observing this student and working with him, I found that he responded to some interventions quickly; I saw his reading skills improve in just a short time. When we met...when the SST met to compare notes and make suggestions, I found the rest of the group ready to send him for evaluation. The SST process seemed to be a mere formality to get this student to special ed. The phrase I heard was "Let's get this meeting documented and done." This was said at the very beginning of the meeting. I found the rest of the SST ready and willing to oblige. Another member said that when he met with the student and his mother, he told them that the student just wasn't a good reader. This particular teacher had never met the student. Again, we're saying that the problem is the student's fault, not ours. This is a huge problem in education.

Interviewer: Here is a list of categories, please check the ones that you feel have the greatest impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education.

Gender Bias

Racism/Discrimination ✓

Cultural Bias ✓

Special Education Referral/Assessment Practices ✓

Teacher Training Deficiency ✓

Biased Disciplinary Practices

Achievement Gap

Other (Explain)

Interviewer: Thank you. ...you checked Racism/Discrimination, Cultural Bias, Special Education Referral/Assessment Practices, and Teacher Training Deficiency. You've already commented on racism and discrimination and cultural bias, is there anything you want to add concerning these categories?

Yes...you know what I would like to see is our district actively pursue more male teachers. [REDACTED]. That's a problem. Many of our students, especially our African-American students, don't live with their fathers. Many don't have positive male role models in their lives. We have a day in the spring, where we have our students name and draw their favorite role model. We then have them describe the characteristics of their role model. Our White students will, more often than not, choose a parent. Sometimes an athlete, or someone famous, but most of the time it will be a parent. Oddly enough, fathers are usually chosen over mothers..for boys and girls. Our African-American students will choose an athlete...sometimes their mother, but most often a famous athlete. I'm not saying that it's bad to have a famous athlete as your role-model, but I am saying that it would be best if your favorite role model was someone you had constant, maybe daily, interaction with. Our African-American students need more positive male role models in their lives. It seems to me that one of the best...one of the easiest ways to do this is to actively pursue and hire male teachers....better yet, African-American male teachers. I've heard that male teachers usually don't want to teach at the elementary level. I really don't know if this is true or not. What I always say, when I hear that, is..."Are we actively pursuing male teachers?" "Are we actively recruiting male teachers?" We're not, I know we're not. Are we on college campuses recruiting men to be elementary teachers? No. This is an issue of discrimination, I think. Follow me for a minute. What group of students would benefit the most from male teachers? African-American male teachers? African-American boys, of course. What is your research about? Ok, I'm giving you that one for free. (laughter)

Interviewer: Thank you. Anything else you want to say about racism, discrimination or cultural bias?
No. That's it. (laughter)

Interviewer: Ok, I see that you also checked the Special Education Referral/Assessment Practices and Teacher Training Deficiency. Why the special education referral and assessment practices?

I think they are inherently flawed. If we're not going to go into the process with an open mind, then the system will not work appropriately, and you'll have problems, like the overrepresentation of minorities in special education.

Interviewer: I'm not sure I'm following you.

Ok, like I mentioned earlier, the majority of SST meetings I have attended have been formalities at best. The attitude is "let's get this done...we know this student needs special education...document...document...then refer to special ed." That is simply wrong. I know for a fact that interventions have been suggested and documented that teachers know will fail. This is done to support the opinion that the student needs special education services. The SST process needs to be more fact-based...more, I don't know...you know what would be a good idea? The SST team should be a group of educators who have no direct or indirect benefit for the student receiving special education services or not. I think something like that would make the process more...more objective.

Interviewer: You also checked Teacher Training Deficiency.

In my 5 years of teaching, I have never been taught how to better instruct an African-American boy. Now, this may seem strange...I know we can't receive training on every specific ethnic group, male and female...but it stands to reason that we should be receiving constant, or at least periodic, training on the best teaching practices for African-American and Hispanic children. Our student body is approximately 25% Hispanic and 25% African American....and approximately 50% White. So, for half of our student body, we have no real training...this just

isn't right. Oh, and by the way, like I said earlier,

Interviewer: Approximately, how many Caucasian teachers are there?

Interviewer: You didn't check Gender Bias, Biased Disciplinary Practices, or Achievement Gap. Why not gender bias?

I could have...maybe I should have...I mean I definitely think there is a gender bias in our hiring practices. Why it is that elementary teachers have to be women? Why do elementary administrators have to be women? I don't think that's your question though. I guess I don't think teachers demonstrate gender bias in their teaching practices. Our curriculum may be a little gender bias, but the other way. Most of the historical characters that our students learn about are men.

Interviewer: Do you think teachers prefer girl students over boy students?

Yes! (laughter) Girls at this age where they aim to please. They're soft, quite, and pink. Boys are loud, rough, and dirty. (laughter) Boys tend to be...well, not all boys...your risk takers. They are the ones that create havoc in the classroom. Now, like I said, I don't mean all boys. I'm just saying that if you're going to have a student that is difficult, it's usually going to be a boy.

Interviewer: Why didn't you check Biased Disciplinary Practices?

I think we're pretty consistent when it comes to disciplinary practices. I don't think one minority group or one ethnic or racial group is being discipline any more severely or frequently than any other.

Interviewer: Why didn't you check Achievement Gap?

There is an achievement gap present in our district and school. I think that's pretty much the situation everywhere. I just don't think, though, this issue would create more special education referrals.

Interviewer: Here is a list of categories, please check the ones that you have the greatest level of competence.

Special Education Assessment Practices/Procedures ✓

Special Education Referral Process ✓

Student-Centered Instruction ✓

Cultural Awareness ✓

Intervention Strategies ✓

Disability Awareness ✓

Interviewer: Ok, interesting...you checked all of the categories...good. What is your understanding of the special education assessment practices and procedures?

Ok, as I understand it, students must go through the RtI process to be eligible for special education services. RtI is a 3-tiered process that attempts to meet a student's academic abilities with the interventions that are required to enable academic success for that student. Tier 1 students, which represents approximately 80-90% of our students, receive quality, scientifically based instruction by qualified teachers. These students are evaluated on a regular basis...through this evaluation, two groups of students emerge: students that are successful and students that are struggling. The struggling students receive interventions such as additional support or instruction, right? These student are thoroughly monitored though. Some students will demonstrate success at this level of support, yet some will not. These students...these struggling students are then moved to the next RtI level...Tier 2. Tier 2 involves more intense interventions that usually entail removing the student from the classroom and into small-group settings for extra support, right?...normally in reading and or math. This removal is only for a short time during the day, maybe 30 minutes to an hour. The time is based on the student's need, of course. If the student continues to struggle, they are moved to Tier 3. Tier 3 students, which is a very small group of students...usually only about 2 or 3% of your students will end up at this level, receive more interventions. At this level, students receive individualized instruction that attempts to target the student's specific skill deficits, ok? The SST monitors the progress of the student and documents what is working and what is not. If the student is not successful at this level of intervention, the student will be referred to special education. Well, that's not completely true. The student will receive a comprehensive evaluation, and based on the results of that evaluation, may be referred to special education. I know at that point the student will receive formal testing that may or may not indicate that there is a special education need.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of student centered instruction?

Student-centered versus teacher-centered instruction is the basic difference between old and new school. Before, teachers could be consumed with their own interests, their own style...basically, what worked best for them. We can't do that anymore. The focus has to be on the students. What are their needs? How do they learn? What are their interests? I think this is the most important aspect to student-centered instruction. We have to find ways to teach to what they enjoy...the things that are relevant to their lives. Back in the day you'd find a teacher standing in front of the room with 20 students, quietly awaiting her instruction. This is old school and it is not how students learn best. They learn by interacting, by being a part of the process. They learn best from each other, in groups...I am merely a facilitator...a direction keeper. I have the goal in mind and they figure out the best way to achieve that goal.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of cultural awareness?

I think this is where we fail our students. Like I mentioned previously, we have demonstrated to them that cultural diversity is not important. We do this by who we hire. Our demographics are 25, 25, and 50. [REDACTED], if you include all of the support staff...administrators, counselors, and so on. So, what is my understanding of cultural awareness? Being fully aware...being conscious of the needs of our students. They do not need to see an all-White staff. They need to see a school that reflects their culture, not ours. This goes back to the idea of student-centered instruction. Are we addressing our needs or the children's needs?

Interviewer: What is your understanding of intervention strategies?

What is my understanding of interventions strategies? Well, the way I take your questions is, am I able to...determine the appropriate interventions for a struggling student. Yes, most of the time I can. Actually, I think most teachers are experts at this. We, on a regular basis, intervene on a student's behalf to afford some level of intervention to help the student experience academic success. Teachers are really good at this. They do it much more often than they realize. Where the problem comes in is when you're out of interventions. This is rare, but it does occur. This is when you should be willing to ask other teachers for help. I think what happens a lot of the time is teachers get so overwhelmed by their daily jobs...all of the tasks they must get through in a day...calling parents, offering after-school assistance, attending meetings, they run out of time to simply ask another teacher for help. Regarding interventions, I found these to be somewhat easy. You observe the student, see what he or she needs, and offer support that will enable that student to enjoy academic success. It's not brain surgery.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of disability awareness?

This relates to knowledge concerning learning disabilities, how they are identified, and what interventions work...I think I have a better understanding of this than most. My Master's degree is in Special Education. If it were up to me,

all teachers would have to have at least a certification in special education to teach. I learned so much about learning disabilities while in graduate school. I really can't imagine teaching now without that experience.

Interviewer: How do you perceive African-American boys differently from other students in your classroom?

That's an interesting question. When I originally read that question, I wondered how I would answer it. I'm still not completely certain how to answer it. (long pause) How do I perceive African-Americans differently? (pause) I think they enter the educational setting with almost everything stacked against them. It was worse in [redacted]. I know I mentioned their before, but you have to find ways to reach these students. The culture of our school, although effective and appropriate for our White students, is at time in direct conflict with our African-American students. So, how do I perceive these students differently? They struggle in this environment. I don't really know how you changes that...we live in a racist society...look at what we tell our Hispanic students...your culture, your language...your way of life is not important...conform quickly or you will fail." What we should be telling them is "you are bringing a wealth of knowledge, experience...culture to our school. Teach us your language, while we teach you ours. "Teach us your culture, while we teach you ours." That's not the message they get, I assure you. The same problem resides with our African-Americans students, yet it's not as overt...but they get the same message. I know this is not a popular belief, but the idea of separate and equal maybe the best answer.

Interviewer: You're referring to Plessy verses Ferguson?

Kinda...maybe we should look at that again. This time we make it truly equal though. I don't know...I know this isn't a real popular idea. I just feel bad for our African-American students. They're told from the moment they enter the educational environment that their culture doesn't matter...no wonder there is an achievement gap...no wonder there is a disproportional amount of African-American boys in special education, right?

Interviewer: What is your understanding of cultural and race awareness and how it relates to education?

We as educators, if we love our babies as much as we profess, we must be aware that the culture of our schools is far different from the culture that would be best for all our students. What I mean is if we truly wanted to create a school that specifically addressed the cultural and educational needs for our African-American students, it would look far different from what our schools look like. The teachers would be different...the curriculum would be different. I guess the only thing that might be the same is the building itself. Can you imagine how successful or White students would be in a school that specifically catered to African-Americans students? How long would that be tolerated?

Interviewer: What is your understanding of colorblindness and how it relates to education?

I know most teachers say their colorblind; they're not. They see color. How could they not? I think teachers confuse being colorblind with...they assume that if they say they are colorblind this suggests that they're not discriminatory...I think if a teacher is truly colorblind, they're taking away the beauty of difference in their class. Embrace difference...difference equals varying experience...if I had a class where each student was from a different country, I think that would be awesome. I think most teachers would loath this...I would love it. Can you imagine how much fun you'd have with those babies? You'd have to see them...truly see them. If you're colorblind, you can't see them. Colorblindness to me equals White. What we're really saying is that we want something without color, void of difference...White.

Interviewer: How comfortable are you with teaching African-American boys?

As comfortable as I can be, I guess. Like I mentioned before, I wish I had more of a background with these students...more training...I wish I knew what really worked with these students. I'm guessing most of the time...I mean, I have experience now...so I'm not guessing all of the time...I just wish I had more experience...more training.

Interviewer: What obstacles do you encounter when teaching African-American boys?

The biggest obstacle is proving to them that you're there for them...gaining their trust. We...our schools send them the wrong message. They don't trust us...I'm speaking generally, of course. Once you gain their trust...they see that you really care about them...their difference...their culture...the obstacles are gone, for the most part.

Interviewer: What types of strategies do you implement to assist African-American boys in their educational endeavors?

The best strategy...the one that works every time is showing them that you care about them. Once they really believe that...education...success can happen. I know that sounds really basic, but it works. Show a student you love them...you love the fact that they are different from all of your other students...and that you truly love that difference...true academic success can occur. I know I'm sounding a little redundant...but it does work.

Interviewer: What effect do you think gender difference has on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

A lot...probably. I wonder if we'd have so many African-American boys referred to special education if their teachers were African-American male teachers? That should be your research. See how many African-American male teachers are referring African-American boys to special education. They're probably referring White boys and girls (laughter). No, really...that's kinda funny...I'm sorry. But really...I think gender and race difference have everything to do with the disproportional number of African-American boys in special education. I think that's different from what I checked off, isn't it?

Interviewer: That's ok. How do you teach boys and girls differently in your classroom?

With boys you normally have to be more hands on...you have to be there with them through the process. Girls are normally different. Often you're the facilitator. You get them started...and then they're off. Boys, at this age, tend to be more anxious and have more energy...they're more active. I don't want to extinguish their enthusiasm...I just want to funnel it into something productive...that's fun.

Interviewer: What obstacles do you encounter when teaching boys as opposed to girls?

Again, keeping them focused. Girls will stay on task...boys are constantly looking for something to entertain them...they create projects for themselves if they get too bored. Keep them busy...watch time closely...that's really it.

Interviewer: What diversity/multicultural training have you received (pre-service and/or professional development) to enhance your understanding regarding the educational needs of African-American boys?

That's an easy question to answer...none. At this point, it's time for me to actively pursue training for myself. I mean, I say it's important to me, but I've yet to really show that.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time.

Thank you. I had fun.

Interviewee: P3
Degree Level: Bachelor's degree (Elementary Education)
School: [REDACTED]
Grade Level: K through 6th
Experience: 9 years
Date: September 24, 2013
Time: 4:30
Place: Cooperative Behavior Center

African American 37%
Hispanic 59%
White 3%
Status: Academically Acceptable, Met AYP

Interviewee 3 suggested that her time was limited. I decided not to ask any preliminary questions; only interview protocol questions were asked.

Interviewer: What can you tell me about the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

I know **theoretically** there are too many African-American boys in special education. I know our district has previously suggested that there is, or has been, a problem here. **I really don't know how this is determined. I guess it's by percentage...the percentage of the African-American boys in your general population should match the percentage of African-American boys in special education.** Is that correct? I really believe that this problem is one that is a commentary to our society... really. What I mean is...what I'm trying to say...**African-American boys come from homes that are most often single-parent...usually the mom...this is unfortunate but true with almost all of our African-American kids. They come from low socio-economic homes where education is a formality...I'm not saying g that they don't take it seriously, I think they do...but education is not the number one priority. How can it be? If you're raised in a single-parent home, often that parent has to work long hours, overtime, an extra job, whatever it takes to make ends meet. Survival becomes the priority, not education.**

Interviewer: What do you mean by formality?
I'm sorry, what?

Interviewer: You mentioned that for many African-American families, education is a formality.
So...what I'm saying is...**education is viewed as something that has to be done; it's not viewed as an opportunity.**

Interviewer: So how does this relate to the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

If education is seen as something you just do, rather than opportunity to learn, the full benefit of education will not be realized. This also leads to apathy or minimalism...just getting by. If a kid is just trying to get by or doesn't really care about their education, they will struggle. These kids will likely be referred for evaluation. Since African-American boys often enter school with certain social and educational deficiencies, they will, more often than not, be referred for evaluation. I'm not saying all African-American boys fall into this category...I'm saying that sense many of them come with such deficiencies, often they will be referred. This has to augment the number of kids...African-American boys in special education.

Interviewer: Here is a list of categories, reason that may contribute to the overrepresentation phenomenon. Please check the ones that you feel have the greatest impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education.

Gender Bias X/√
Racism/Discrimination X/√
Cultural Bias X/√
Special Education Referral/Assessment Practices X/√
Teacher Training Deficiency X/√

Biased Disciplinary Practices X/√

Achievement Gap X/√

Other (Explain)

Note: Interviewee noted that none and all apply.

I'm really not sure any of these really apply. Well, I guess they all apply in one way or another, but I think the reason...my opinion is...African-American boys are referred to special education because of the deficiencies...academically...or they have...you know...behavior problems. I mean, we could say, for example, that this is discriminatory...sending an African-American kid to special education, but the truth is the student was struggling. We've done all we can, now we need help. An African-American kid is not going to be referred to special education unless they need special ed. support. That's the strange part about all of this...it's really not up to me or any other one person...there is testing involved, there is an evaluation... I think we need to stop being concerned with how many of any racial group is in special education...if they need special education, let's make sure they get it. What's happening a lot of the time is that we're finding that it's African-American boys who often need extra support. It's like I said, they come in to this environment with deficiencies. We do the best we can to fill in the gaps.

Interviewer: Why do you not believe gender bias has an impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

Gender bias? In other words, because I'm a female...I'm going to send a boy to special ed...that's ridiculous. No offense but...you know...again...I don't send anyone to special education...it's a process. There's testing involved...It really wouldn't matter if all I sent for evaluation were boys...it's not up to me. See, what I think is unfortunate is because we have too many African-American boys in special education, there's an assumption that there's something wrong with the system...discrimination, bias, racism, whatever. What if there's a problem with...I mean, what if the kid really has academic deficiencies...and needs special ed.? that's like saying, the car doesn't run, there must be something wrong with the engine. What if there's something wrong with the driver?

Interviewer: I'm not sure I'm following you.

What I'm trying to say is that maybe it's not the system; maybe it's truly the kid. What if African-American boys just so happen to need special education more than other?

Interviewer: Why do you not believe cultural bias has an impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

There's no doubt that our schools are ran by a predominant...the school culture is predominantly White. But, I don't think this culture is in direct conflict with the African-American culture. Just because it's different, doesn't make it conflicting...I've never understood that assumption. It is as if we just accept the idea that White and Black have to be at odds...there must be a conflict. African-American kids can be , and have been, may I add, successful in a White culture and environment. Look at Asian kids. Their successful...does the assumption work for them too. Do we ever say that White and Brown conflict...no...then why do we say this about our African-American kids. It just doesn't make sense. We need to stop making excuses...get away from all of these assumptions...African-American kids can be successful in our schools.

Interviewer: So, I'm not sure I'm following you, do you not believe cultural bias has an impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

Well, I guess what I'm saying is...it can...I guess...this overrepresentation can be affected by culture and race, I just don't think that it does the way you...I mean, you know...the way people think it does. I know that there are more...relatively, more African-American students sent to special education... But I don't think this is occurring because White teaches just don't know how to teach these kids...or choose not to...or just want to send them away... I think... I think it's related to the fact that these kids come to school from less than ideal situations than many of their peers. It's a social issue. What I have seen firsthand is the importance African-American families put into athletics for example...this is ok...but there is a problem if athletics, you know, playing sports, is more important than school. Our Asian students come to school to work...and to learn. They're not here to just get through the day. They're not here to play sports...they're here to excel. Their parents are demanding this. Here's a story for you. I called a parent the other day to inform her...the mom...that her son was having some difficulty with reading...now I'm making a long story short here...the kid was really struggling...there were some other issues, but

reading was the main problem. This was an African-American...boy...now, I really don't think this kid really needed any kind of special education help, he's a smart kid...he's just behind...he came to me behind...I suggested to the mother that, although your son is behind, having him read ...reading to him on a nightly basis will likely...in a few months, catch him up to his peers. Her response to my suggestion was..."How do you know I'm not doing that already?" Now...what am I going to say to that? "I know you're not because your son is so behind." I told her that if you are, maybe you could spend a little more time with him...reading...her response to that was..."He plays basketball every night...we don't have time." What? That's the problem. If too many African-American boys are being sent to special education, don't blame the teachers...blame the parents for not instilling the importance of education to them.

Interviewer: Why do you not believe that special education referral and assessment practices have an impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

I think the system in place is a sound one. Like I said, I can't send anyone to special education. There is a process...there is testing and assessment...these are objective...either you need special education services or you don't. So no, the overrepresentation of these kids is not based on the process.

Interviewer: Why do you not believe that teacher training has an impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

Teachers can't complain about any lack of training. We receive professional development training on a regular basis. So, no, I don't see how a lack of training could be a problem.

Interviewer: Have you received training related to the best teaching practices and or strategies for African-American boys?

See, I don't understand that. Good teaching practices and strategies are good teaching practices and strategies. I'm not saying what works for one, works for all, but I am saying what works from one, works for most. But to answer your question, no, I haven't received training for African-American boys, nor have I received training for Hispanic girls, or Russian boys, or Vietnamese girls...right? You understand what I'm saying.

Interviewer: Why do you not consider biased disciplinary practices as one of the factors that causes an impact on the overrepresentation of African-Americans in special education?

Well, the way I'm interpreting this questions is...I'd have to believe that biased disciplinary practices are going on...I just don't. Although boys are in trouble more often than girls, this is because boys tend to have more energy and want to take more risks than girls at this age. African-American boys are the same. They tend to break the rules more often. They also...like I mentioned earlier...come to school with several social deficiencies. I think this is especial true when it comes to behavior. This is probably not politically correct to say, but it's true. Some, not all, some African-American boys' behavior is incredible. It's almost as if they have no training from home. What's even worse? When you call home, often their mothers...it's always the mother...will justify the kid's behavior. If you have a conference with the mom, it may get violent. 2 or 3 years ago I was physically attacked by a parent in a parent conference meeting that was in our assistant principal's office. The meeting was over how her sons' behavior was becoming more and more violent...go figure. Before she attacked me, she had become verbally...she was cussing and ranting and raving...all of this, by the way, was in front of her son. If he sees her act that way, I have to assume he thought it was ok. This is what I'm talking about. You just don't see this kind of behavior from our White families. Have you? Well, I know this is not popular. I'm not supposed to say this...but it is true. I could tell a number of stories, none of which are about Hispanic families, White families, Asian families...why is this? African-American families should be held to the same standard as everyone else. They're not. There is this fear that if you do, you'll be tagged a racist. No, I'm just honest.

Interviewer: Ok, I understand. I'm providing you with another list. Please check the categories you feel you have the greatest level of competence?

Special Education Assessment Practices/Procedures ✓

Special Education Referral Process ✓

Student-Centered Instruction ✓

Cultural Awareness

Intervention Strategies

Disability Awareness

Interviewer: Ok, I see you checked Special Education Assessment Practices and Procedures, Special Education Referral Process, and Student-Centered Instruction. What is your understanding of the Special Education Assessment Practices and Procedures?

The assessment process I know involves testing...this is my point. I can't send anyone to special education; they have to be tested and evaluated. I only refer...

Interviewer: Ok, what is your understanding of the special education referral process?

Well, like I said, the process is me referring a student that is struggling in class. This is usually done when I've attempted several interventions.

Interviewer: What is your understating of student-centered instruction?

Student-centered instruction involves instruction that is relevant to the student. We keep the students' needs in focus rather than our own.

Interviewer: Ok, I'm going to change the line of questioning a little bit. How do you perceive African-American boys differently from other students in your classroom?

How do I perceive African-American boys differently... Well, I know that many African-American boys have difficulty in our schools. This is a problem. But you asked how I perceive them differently. Well, I feel sorry for them. They are disadvantaged...some of them...many of them...but I think some of this is preventable.

Interviewer: How?

It starts with the parents. We, as a society, make too many excuses for African-Americans...the students. Like I said before, we need to stop this. No one wants to say what they're really thinking.

Interviewer: What are they thinking?

They're thinking enough is enough. Stop blaming the schools, stop blaming teachers for your inept parenting skills. I now that sounds harsh, but I mean, if you're going to come up to the school in a muumuu and house shoes, cuss out everyone you see, while your son is watching, making excuses for his behavior...and you ask me, how do I perceive them? We have some work to do. I would start by putting more...giving more responsibility to the parents. We tell them, your son is out of control and we know why, you're out of control. We tell them that if this continues, he no longer can attend this school. We are teachers, we teach. We don't have training in anger management; we're not counselors or psychiatrists. When did we decide that teachers...have to take so much crap? Why is it ok for a mother to cuss out anyone? I've grown so tired of this. I think it's a shame that we have to have a police officer that works at our school...an elementary school. What does that say about our society? So getting back to your question...how do I perceive African-Americans? My perceptions are based on experience...they sound harsh...but I can only tell you what I have seen. There is a general lack of respect for authority, teachers, education...but if I say this, I'm a racist...no I'm just telling what I've seen.

Interviewer: When you say there is a lack of respect for authority, what have you seen?

What I can say is there have been many times that I have seen kids not want to say the Pledge of Allegiance...or I guess they say it but they don't want to stand up straight...they'll bend over, laugh, or talk...they will smile or laugh when they're in trouble with a teacher or principal...here's something else. The reason our students wear uniforms is because of gangs...Black...or African-American gangs. Can you believe that? Apparently gangs are getting younger these days. (laughter). This is a poor school. We have poor students...Black, White, Hispanic, they're all poor. But you'd never find a White kid come to school wearing gang colors. That's not racist, that's a fact.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of cultural and race awareness and how it relates to education?

It's important that we treat all of our students the same, regardless of their race. I know I treat all of my kids the same. I think that it's important to value difference in cultures, but we don't just have to accept all difference as right.

Interviewer: I'm not sure I follow you.

Take the laughing in a teacher's face while they're trying to correct you. This is a cultural thing, but it doesn't make it right.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of the term colorblindness and how it relates to education?

As teachers we have to be colorblind. We have to leave our personal views and prejudices at home and teach the kids...the same...we don't...we can't...I mean we have to treat each kid with the respects and dignity they deserve. Look past all of the issues and teach them...that's our job.

Interviewer: How comfortable are you with teaching African-American boys?

I'm comfortable teaching anybody. I have to be, it's my job.

Interviewer: What obstacles do you encounter when teaching African-American boys?

Well, like I said, there is a behavior thing...respect...I think it's...like I said, a general lack of good home training...there's a lack of good examples. I mean, if your mom is going to disrespect the school, why shouldn't the kid? I'm really worried about some of the things I see. No one wants to deal with it because they're afraid of being tagged a racist. We just need to be open and honest, some kids are worse than others. Some kids don't know how to behave. Some kids do not care about their education. Most often these kids will be...Have I had a misbehaving White kid? Yes. A Hispanic kid? Absolutely. An Asian, never (laughter). But more times than not, the kids that lack basic social norms are Black kids. This makes it tough in the classroom. You spend all of your time trying to correct the behavior. This isn't right. The other kids suffer. It takes time away from their education. Families should catch on to this and start suing the district. Sue the districts for allowing students to remain in the classroom that have little to no social skills. If they started doing that, I guarantee you there'd be a change.

Interviewer: What types of strategies do you implement to assist African-American boys in their educational endeavors?

What kind of strategies?

Interviewer: Yes.

I guess I don't. I mean the strategies that work for all students work for them too. I think one of the best things I can do for these kids is show them that I'm going to treat them like everyone else. I mean, in the work place, are we going to tell Black workers how to do something differently than White workers? Are we going to help them in different ways? They'd call us racist if we did. No...I don't do anything differently from one student to the next. I think that is what we have to keep in mind. We have to think how the workplace works. I know they're young. I know it will be several years before they enter the work force, but isn't that the reason we educate them? Aren't we trying to get them to a point of employability? If we're constantly creating strategies that just work for them, how will that work for them in the workplace?

Interviewer: You may have already answered this question, but I'm going to ask it in a slightly different way. What types of strategies do you implement to assist African-American boys who are struggling in your classroom?

Well, here again, the strategies that I use for any struggling student are the same. I don't say, "Oh, here's a strategy that only works for my Black boys." I sure would like to see that. What does a Black boy strategy look like? I think this ties into what I was saying earlier. We have to stop treating these kids differently. That has been going on for way too long. We need to start treating them the same...have the same expectations...the same strategies...I don't know...everything...treat them the same, that will correct most of the problem.

Interviewer: And when you say "correct most of the problem," what specifically are you referring to?

Everything. Why are you doing this research? Why is there an achievement gap? Why are there...you know, theoretically...why are there too many Blacks in special education? The problem is we're making too many excuses for them...that's the problem I'm referring to. I mean is it too much to ask to have a student show respect? Is it too much to ask to have high academic and behavior expectations for your kids? Is it too much to ask to have a parent support you? This is a Black epidemic? White families are supportive. Hispanic families are supportive. Asian families are supportive. Black families...not all of the time...but often...question everything you're doing. I had a Black mother call me a redneck racist one time. I was calling her to her that her son was sent to the office for fighting. She asked me if the boy he was fighting was White or Black. I told her that I could not reveal that information. She said she knew it was a White boy because I wouldn't have sent them if it were two [redacted] fighting. Can you believe she said that? I asked her not to use that kind of language, and then she said, something

like, "Shut up you White beep. You're just a redneck racist." I hung up the phone. I and told my principal that I would never call that lady again. If there was something that we needed to call about, she would have to make the call. So, what was your question again? What's the problem?...that's the problem.

Interviewer: How do you teach boys and girls differently in your classroom?

Again, I don't think I do. I mean, yes, there are differences between the two. Boys tend to be more difficult, so you have to get on to them more often. You have to stay after them. Your behavior problems are 99 percent boy problems. The other 1 percent probably has something to do with boys. (laughter) Boys are just tougher. They're headstrong. I view them like an untamed horse. You have to tame them to a point that is manageable in the classroom. Some teachers haven't mastered this ability. I think they try to be friends with their students. That's setting yourself up for heartache and trouble. I, on the other hand, view them as...well...I need to tame you, then I can teach you.

Interviewer: What obstacles do you encounter when teaching boys as opposed to girls?

Behavior. Don't get me wrong, not all boys are bad. They're just worse than girls. Usually by Christmas I have them under control though. (laughter)...most of the time...not always. If my boys acted like my girls, there wouldn't be any behavior problems. behavior is getting worse and worse. I know that's what all teachers say...teachers always complain about their kid's behavior. It is a problem though...behavior. I really don't know where we're going with this. I would hate to see a classroom in American in...let's say 15 or 20 years. I'm afraid to think...so yes, my biggest obstacle with boys is behavior.

Interviewer: Ok, again I'm going to change the line of questions a little bit. The next few questions will be related to training. What diversity and or multicultural training have you received either in pre-service training or professional development to enhance your understanding regarding the educational needs of African-American boys?

I haven't received any training. But please understand, I think this is part of the problem. Why should there be different training for African-American boys? I know I've said this...I don't mean to beat a dead horse here but I really do think we need to get away for this line of thinking. Lets treat our kids the same. I've received training on the best practices for students...not for African-American boys. I mean, can you think of training that would help me relate better to Black boys that wouldn't help me relate to any kid in my class? If there's anything you're going to get from this interview is that I want us to start treating our kids the same. If we continue down this road, I really think issues like the gap and the overrepresentation problem will continue.

Interviewer: Ok...that brings us to our conclusion. Thank you for your time.

Interviewee: P4
Degree Level: Master's degree (Accounting)
School: [REDACTED]
Grade Level: Pre-Kindergarten through 8th
Experience: 34 years
Date: September 18, 2013
Time: 5:30
Place: Cooperative Behavior Center

African American **13%**
Hispanic **29%**
White **44%**
Status: Exemplary, Met AYP

Interviewer: Let's start with you just telling me something about yourself.

Ok, I'm not sure what you're wanting here but obviously I'm a teacher. I have taught 10 different grades. I'm currently teaching kindergarten; I've been teaching for 34 years...I love it. Hmm...what else do you want to know?

Interviewer: Why did you become a teacher?

Hmm...well...the honest answer is I wanted the time off. (laughter) When I got out of college I started working with an accounting firm...I loved the job but I was working around the clock and never got to take time off. I worked there for 5 years and probably only took 12 to 15 days off the entire time. I made good money, but it just wasn't worth it. After my first 4 years at the firm I started looking around for other jobs, and teaching came to mind. Being able to have your summers off seemed like an unbelievable dream. So that was the initial attraction. I do love to teach. I love the students. They're so fun to watch. When you see them learn it's like witnessing a small miracle. I get to see the miracle every day.

Interviewer: What do you like best about teaching?

Definitely the students; they are so incredible.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about education or your job, what would that be?

That's a really good question. I'm not sure...there are always things that bother you...but I don't think that I would change much. I work for a nice school and district. We have a really good principal. I have heard horrible stories from other teachers from other schools and districts. I think most of it comes down to your principal.

Interviewer: Ok, what do you know about the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

Not too much. I know that there are too many African-American boys in special education. Our school is a little less than 20 percent African-American, so this is not a problem for us. Well, I shouldn't say that. I really don't know to be honest. But I know that our African-American population in special education is around 30 percent, well, at least that is what I was recently told. So I guess we're a little overrepresented...not sure.

Interviewer: Do you know the approximate percentages of those are boys?

No I don't. I can say that most of the African-American students in special education are boys; but I can't give you a percentage.

Interviewer: You mentioned previously that that there are too many African-American boys in special education, just not at your school. Regarding phenomenon, what do you think causes overrepresentation?

There must be several reasons. I have heard that the testing can be bias. I believe that. I remember a college professor giving us a test on Black Vernacular English. We all failed miserably. I think this could be true for African-Americans. I know that the culture in which schools create...I think that's what I mean...are not conducive to other cultures.

Interviewer: I'm not sure I know what you mean.

One of the more interesting things about elementary teachers is that we're all White women. Obviously this is a gross exaggeration, but you get my point. Now understand, I don't think this is done on purpose. I don't think principals are only hiring White female teachers just because. I think that this has always been an enticing job for women who graduate from college....historically speaking. This is one of only a hand full of jobs that is conducive to family life. What's happening now is our students are changing. When I first started teaching I worked at another elementary school in the same district. When I started teaching the student population was approximately 80 to 85 percent White. The African-American population was at about 10 percent and the Hispanic population was at around 5 or so. Now, the school where I work, which is basically the same community, is approximately 30 percent Hispanic, 20 percent African-American and 50 percent White. That's a huge change in a short amount of time. The problem is our teachers haven't changed. I can't give you any specific percentages regarding the teachers, but I'd guess that 80 to 90 percent of our teachers are White. We have wonderful teachers. They all work hard and love their students. But, this demographic difference can't be ideal for our students.

Interviewer: So you think the teacher and student demographics should be similar.

Yea, but I think it's going to be really difficult to get half of your teaching staff as males. I don't think men are too interested in teaching elementary. I don't think that the demographics will ever be similar. But I do think you have to work on the racial demographics. I've mentioned this to other teachers and their not too keen on the idea. The thought is that we'd be fired. I don't think that's what would happen. What you have to do is...when you have a new opening for a position; you should look for a teacher that is more like our student population, or something. Half of our student pop is minority.

Interviewer: When you say that other teachers are not too keen on the idea to hire non-White teachers, what do you mean?

Yea...ok...that didn't sound right, did it? I think there is this assumption that if you are trying to hire more minority teachers that means that you're firing White teachers. I don't think that so...when teachers retire or move or whatever, you try to replace them with teachers that match our student body. I think that's only fair.

Interviewer: Ok, here is a list, check the categories that you feel have the greatest impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education.

Gender Bias ✓
Racism/Discrimination ✓
Cultural Bias ✓
Special Education Referral/Assessment Practices ✓
Teacher Training Deficiency ✓
Biased Disciplinary Practices ✓
Achievement Gap ✓
Other (Explain)

Is it ok if I just tell you?

Interviewer: Sure.

It seems like all of them would have some impact on the overrepresentation problem. I think the gender bias thing is just natural. Now I don't think it's done on purpose, but there has to be a bias between female teachers and boys. What I see all of the time, or I guess what I hear all of the time is teachers saying I wish so and so was like so and so. The first so and so is usually a boy and the second so and so is usually a girl. Actually, I don't know that I've actually heard this, but things like this. I think I've fallen in this trap before. The girls usually are perfect or more...what I'm I trying to say? The girls...act the way you want your students to act...well, most of the time. Boys are rowdy and ruff. Both need attention, but boys tend to like the attention they get after doing some wrong. Girls like getting attention for doing something right. I guess that's the difference. I always like having boys in my class; they're the ones that make the day interesting. (laughter) The girls make it rewarding.

Interviewer: How does racism and discrimination impact the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

Well, unfortunately as in our society, there are racists in education that will discriminate against minority children. This is hard to see...I don't know that I have ever witnessed a teacher discriminate against a student. I have heard

discriminatory remarks, but that's it. If you discriminate against a student, it could be your job. I think though there are ways minority students that are discriminated against. Like, take for example, testing. Why do we require our ESL students to take state assessment tests? I think that's just wrong. Why do we allow an achievement gap to exist? I think this is wrong too. Why don't we hire more minority teachers? That's wrong.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you've heard discriminatory remarks about minority students, can you give me examples?

What you will hear most often is...and this isn't all the time...but...you'll hear that certain students are lazy. This is usually Hispanic or African-American students. You'll also here a teacher rave on and on about their Asian students or Middle Eastern students. "They know how to work." I guess...well...I must admit that it is difficult at times to reach certain students. I have had trouble getting through to a White student, but most often it will be...you know...you'll have trouble with a student that is in a minority group. That's why I think the cards are stacked against them. Can you imagine if you had a school that all the teachers were Hispanic...or they were African-American? Can you imagine if the students were predominately White? Then could you imagine half of these students having trouble in class? How fast do you think those teachers would be fired? That's what's happening with us. I'd say about half of our minority students struggle academically. One way you could help them is by hiring teachers they can relate to ...maybe even some that actually live in their community. That's another problem, the teachers that work in my school, don't live anywhere close to the school Can you imagine how teachers would become completely vested in the school if they actually lived in the community?

Interviewer: Here is another list of categories, can you check the ones that you feel you have the greatest level of competence.

Special Education Assessment Practices/Procedures

Special Education Referral Process

Student-Centered Instruction ✓

Cultural Awareness

Intervention Strategies ✓

Disability Awareness

I hate to admit this but I don't feel comfortable with the special education process at all. We have been told different things at different times...special education is an enigma to me...I..I try to stay as far away for the special ed. thing as possible.

Interviewer: Was there an RtI process followed?

What? No.

Interviewer: So there was not response to intervention process that was followed before the student was referred to special education.

no...when I referred the student to special education, they may have offered him some interventions then.

Interviewer: Ok, I just want to make sure I understand the process. The student was referred to special education before interventions were offered to the student?

Yes.

Interviewer: Is the student currently receiving any interventions?

No, he's not. It is my understanding that since he tested well, special education modifications could not be offered.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of student-centered instruction?

Student-center instruction relates to our need as teachers to center or focus our instruction around the instructional needs, social needs, and so on...the needs of the student. How I try to accomplish this is by making everything...well, trying to make everything culturally relevant. This was easier to do I think when I taught 3rd grade. In kindergarten, you just teach the basics. It also has to be...the instruction has to be presented in a way that is interesting and relevant; germane to the children. In other words, you present a math problem in the form of money or sports. For boys, if you present a math problem using sports, they're always interested. For girls, they're usually interested regardless.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of cultural and race awareness and how it relates to education?

We need to be aware of the differences of our children. They all come to school with their best. We need to see that. Believe that. And be willing to work with that. I think most teachers do. Yes, from time to time, you'll get a teacher who just doesn't like children, or particular kinds of children. It's pretty easy to weed these out quickly. Most teachers and administrators love children regardless of color or whatever.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of intervention strategies and how it relates to the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

Certain intervention strategies work for certain students, but not for others...and vice versa. It's important that you find that works for your students. I know as teachers we tend to get stuck in ruts all of the time. We do what we have in the past because it's worked in the past. Like I said earlier, our students are changing, so we must change. I think this relates to the disproportional issue because some teachers will not implement the strategies that work best for their African-American boys. I don't think this is some like, "I'm not going to do it because it's for an African-American boy" issue. Like I said, I think it's because teachers are creatures of habit. And because of this, African-American students may struggle.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of disability awareness and how it relates to the overrepresentation phenomenon?

As teachers we must be aware of the learning and behavioral disabilities of our students...potentially any way. I must admit this is not strength of mine. I think most teachers...general ed. teachers are afraid of special ed. in general. We hear so often that if we don't do the right thing it could be our job. I think there is this feeling that you pass special ed. students...we're too afraid not to. Disabilities are strange...I think that's the way most gen. ed. teachers view them...I think as a society that we over diagnose. Take for example you average student that has a hard time focusing; he's ADD. If he can't sit down, he's ADHD. I know this probably isn't too popular, but I'm not sure I agree. And if I did agree, who cares if you're ADD? How does that relate to life? An employer won't care. I know we're not overly concerned about employability right now, but the learned helplessness is hard to break once a diagnosed crutch is applied.

Interviewer: How do you perceive African-American boys differently from other students in your classroom?

Differently...well, the boys that I...the African-American boys that I work with are primarily poor. When a student comes from a poor family...or from a low socio-economic level usually...or...what I mean is...often there are academic hardships. I feel like I'm not answering your questions. What I'm trying to say is that low socio-economic students often struggle in school. So I guess I don't think of African-American boys differently, I guess I just think of poor students differently. Now, I will do anything for these children. I'm just stating fact. What we need to do is find a way to equal the playing field. The gap I see is not necessarily between White and African-American or any other racial group. It's between the rich (laughter)...well, there aren't any rich where I work...the gap is between the poor and the middle...is I guess what I'm trying to say.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of the term colorblindness and how it relates to education?

Colorblindness is what every teacher should aspire to be. Don't be afraid to teach students that are different from you. Love all your children. Teach them to love. Teach them to tolerate difference. I think teachers do a pretty good job with this. I do think that we, as a society, are way too concerned about color. I do this too. I describe someone by saying "you know, the African-American girl with short hair." Why is it so important to do that? We all do it and it drives me crazy.

Interviewer: How does cultural and race bias affect the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

It's there...I mean there is definitely cultural and racial bias in schools. This has to have an effect to the problem. Earlier I mentioned that there is a teacher culture that is different from our student culture. If a student does not feel comfortable in that culture and I would guess that most minority students wouldn't, it has to cause them problems. These problems would manifest into academic trouble and maybe behavior problems. I don't want to beat a dead horse but I think the easiest way correct this problem is by changing the teacher culture; hiring teachers that are similar to the students.

Interviewer: How comfortable are you with teaching African-American boys?

I guess I've never really thought about it. On one hand I'd say that I'm very comfortable teaching any student. I think most teachers are. I mean, at the beginning of the year, I don't think, "Oh my gosh, I have 6 African-American students in my class." I don't really care. They're children, and I love them all the same. I will teach them all the same. The student's race has no relevance to me. But, I would like to know how to relate better to my minority students, for the most part, it has been trial and error. You try something, and if it works, you use it again. If it doesn't, you leave it forever. My concern is, what if there are ways to communicate, teach, relate, whatever, and I'm not doing it because I just don't know about it. That's frustrating. We need a better background or training. You know, that may be the issue all together. If we were trained on how to teach these students...minority students...if there is a better way, that might take care of the representation issue.

Interviewer: What obstacles do you encounter when teaching African-American boys?

Well, I think there are a few. First, African-American boys often come to school behind their peers. Well, actually, most Hispanic children come the same way. I'm really not sure what's causing this. At first I just thought it was a cultural thing; White parents take more interest in education than do some minority families. I no longer believe that, and can't actually believe I ever did...but it seemed to make sense at the time. I still think it's a cultural thing, but I know all of the families think education is important...I just think there is a mismatch or something. When they come to school, it might be the first time they've really been exposed to a different culture. Shoot, maybe it's the first time they've been exposed to White folks. (laughter) Whatever the case, I just don't think they're comfortable. How much can you learn if you're not comfortable? This is a huge hurdle. Second, you'll often find a lack of parental support. Now, I'm not saying this for all African-American families, but with a lot. The best way I think I could describe it is a general lack of confidence and trust. The lack of confidence is seen when you have a meeting and there is a barrage of questions that usually go something like, "Why?" –you feel in the blank. "Why are you still having the children nap?" "Why are you doing math in the afternoon?" Why is little Johnnie not getting the highest academic and behavior marks?" White families usually ask how they can support you. What can they do to help. "Is there anything we can do to support your lessons?" The trust, or lack thereof, is demonstrated when you try to make apply constructive criticism. This is rarely taken well...I don't understand that. I mean I have to be objective. I have to give them the good and the bad. I don't think they trust that I'm doing this. And third, we need more training. I think it's a little funny that we're always training, we continue to have an achievement gap, our student body continues to change, yet we're never training on the best instructional practices for our minority students. That's funny, I think.

Interviewer: What types of strategies do you implement to assist African-American boys in their educational endeavors?

I don't know that I have any strategies that I specifically use for only African-American students. I probably should...no I should, but I don't. I would like some help with this though. I'm open to ideas. It would be nice if we had at least one African-American teacher. That way we could use her as a sounding board, go to her for ideas and suggestions. This has got to be something we do in the future.

Interviewer: What effect does gender difference between teachers and students have on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

I think this causes a huge effect. I think I mentioned this before, but we need to hire more male teachers. There is no doubt that boys respond to men better than they do women. No, don't get me wrong, I think women have been doing a wonderful job for many years teaching boys in school. But, you can see a boys demeanor, attitude...everything change when a man enters the room. I think especially for our students, many of whom are living without their fathers...they need a male figure in their life. Someone they can look up to and aspire to be. Our kids need interaction with male figures every day. These boys may not have interaction with adult males all day. We have to do something to change that. So, I think I got a little away from your questions, but, yes, I think gender difference does have an effect on the problem...um... you know, the disproportional problem.

Interviewer: How do you teach boys and girls differently in your classroom?

Most of the time I teach everyone the same. Boys will often need more direction and structure. Girls usually do exactly what you tell them, at the time you tell them. Boys seem to be more distracted. Most of the boys have good intention. They just have way too much energy. (laughter) No really it's true...they need more attention. If you're going to have an effective learning environment, you have to give them more attention.

Interviewer: What obstacles do you encounter when teaching boys as opposed to girls?

Well, like I said, the behavior....the attention. Boys aren't worse than girls or anything like that, they just need more...more attention...more direction...more everything. (laughter) You know. (laughter)

Interviewer: What diversity or multicultural training have you received pre-service and or professional development to enhance your understanding regarding the educational needs of African-American boys?

In short, I think I may have taken a multicultural educational class in college, but that was eons ago. As for professional development, there has been any. I think I said this before, but I would definitely be open to being trained. We need training for our African-American and Hispanics students. These are basically the children that we are teaching.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time.

Thanks you...I hope I helped.

Interviewer: You did...thank you.

Interviewee: P5
Degree Level: Bachelor's degree (Elementary Education)
School: [REDACTED]
Grade Level: K through 5th
Experience: 43
Date: September 21, 2013
Time: 10:30
Place: home

African American 49%
Hispanic 45%
White <1%
Status: Recognized, Met AYP

Interviewer: Let's start out with you telling me a little about yourself.

Ok, well, I'll keep it about teaching. I've been teaching for 42 years...well, I guess almost 43 years. It's been a fun and interesting ride. I think I've taught every elementary grade now; I'm currently teaching 1st grade; I like kindergarten the best, I think. It's fun teaching the little ones. I was originally a special education teacher....self-contained...I didn't like the paperwork (laughter). Every year they'd add another form that had to be completed...at least...yet they'd never take anything away. It got ridiculous. I sometimes wonder if our state senators and TEA know what we're doing. I wonder if they know how many hours are spent doing paperwork, and not actually teaching? So...as you can see, I didn't like that. My first teaching assignment after special ed. was 1st graders. That was interesting. I was at a school that was almost entirely Hispanic. Most of my children didn't speak English. So, here I was teaching Spanish speakers lessons in English....I don't think they understood a word I was saying until after Christmas....so, your...ok...what was I saying?

Interviewer: Well, I just asked you to tell me a little about yourself.

Right. Ok, I tend to do that from time to time. Well, what else do you want to know?

Interviewer: What do you enjoy most about teaching?

I really enjoy the students. They can make you laugh, they can make you cry, they can make your day. Sure, they can be difficult, but that's the reason we get paid to do this job, right? I mean, if it was fun every day, they wouldn't have to pay us, right? I enjoy the fact that you can come to work a little down for whatever reason, and then you see their smiling faces. Seeing them learn is incredible. To this day I get this incredible feeling that is overwhelming when I see firsthand a student learn something new. That's what I love the most.

Interviewer: What don't you like about teaching?

A lot. (laughter) No, I'm just kidding. Well, let's see...I don't like all of the changes. You know, special education is a good example. They keep piling on the work, but for what? So the district won't get sued, I think. The students are changing too. My school is about 40 percent White. When I got here it was about 80 to 90 percent white. This isn't a problem unless you look at how this changes your students. Our students lack basic social and behavior skills. They come to kindergarten not knowing any letters or numbers. You wouldn't have seen this 15 or 20 years ago. When I first started teaching we hardly ever had behavior problems. Maybe one or two students were difficult, but most of the students were great, did what they were supposed to do...learned. Now we have behavior problems on a daily basis. I hate this. I hate that we have to spend so much time teaching students social skills. Parents expect that. Here's the problem, though, if they couldn't teach them, how are we going to? This change occurred when the students' demographics started to change. I know this doesn't sound good. It sounds like I don't like minorities...no...I'm telling you what I've seen. White families tend to put greater importance in their children's rearing and education. No one likes to talk about this. What we prefer to say is Hispanic families don't have the appropriate resources to raise their children, or Black families don't have the money to educate their children. Education is free in this country, right? If a family can't pay for breakfast or lunch, we pay for that. We educate their children for free. What resources are we talking about... what means? I know, none of this is popular, but it is true. We need to stop giving minority families excuses for failure. It's an accountability issue...really. You know, that reminds me, I remember when I was in college I had a professor say that the education of a child can be viewed like a table. For a table to stand properly, you need four legs. Each leg represents a person or group's responsibilities.

One leg represents the teacher and school. Another leg represents the community. The remaining legs represent the student and the parent. Here's the problem. More and more responsibility has been delegated to the educators, and less and less has been expected from the students and parents. **It should start with the student and parents.**

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about education, what would it be?

That. I'd put the responsibility back square in the lap of parents...and students. Yes, **as teachers we should accept the responsibility of teaching, but that's where our responsibility ends. We're not responsible for a student not knowing how to act in class. We're not responsible for them failing...** we're responsible for teaching. I'm tired of the questions, "Why is my son failing?" He's failing because...well, because he's failing. **He needs to stay after school. He needs a tutor after school. He needs to work harder. He needs support...academically from other areas other than the school.** I will teach him from 8:15 to 3:15. I will come in early, I will stay late, I will teach him. But, in the end, he needs more; and that's not my fault. That's not my responsibility. Now, this isn't popular either. We're not supposed to say things like this...educators. But it's the truth. I wish we'd stop trying so desperately to be PC. We need to start being real...truthful...honest...the rest is just people saying what they think they have to to not rock the boat...to keep their job.

Interviewer: Ok, let's transition to questions concerning the research specifically. What do you know about the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

This is an issue that has come up a few times in our district. What's interesting is currently, or I should say a couple of years ago I know we were over represented in Asians or something in special education. This was because we had a large Asian family in the district and all of their children were in special education, or something like that. I have a lot of mixed emotions and opinions about this issue. I really don't know where to start. I guess that's why I volunteered for the study. I know that most educators don't believe in this. Take for example the Asian issue. Most Asians, general speaking, are outstanding students. To say that we're overrepresented in this pop. in special education demonstrates a problem. The problem is not that we have too many Asians in special education, the problem is how we're counting these students. How many educators in this country can you convince that there are too many Asians in special education? None. We have to get away from counting how many of any group is in special education. We need to look at the number of students that need special education and compare it to the number of students in special education that don't need it. That's where you could find a problem. Do I believe there are students referred to special education and in special education that don't need it? Absolutely. But say that just because we have, for example, 15 percent of our student body is African American and 25 percent of our special education pop. is African American, then we must have a disproportional problem is looking at the issue in the wrong way. **We have to come up with a way to determine, an objective way to determine, who needs special ed. and who does not.** I mean, what if, hypothetically, we found that African-American students need special education more often than let's say Asian students, and we could prove this empirically, then, I think, we could definitively determine that this overrepresentation issue is really not an issue at all. **What I'd advocate for is better testing...objective testing that could accurately determine the need for special education.** You can't tell me that there's not a way to do this. With all of the testing that's done in education and all of the technology that is at our disposal, there has to be a way to do this.

Interviewer: Ok, from the categories provided, tell me the ones that you feel have the greatest impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education.

I don't mean to be difficult, but I'd have to choose 'Other.' The categories you've provided assume that there is an overrepresentation problem, I'm not completely certain there is a problem. Now, I'm not saying there's not a problem either...I just don't know. I think we're looking at this all there wrong way. If I said, for example, that it was racism that was causing the problem that would be implying two things. Number one, it would imply that I've witnessed racism, which I have not. Two, it would imply that I think there is a problem, which, like I said, I'm just not sure there is. Also, if there is a problem in the number of African Americans in special ed. I wouldn't assume that it is something that is caused by the teacher. What I'm saying is, in the categories you've provided there is an assumption that the problem is the teacher, of schools, or the system, whatever...what if the problem is something else? What if the problem lies with the student?...or the parent? What if their causing the problem of overrepresentation? That would be interesting, no? Have you thought of that? Take for example a student, let's call him "Jim." Jim's cultural background is Martian. Ok? In Jim's culture there is no significance placed on education at all. Jim turns five and goes to school for the first time. Oh yea, and let's also say that Martian culture is different from the mainstream culture. **Let's say in Martian culture it is culturally accepted and appropriate for you to...oh, I**

don't know, close your eyes when you introduce yourself, instead of shaking hands. Ok, now, they go to school for the first time...how successful...or I guess, what are the chances of this student...Jim...being successful in school? I know this is an extreme example, but the truth is there somewhere. Yes, students that come from families that place little to no importance in education can be good, or even exceptional, students. But, what are the chances? I think we can both agree that Jim will have less of a chance for academic and behavioral success than a student that comes from a family that values education, and adheres to more culturally acceptable behaviors. Now I'm not trying to compare African Americans to Martians. What I'm trying to do is illustrate what we're dealing with in schools. Maybe the problem isn't a disproportion problem in special education. Maybe the problem is how students enter school for the first time. What academic, cultural or experiential deficiencies exist?

Interviewer: Here is a list of categories, please tell me the ones that you feel you have the greatest level of competence.

Special Education Assessment Practices/Procedures ✓

Special Education Referral Process ✓

Student-Centered Instruction ✓

Cultural Awareness ✓

Intervention Strategies ✓

Disability Awareness ✓

I think my level of competence is relatively high in each category.

Interviewer: Can you tell me your understanding of the special education assessment practices and procedures?

Yes...ok...I don't think you like my answers so far.

Interviewer: Why do you say that?

I don't know. I just think that I may be upsetting you?

Interviewer: Why?

Because I don't think I'm giving you the answers that you wanted.

Interviewer: Why?

I don't know. (laughter) Am I?

As long as you believe your responses to be accurate and truthful, you're giving me exactly what I want. This is research. What I discover in this research is not necessarily predictable. I will report what I discover in this research. There are no right or wrong answers...just your perceptions...your truth...your reality. Ok...are you sure? Ok, what was your question again?

Interviewer: Ok, what I asked is...taking one category at a time....tell me your understanding of the special education assessment practices and procedures?

Ok...let's say our student....what did I name him...

Interviewer: Jim?

Right (laughter)...ok, Jim is in my class and is struggling to keep up with his peers. Jim is not unlike 10 to 20 percent of his peers, by the way. I offer Jim and his struggling peers some interventions that are suppose to help Jim be more successful in class. If Jim continues to struggling in class, I would then apply more intense interventions. Again, these interventions would be to help Jim be successful. If Jim is still not demonstrating success, he would then be referred to Tier 3 (RtI). At this point, Jim would be required to attend pull-out sessions on a daily basis aimed at giving him the supports that he needs to be successful with his peers. Usually an SST team is involved and will monitor Jim's success or lack thereof. The team will suggest certain interventions as well. If Jim is not successful with this level of intervention, he is referred for special ed. testing. The special ed. testing involves a lot of IQ and ability testing. There is a formula they use to determine whether or not a student's abilities match his or hers IQ. If the formula shows that Jim needs special ed., then an ARD (Annual Review and Dismissal meeting) is scheduled and Jim is place in some level of special ed.

Interviewer: Ok, what is your understanding of student centered instruction?

Student centered instruction relates to the need for us to...sorry...the need for educators to center the instruction around the student. To focus what we're teaching and the way we teach around the needs and preferences of the students...in a way that makes the lesson relevant, understandable, meaningful, and accessible. (laughter) Accessible...I think that's what I mean. Meaning that it is done in a way that the students prefer and can acquire at a more successful rate. We can't just stand at the front of the room and lecture. I don't think many elementary teachers ever did this, I think lecturing is more of a high school thing, but anyway, you see what I'm talking about. You don't want to just read a story or instruct a math lesson without making it relevant to your students. I remember I used to read *A Wrinkle in Time* to my students, I don't do that anymore. My kids used to just stare at me with a look on their face like, "What are you talking about?" Now I'll read something like *In the Time of Drums*, or something like that. In other words, the instruction is about them, their needs.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of cultural awareness?

I think it's very similar...my response will basically be the same. Cultural awareness is understanding the cultural background of your students, and creating instruction or I guess lesson plans that make the lessons more attractive to the cultures that are represented in your class. So, instead of reading *A Wrinkle in Time*, you read something like *In the Time of Drums*. I think this can be taken too far. I mean, how do you make a lesson culturally relevant for all of your students when your students are as culturally diverse as the UN? You can't. You pick and choose what culture you want to celebrate or...I'm thinking...parallel to the lesson. So, we celebrate Black history Month in February. We celebrate Hispanic culture in May. We try to celebrate other cultures throughout the year in different ways. But, you can't celebrate all cultures all of the time. I think too, you have to understand that this is American, and with that come certain traditions and culture. So, you can't expect that all cultures will get equal footing. That's impossible. We say the *Pledge of Allegiance*. Why? Because that is something that is important to this culture. It has to be to continue the legacy of this culture. This is something that is changing though. What I'm seeing more and more is...children not wanting to say or not having to say the Pledge...for religious, cultural, or personal reasons. Why do we...Why should we be ok with this? It's not ok; it's as simple as that. When can we get back to saying this is American, we're proud to be American, and we raise our children to feel the same way. That is not happening...or I should say, that is not happening with certain cultural groups in our schools.

Interviewer: Which cultural groups?

(laughter) I know what you want me to say. Let's just say this, our culture is in jeopardy. Not because other cultures are a part of our culture, it's because we allow our culture to be questioned...chastised. We say, "It's ok not to participate, we don't want to offend you." What about offending us. My son is a soldier and has done three tours in Afghanistan. You would not believe how far the U.S. Army goes not to offend the Afghan people. Yet we say, "It's ok to offend us." I don't get that. I love Hispanic culture, I love African culture, I love learning about different cultures, Asian, whatever...but we have to put our culture first. We have to. If we don't what will happen will happen to our culture? What will happen to us? I'm close to being a grandmother and I'm afraid for my soon-to-be-granddaughter. Is she going to have to learn Spanish to get a job? Will *The Pledge* be said in Spanish? I know you probably think I'm crazy, but I wouldn't be surprised if she has to say *The Pledge of Allegiance* to the Mexican flag one day. I know, you think I'm crazy. We'll see. Do you remember a few years ago there were several Mexican-Americans protesting a proposition in California, if I remember correctly? They were waving the Mexican flag. I know, I'm Chicken Little. Laugh at me now...this might be your only chance. (laughter)

Interviewer: Ok, what is your understanding of intervention strategies?

Ok, well. This pertains to special ed. students. Well, not necessarily...it pertains to students that are struggling. If a student is struggling academically, we offer strategies that we think might assist the students...might make them successful. For example, if there are difficulties in reading we might enlarge the font of the text, or offer a reading thing...a device that only allows the reader to see a few words at a time. With math we may try to boost the student's mathematical fluency with math drills or timed drills. With behavior we may give the student a place and time that they can cool-off when they're upset. There are millions of strategies that can be tried; it's usually a matter of getting to know the student, and through trial and error, figuring out what works best. I tend to use the same one over and over. This is not because I'm lazy or don't care, it's based on experience. I have found that some strategies work better than other for most of my struggling students. But, I should also say, I'm willing and ready to use whatever it takes to get my student to a level of success. I will usually ask for some help by an outside person,

another grade teacher, or special ed. teacher, if I'm seeing that the interventions that I'm offering are not working. The fun part of this is it's like a puzzle or an investigation. You're trying to figure out the answer; it's not always easy.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of disability awareness?

Disability awareness pertains to the...or better said...my ability to detect a learning disability quickly. I think I have a better working knowledge of the special ed. process and the ability to detect a learning disability than most teachers. Being a special education teacher...you know...previously...I have somewhat of an advantage over most. The problem I have with this is that disabilities, once ascribed are difficult to shed. This is a fact. Students will use their disability as an excuse. I was told many years ago that I was dyslexic. This empowered me. It gave me so much hope and understanding. I finally understood why I had such a hard time reading. But, I never used this label as a crutch. I would have never said, "Well, I can't do this because I'm dyslexic." Instead, I would think, "I'm going to do this in spite of the fact that I'm dyslexic." We do a poor job at teaching this...what would you call it? ...I don't know...pride...or resiliency...whatever. We tell our kids that there is something wrong with them, and because of that, they get a pass. Here's the responsibility thing again. We have to hold our students accountable. Period. Regardless of their shortcomings, disabilities, or whatever. Do you think their eventual employer will care that they're dyslexic. Are they going to modify their job? No, they're going to modify their paycheck. (laughter) Right? No, really. We have to get back to telling our students, "Yes, you have a disability, now work your butt off to overcome ...there are no excuses."

Interviewer: Ok, moving on a little, I'm going to change the question just a bit. The next question is how do you perceive African-American boys differently from other students in your classroom?

How do I perceive African-American boys differently? I don't. No, I don't. I think I perceive all of my students the same. They're children that need to learn. They have been sent to me to teach them. And, with the grace of god, I'll be able to. I think what happens is over time, usually by mid-Fall, students start showing who they are; academically and behaviorally. I don't know if I could say emphatically, this group of students demonstrates this type of behavior, so now I feel a certain way about them. Rather, what I know I do is allow the student, through their behaviors, to tell me who they are.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of cultural and race awareness and how it relates to education?

We should be aware of the cultures and races that are represented in our classrooms. This gets back to the idea that we need to make our lessons culturally relevant. We have to be able to change with our students. If they change, we must change. There are limits, I think, to this, however. I don't want to get back into this because I already have, but there are some things that we have to stick to...we say, "This is sacred...we will not change this." Fill in the blank. Our culture is important, is what I'm saying. Yes, our students' culture is relevant too. But since we are in this country, our culture must win out. Can our culture change? Absolutely. But not to the point of it becoming their culture. Does that make sense? If I lived in Russia, I'd expect to be immersed in the Russian culture. I'd go in understanding that Russian culture will be the most important culture in Russia. That's not so strange, right? What's so wrong about saying that? I can tell you that teachers don't want to say anything like this. They think they'll be fired. I think I'd be fired. That's crazy, right? There's nothing wrong with saying that we believe our culture is the best...we will teach our culture...the importance of our culture. We are open to new experience, being exposed to different cultures, but in the end our culture wins out. Period. I really don't think we're too far from having to teach our culture is wrong, other cultures are better. To be PC, you have to believe this already. That's crazy. Ok, now I'm worked up.

Interviewer: Would you like to take a break?

No...thank you...I'm fine.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of the term colorblindness and how it relates to education?

Colorblindness refers to our ability as educators to not see our students' color when they enter the classroom. We teach and treat all of our students the same. We do a good job of this. I have never seen a teacher treat a student of color badly due to the color of their skin. Teachers by nature love their students...would do anything for them. Colorblindness is just an occupational hazard that comes with the job.

Interviewer: How comfortable are you with teaching African-American boys?

As comfortable as I am teaching any other student. Look, I see all of the students the same. I treat them the same, I love them the same. What I think you're getting at is how this group of students...how they are discriminated against. It's just not there. I don't see it. I am comfortable teaching Black students. All of the teachers I have worked with are comfortable teaching Black students. I really don't think we even see their color until someone or something points it out. What I'm not comfortable with is teaching, or trying to teach, students that have no regard for me, the other students, or their own education. This is not an issue with Black students; this is an issue that you'll see in every racial group. I have had plenty of White students that have been complete disasters. I hate to say that, but they were raised by a parent or parents who just didn't care about them...didn't care about their education. This is horrible. The only love they get is when they come to school. This is our society. This is where we are. We are on the front lines of a battle that's taking place with our culture and our children. Most parents...no I shouldn't say that...many parents do give a damn.. They love the fact that we are responsible for their children for 7 to 9 hours a day. See you're seeing it all wrong. You think that because you've been told that there are too many Black boys in special educator, we must be discriminating against them; that's wrong. What we're saying is that these students more often need special education services. Why? Because they need it...that's it.

Interviewer: What obstacles do you encounter when teaching African-American boys?

Do you want the truth? What we see is Black students with families who either don't care or don't respect the system. Now, is that all Black families? Of course not. There are White families that are the same. Believe it or not, you'll see, from time to time, Asian families who don't care and or they don't support the school in any way. It's rare, but I have seen it. But, you'll often see a Black family...a student who has little regard for education or rules, or whatever. Here's the really crazy part, their parents are the same. If you call home they'll say, "Ok, I'll talk to him about this." They may even tell you they're going to beat the boy. But rarely do you see a difference in their behavior. Now, there are always anomalies. I had a mother a few years ago come up to the school while I was teaching and pulled up a chair right next to her son. She sat there for the rest of the day. Do you think that student acted up the rest of the day? Actually, after that day, he became one of my best students. but the problem is, you don't see this kind of commitment and support a lot of time from your Black families. So, you end up with a lot of Black boys getting into trouble...struggling in class...that's not my opinion, that's just fact.

Interviewer: What types of strategies do you implement to assist African-American students in their educational endeavors?

I don't know that I have any strategies that are just for my African-American students. Most good teaching strategies are good regardless of the color of a student's skin. Hmm...but to answer your question, I'm just trying to think...I guess I do a lot of re-teaching and peer work. I have found that these two strategies work well with all of the students. The first one, well, it's important for all students. There's always going to be something that was missed, I don't care how bright the students is. It's important for teachers, once there has been an assessment of some kind, to go back and teach what your students missed. Peer work is just a fun way for all students to learn. Teachers hate to admit it sometimes, but sometimes students learn better and faster from their peers.

Interviewer: What types of strategies do you implement to assist African-American boys that are academically struggling in your class?

I guess I'll answer this question the same way. I mean, I don't mean to be difficult. I just think that good teaching strategies work for all students. Right? I mean, take peer teaching, that negates the idea that a teacher is not teaching well. It allows the students to teach and the students to learn from their peers, whom they hear and trust more so than us. Right? I guess what I'm saying is that I don't think there are certain strategies that work best with African-American students. I just don't.

Interviewer: What effect do you think gender difference has on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

You're talking about my gender difference from the African-American boys, Right? Well, I'm sure there is something there. I mean, teachers hate to admit this but we find boys to be harder to teach. That doesn't mean that we do like boys or we don't want them in our class, it just means what I said, they're harder...for the most part, you have to earn a boys respect, it's rarely given. This isn't true for girls, they automatically trust you and respect you. Boys are what make school fun, though. So, yes, I think there's something there, I just don't know if I could articulate it or not.

Interviewer: How do you teach boys and girls differently in your classroom?

Boys take more attention. You have to give them more attention, generally. Girls usually don't require as much attention. Because of this, I think I tend to be more stern with the boys than I am with the girls. I know that's probably wrong, but it works. This keeps the behavior issues down to a minimum as well. Other than that, I can't think of any other differences really.

Interviewer: What obstacles do you encounter when teaching boys as opposed to girls?

Well, like I said, they require more attention. If you don't give them the attention they require, you'll regret it. I mean, I try to be equitable with my time, but that's just not realistic. Boys simply need more attention than girls do.

Interviewer: What diversity/multicultural training have you received (pre-service and/or professional development) to enhance your understanding about the educational needs of African-American boys?

I can't think of any training I've received for African-American boys...really.

Interviewer: Ok. Thank you so much for your time today.

Interviewee: P6
Degree Level: Masters (working on doctorate) (Elementary Education)
School: [REDACTED]
Grade Level: 3rd and 4th
Experience: 26 years
Date: September 28, 2013
Time: 10:00
Place: home

African American **16%**
Hispanic **34%**
White **37%**
Status: Recognized, Met AYP

Interviewer: Ok, let's start out with you telling me a little about yourself.

Ok, well, I teach at [REDACTED] Elementary school, and I have been there for 26 years. I've taught two grade levels, 3rd and 4th, and I was a special education teacher for 1 year. I have to be honest, I really didn't like special ed., there was too much paper work...too many ARD meetings. It just wasn't for me. I didn't feel like a teacher, I felt more like a paper-pusher...but anyway...I do really enjoy teaching. I love the kids

Interviewer: What do you enjoy most about teaching?

Definitely the kids. They're a lot of fun. I still get a kick out of seeing a student learn. It's an amazing process that I get to participate in everyday. There are good days and bad days, but most of the time it's just me and my students learning...it's fun.

Interviewer: What do you dislike the most about teaching?

Hmm, I really don't know. I really don't think there is anything that I can say that I dislike about teaching. Now, I've complained...teachers are the biggest complainers. We will find a way to complain about anything. But most of those complaints are short lived. They're short term complaints that really don't distract me from the love I have for teaching and my students. It's in my blood....teaching...my mom was a teacher, my dad taught for over 10 years. My grandmother was a teacher. I met my husband while teaching. My sister is a teacher. We're a family of teachers. So, no, I can't say that I have any serious complaints about teaching.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about teaching what would that be?

That's easy, the pay. (laughter) really, we should get paid more. I have a graduate degree, and have started working on my doctoral degree. When I complete it, I can only expect a minimal pay increase, unless I get into counseling or administration or something like that. I really don't have any interests in those things right now, maybe that will change, I don't know. I just really like teaching. I've been asked why I'm pursuing a doctoral degree...my answer is I love learning. I'm a lifelong learner. But what's bad about teaching is you really don't get a financial...I mean there's not a financial incentive for pursuing higher level degrees. This has to change. If we want our teachers to be lifelong learners and we want them to pursue higher level degrees, there should be incentives, financial incentives for doing that. Regardless, we need to be paid in a way that is competitive with the business world. That would create greater competition for teaching jobs...this would, I think, improve education overall.

Interviewer: Ok, I'm going to change the line of questions a bit, what can you tell me about the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education?

I know that there is...nationally speaking...a disproportional number of African-American boys in special education. I also know that there are a lot of theories out there that suggest different reasons why this disproportion exists. I don't know that I have seen this personally. I have referred African -American boys to special education, as well as White boys, Hispanic boys, girls too.

Interviewer: You mentioned that there are a lot of theories related to the overrepresentation phenomenon; do you know any of these theories?

Well, yes, I think that some have said that bias testing is a reason. I've also read that there is a cultural disconnect between African-American boys and teachers and schools. I'm guessing this is what your research is concerning.

The cultural disconnect between Black boys and White teachers, I think there's something there. I mean I see African-American boys...they seem a little disconnected from teachers and school. I think this can add to a lot of problems in schools. Let me also say, teachers are often disconnected from African-American boys; truthfully speaking. This should come at no surprise really. Most teachers are White and female. It should be no surprise that these teachers are not going to connect with African-American boys as well as let's say an African-American male teacher...which we need more of in education, especially elementary education. I am married to an African-American man. I think this puts me in a unique situation to speak on this issue. I can see the teachers' perspective, but I can also see the students'...the African-American students' perspective as well. I don't want to jump the gun here but if I may...

Interviewer: Absolutely.

Here's the issue....and it's not racism by the way...at least from my perspective. The problem is that we just don't have enough African-American teachers in education, especially elementary education. Most teachers are well meaning. Are there teachers that are racist or bigots, I'm sure there are, but they really can't affect education that much...I guess what I mean is if they attempt to use bigotry or racism in the classroom, they'll be out of a job; it's as simple as that. No, what the problem is teachers, more specifically White teachers, teaching in a way that is conducive to their history, their experience, and what worked for them and what works for people like them. This is not racism, this is common sense. The same thing would happen if you flipped the teacher and student demographics. What I mean is if you had a school where the teachers were mostly African-American females and the students were mostly African American, and then you had, let's say 15 percent of your student body was White. I believe you'd have an overrepresentation of White students, probably boys in special education. Right? Teachers are going to teach and act and expect what is normal for their culture, for their history, for what they know and what is comfortable to them. What we need to do is change the demographics of the teachers that teach elementary. We just need more African-American teachers; male and female; particularly male though.

Interviewer: I don't want to get too far off the interview protocol, but I think this question would be most appropriate to ask now. Why do you think there are so few African-American teachers in education; specifically elementary education?

That's a really good question, and one that I think hits at the heart of your research. I don't know if there is one answer to your question. I would assume that there are several. Let's see, one issue, and the one that I think is the biggest problem is that there is a lack of desire on the part of schools, school administrators, and districts to hire men as elementary teachers. Now, I'm not just talking about African-American men, I'm talking about men in general. I think there is some just cause to this lack of interest. There have been, recently speaking, men that have been arrested for molesting their students. I think there is this belief that female teachers are safer, and I tend to believe that as well. I think parents, mainly, want their children's teachers to be female, at least until middle school. So that's one problem. I think another issue is that there just aren't too many males, including African-American males that are interested in teaching elementary school. Since I have been a teacher, we've only had 4 male teachers. That's incredible if you think about it. 4? But when I talk to my husband about this, he tells me that men just don't think teaching elementary kids is very masculine at all. Actually, he uses the word 'manly.' So that's another problem. I think another problem is that African-American males are not really sought after; and they should be. You see districts actively pursue Hispanic teachers for specific reasons like ESL and bilingual classes. They should do the same thing for African-American male teachers. I mean do you really think there would be a disproportional number of African-American boys in special education if we had more African-American male teachers? No way. Think about this: what if we had our teacher demographics match our student demographics exactly. Do you think there would be a disproportional problem? Of course not. To eliminate this problem, we need to pursue African-American male teachers with the same energy and focus that we use in targeting Hispanic teachers.

Interviewer: Thank you. Here is another list. Please look at the categories. Please tell me which ones you feel have the greatest impact on the overrepresentation of African-American boys in special education.

Gender Bias ✓

Racism/Discrimination ✓

Cultural Bias ✓

Special Education Referral/Assessment Practices

Teacher Training Deficiency ✓

Biased Disciplinary Practices

Achievement Gap

Other (Explain)

Gender bias is certainly a problem. It's a problem when teachers are hired and it's a problem when you relate it to the difference in gender between a teacher and students. As much as I hate to admit it, our boys need more male teachers. (laughter) Now this is really hard for me to say, but men can handle boys better...most of the time. (laughter) Boys look up to men, that's no secret. Often boys don't respect female teachers...not in a bad way...they just don't, oh, I don't know, they don't, I guess, fear female teachers, at least not at first. Male teachers get that initial respect. Now, female teachers can earn boys' respect, but like I said it's earn...as opposed to getting...like the men do. Also, so many of our students really don't have good male role models. Often they live with their mothers, the father is nowhere to be seen, and the only male interaction they get is with their peers...that's just not enough. If you can find a way to get more males to teach, this would be a good way to fill that void.

Interviewer: What do you think about racism and discrimination?

You mean how it relates to the disproportional problem?

Interviewer: Right, I'm sorry. Yes, how does racism and discrimination affect the overrepresentation of African Americans in special education?

I don't think there is any doubt that they both play a part. We live in a discriminatory society; it's as simple as that. It's unfortunate but true. However, I really don't think you have a bunch of hardcore racists running around the halls of elementary schools, disguised as teachers. I think for the most part teachers love their students; that's the reason they teach. You don't get into this profession if you hate a certain group of children; that just wouldn't make sense. Besides, if the administration sniffed that out, the teacher would be gone. I do think that there are certain teachers that have low expectations for certain students. Actually, you see that a lot. You see teachers respond to ELLs and poor minority students in a way that is less than desirable when you're looking at the students' potential. Wait, I'm not sure that made sense. What I'm trying to say is that teachers often react negatively to certain students. It's not overt, and it's not like, "I don't like that kid because he's Black." Instead it's like, "That kid's Black so he is not going to be the smartest kid in the class." Now, I don't think this is a conscious decision on their part; it's subconscious. Based on experience this is a presumption that is made.

Interviewer: How have you seen this? How do you know this occurs?

I hear it most of the time; I don't see it. A teacher will say something like, "I have so and so in my class, and he's really going to struggle to keep up with whatever." This is a statement made before the fact. More often than not, statements like these will not be made about White students, they seem to always be made about Black students and Hispanic students and ELL students. I guess you could say that hearing things like this over time, you start to get an idea that certain teachers sell their students short from the get go.

Interviewer: How does cultural bias affect the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

This, I think, is the biggest problem. You see, I really don't think that teachers hate their students or dislike them...I just haven't seen the racist teacher. But, I do think teachers often get too comfortable with their own culture to the point of making students uncomfortable with theirs. I really don't think that there's anything inherently wrong with White culture. What's wrong is that we say, "Your culture is not welcome." That's a problem. We as educators, educating children from every background imaginable, have to be tolerant of our students' cultures, the things that are important to them. We've done this way too long. So, if you're going to ask what the problem is, why are so many minorities in special education, I'd have to say that this is the biggest contributor. We make our kids uncomfortable with their own background, this is wrong. You know, when you bring this up to teachers, it's not that they disagree with the idea that this is wrong...that making students uncomfortable with their own background is wrong, it's just that they don't see it. They don't think it's happening. They don't think they're a part of the problem.

Interviewer: Teachers don't believe that they are creating or sustaining an environment that is counter to their students' cultures and backgrounds?

Right.

Interviewer: How do you think the overrepresentation phenomenon is affected by special education referral and assessment practices?

I guess I don't. I mean, the process...special education is a little confusing, or should I say complex. I think I have a good handhold on it, but I went to school for it, and it's still a little confusing to me. This can be a problem as it may not...let's see...I guess what I'm trying to say is that unless the process is understood completely by everyone concerned, mistakes can occur. You know, I guess I really don't see how the process contributes to the problem. I don't mean to go back on what I just said, but I think the process is pretty objective...it's thorough. It is confusing, but it is...I don't know, comprehensive, yes, that's what I was trying to say. The process is very comprehensive. There's testing involved, observations, interventions, a bunch of stuff (laughter) all of it is centered on whether or not Johnny belongs in special ed. I just don't see too many students falling through the cracks. That was confusing right?

Interviewer: I think I understood what you were saying. The process is thorough, but still a little confusing to most.

Correct.

Interviewer: How does teacher training, or the lack of training, affect the overrepresentation phenomenon?

You know, I'm glad you're bringing this up. When it comes to minority children, we just simply don't have the tools to teach them. Yes, we're good teachers, and good teachers find a way. But finding a way is different from knowing what the best way is. I mean hell, I could drive to New York on my way to California, but that wouldn't be the best way. I'd rather just drive straight to California. Here's the problem. Teach us how to drive to California without driving to New York first, you know? This is where, I think, there is a little institutional discrimination. I mean, why aren't we getting the training we need to teach minority students. The percentage of minority students in the state of Texas is only going to increase over the next several years, give us the tools we need to effectively instruct these students. So yes, we lack the training and this could be a contributor. How could it not?

Interviewer: How does biased disciplinary practices affect the overrepresentation phenomenon?

I don't think there are biased disciplinary practices...or should say I haven't seen that. I've seen the statistics and read the articles and books that report on the unfair disciplinary practices of districts, schools, and administrators handing out unequal disciplinary consequences. Now, don't get me wrong, I know this occurs, and continues to occur. What I'm saying is I haven't personally seen this. At our school a White boy is just as likely to be suspended as a Black boy, he's just as likely to get any type of punishment as any other. So, although I believe unfair practices continue, I haven't personally witnessed it, and don't think it's a contributing factor at our school.

Interviewer: Fair enough. How does the achievement gap affect the overrepresentation phenomenon?

Well, I think this gets back to the culture issue. I mean, I think that's the reason we have the achievement gap, or at least a main part of the reason why we have the achievement gap in the first place. We just have to start placing greater importance in our students' background and culture. If we say we love them, we have to show it. We have to say, "Ok, this is your education, your classroom, your curriculum, and we are going to teach you in a way, in an environment, that works best for you." We don't say that. Instead we say, "Ok, this is your education and classroom, now learn the way that works best for me." By the way, that's a very White way. We need to be able to teach all of our children the best way.

Interviewer: In the categories that I'm giving you, which ones do you believe you have the greatest level of competence?

Special Education Assessment Practices/Procedures ✓

Special Education Referral Process ✓

Student-Centered Instruction✓

Cultural Awareness

Intervention Strategies ✓

Disability Awareness✓

I think I have the special education stuff down. Yea, I'll have a question from time to time, but most of the time I know what I'm doing...sometimes more than the special education teachers. I think most teachers are pros at student-centered instruction...you wouldn't have a certification if you weren't...most of the certification questions had to do with this. I mean, yes, you do have some old school teachers that think it's all about them, but I think most of them have moved on now. That brings us back to the culture issue again, and you know where I stand with

that. I'll just say that we have to make a change here, if we're going to say that we use research-based best practices and we're going to say that we love all of our kids, we have to start to place the same amount of value into them all. I think the easiest way, or the best way to do this is by first getting us trained. Teach us, point us in the right direction. Tell us how we can make our minority students more comfortable, more successful. What do we need to change? As for intervention strategies, I think I have a pretty good handhold on that too. I mean that's what we do as teachers. I think most teachers understand intervention strategies well. As a teacher you're constantly looking for new and better ways to teach your students, finding ways to get them to understand a new concept. If a certain student needs additional support or time, we do that, that's our job. I think most teachers are pros at this. It's funny, I've heard teachers say that they don't know how to modify their instruction, they don't know how to support their students if they're struggling. Then you watch them in class to offer suggestions, and you find that they're doing both all day. I think it is so much a part of our job, it's so routine, we often don't realize we're doing it.

Interviewer: How about disability awareness?

I understand disabilities, I think more than most. I guess I have an inside advantage as my Masters is in special ed. I do think that there is a great deal of misinformation and misunderstanding regarding disabilities. I mean, take your average BA student.

Interviewer: You mean Behavior Adjustment student?

Yes. Right. So you have a student that has been diagnosed as being ED (Emotional Disturbance). You'll often hear teachers say, "We'll, he just doesn't know how to act." Right. did you just hear what you said? You said that an ED student doesn't know how to act. That's hilarious. I guess what I'm saying is that regardless of what diagnosis a student receives, whatever he is labeled, teachers think that they should be like everyone else, they should act and learn like everyone else. Here that comes up again. Basically, we just want all of our students to be the same. (laughter) I'm joking of course. I love diversity. I love having ED kids in my class; they keep you on your toes. I love having African-American, Mexican, Japanese, you name it, I love having them all in my class. That's what makes being a teacher so fun.

Interviewer: Ok, I'm going to change the line of questioning up just a little. How do you believe African-American boys are perceived by Caucasian female elementary teachers?

Good question. I think that, for the most part, African-American boys are perceived as being less capable academically. What's interesting is that you'll see teachers boast about having a Black student doing well in their class. I'm not saying that you see this all of the time, but you do see it. However, you never hear a teacher say, "Wow, little Johnny, who happens to be White, is doing so well in class." I think I'd die if I heard that. I'm really not sure why this occurs, but I think it has something to do with the low expectations many teachers have for their Black students. So, I guess, I'm saying that White female teachers often have low expectations for their African-American kids, especially their boys. I don't think this is racism, I think this is perception, do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: How do you perceive African-American boys differently from other students in your classroom?

Ok, now you're getting personal. (laughter) No, I'm just kidding. Ok, I want to be really honest here. I've been throwing all of my fellow teachers under the bus, now I need to be willing to do the same to myself. Ok, how do I perceive them differently. (long pause) Again, I want to be really honest here. I don't know that I perceive them differently...how could I? Honestly. I think the issue is me. I think there is a little fear. Not fear of the students. I'm afraid that I'm not going to give them what they need, in the way that they need it. Does that make sense? I'm afraid that they see me as a part of the problem; just another person within the institution who really doesn't want to see their color, their difference, what makes them unique. As for my perception of them, I don't think it's different from any other student's. I think my perspective is a little different, my children come from a partially White, partially Black culture which creates another level of perception and discrimination. It will be interesting to see how that plays out in school as well.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of cultural/race awareness and how it relates to education?

We as educators must be conscious of our students. What I mean by this is we must know who they are, what motivates them, what angers them, what their background is, what their family is like...are they supportive, are they abusive or neglectful. We need to know as much as possible. If we pursue our students in this manner we will have a better idea as to their learning capacity. This goes with culture as well. If we know their culture, what's important to

their culture, what the traditions and customs are, we can better educate them. I think most teachers take on the idea that, "Well their here, they came to us, they need to adapt to us." Even well-meaning teachers harbor such feelings. We have to get away from this. We have to be willing to adapt to our surroundings. If we have a student, I don't know, anywhere, we need to be willing to make the appropriate changes to our instructional delivery to accommodate every student...and I mean every students. Right now we basically accommodate our White kids. The problem is the training and support is just not there. It's like I said earlier, this is where you can see institutional racism. If the system shows a lack of concern for the welfare of students other than White students, this is racism; it's as simple as that.

Interviewer: What is your understanding of the term *colorblindness* and how it relates to education?

That's a trick question, right? I know what you want me to say. But I've been reading too. (laughter) No...colorblindness refers to the idea that we see all of our student in the same way, we treat them the same, we have the same expectations form them regardless of the color other skin....what is it? Content of their character over color of their skin, right? But what I think we need to do is see students for who they are, what they offer to the environment that is different and is based on culture and background...and let's face it, the color of their skin. We need to start seeing our kids differently. We need to stop trying to make all of our students learn the same way, have the same interests, talk the same, look the same. I could go on forever. I mean, is that the idea behind No Child Left Behind? Isn't that wanting all of our kids to learn the same, at the same rate, and so on? Let's embrace difference once and for all. Let's start placing greater value in diversity. So, getting back to your question, "What is colorblindness?" it's really people blindness. It means you're not truly seeing the person...I mean truly seeing them.

Interviewer: How does cultural/race bias affect the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

Well, like I said earlier, I do think there is...no, I pretty much know there is cultural bias in our school, like I said, I've seen it. So there has to be some correlation. I mean if you looked at our Asian and Middle Eastern populations you'd find that they are overrepresented in our GT programs within the district. How does that happen? Teachers are human, we have biases like everyone else. Now I do believe 99.9% of all teachers are well-meaning, but they have biases like everyone else. They think Asians and students from India are smart and African Americans and Hispanics are deficient in some way. That's cultural bias, I think. Oh wait, there is something else I want to say on this subject. I think we, White folks (laughter) bring our biases into the classroom another way too. Not only do we presume intelligence or ability, we also assume that all of our students will learn the same way. Or, they'll learn the way we did when we were in school. Both of these indicate cultural bias as well, don't you think. Well, I think I mentioned this before, but I think it's important noting here as well.

Interviewer: How comfortable are you with teaching African-American boys?

I'm comfortable. I just think until we really, and I mean really show that we are interested in coming up with the best practices for teaching these kids and we actively pursue this...these kids will...or at least can relate to, I guess I'll always feel a little...I don't know...uncertainty. But as far as having African American kids in my room...bring it...I love it...the more the merrier. (laughter) as I said earlier, my kids are mixed, I think this might cause them issues in the future regarding bias, I don't know.

Interviewer: What obstacles do you encounter when teaching African-American boys?

The obstacles that I have faced are related to the system not the kids. I know this is going to sound like colorblindness, but I'll say it anyway, I don't really think I notice a student's skin color when they enter the classroom. I think this might be a problem. We talked about this earlier. I think I enjoy diversity in the classroom, but now that I really take some time to think about it, I guess it's diversity in what the kids bring to the classroom...the way they contribute...Laughter, thinking outside the box, manners, the ADHD kids, they're always fun...that's the stuff that I'm thinking about when I'm thinking about who I want the classroom...as far as skin color, I really don't care. If my entire class was Hispanic, or Black, or Asian, it wouldn't matter to me. I can't believe I said Black, is that ok?

Sheww, I thought I just failed the test. (laughter) You know, that brings to another point, my husband prefers the "Black" identifier rather than "African American"...have you given any thought to how you are referring to your test groups? I mean, you may be upsetting some by how you're referring to them.

So you're not going to tell me? It's something to think about. I really don't hear too many people say "Caucasian" or African American." Maybe it's a southern thing. We say "Black" and "White" and no one gets offended. I mean, my husband's family would never say "African American;" that's really silly if you think about it. They never ask someone to refer to them as "African American" after they've said "Black."

Interviewer: I'll give that some thought.

Interviewer: What types of strategies do you implement to assist African-American boys in their educational endeavors?

I think the best strategy is to show you care about them. Try to break away from how they view you...as another part of the system that just doesn't give a damn. A part of a machine that wants them to fit into the same mold that any other student, particularly White students, fit into. So, how do I do that? My room is covered in Black role models, Hispanic role models. It took me forever to find a poster of César Chávez. One year I got a student from Honduras. I finally found a picture of the Honduras president and a soccer player who played for a Honduran soccer team and posted those pictures on the wall in the classroom. I also found recipes for Honduran food. About every month I'd bring a dish to class. I think that's the way we show that we love our kids. We want to see their difference. We need their contribution, their culture. That's the best strategy. We get so locked into state assessment tests, curriculum, lesson plans. We sometimes forget that we have little babies in our class that are looking to us for guidance and love...and I think most of all, love.

Interviewer: What types of strategies do you implement to assist African-American boys who are struggling in your classroom?

I think I'd use the same strategies that I use with any other students. I think this goes back on just about everything that I've said, but that's what I do. (laughter) I've found that struggling students most often need more time or more focus. The time I can give them. The focus is a little more difficult. I'll re-teach 'till I'm blue in the face if that's what it takes. You know, now that I'm thinking about it, a strategy that I have found that works a lot of the time with Black boys is relating the material to real world examples. More specifically, if you can relate it to something they're interested in or something related to sports, most often you can peak their interest.

Interviewer: What effect does gender difference (teacher/student) have on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education?

I guess there is some effect. I know that some teachers, dare I say some White teachers fear some Black boys. Well, that's not entirely true. They're not accustomed to the way some Black boys act, talk, the way they express themselves...Black boys tend to be more animated...they'll often be louder than other kids...it's a cultural thing really. I mean when I get around my husband's family, sometimes they're all talking at once...it's louder over there...I see the same thing with my students. I think that intimidates our teachers a lot of the time. I think it intimidates them because they're not used to it. This goes back to what I've previously said, we need to learn about these kids. We need to learn what works for them. We need to understand that their physical animation and loud voices is a cultural difference and is not intended to scare teachers. What I have also found is that Black boys tend to respond to strong teachers very well. If you say, "Johnny, sit down" in a firm voice, Johnny will sit down. If you say "Johnny, please take a seat" in a meek and mild voice, Johnny will look at you, laugh, and continue what he is doing. Again, this is a cultural thing. We should use this to our advantage. Many Black boys come from single-parent homes, and almost always the single-parent in mom. Black boys are used to mom saying, in a very affirmative voice, "Johnny, sit the hell down, or all beat your ass." Now, Johnny knows that mom is not going to beat him, but he also knows that she is not to be messed with. Knowing this, we should mimic this at school. We don't ask Johnny to sit down, we tell him. I guarantee that if you tell this to some teachers they'll scoff, but I also guarantee it will work...for most kids...well, I mean, for most Black boys.

Interviewer: How do you teach boys and girls differently in your classroom?

With boys you have to be more assertive. They are constantly looking for something to manhandle. At this age, they're running around looking for something to bulldoze. You just have to make sure they know that you are not to be messed with. Now, of course, you love them, you nurture their character and budding masculinity, but you also ensure them they know you are a strong person and they must respond to your requests. Girls are so different. They want to please. You ask them to do something, they'll do it every time.

Interviewer: What obstacles do you encounter when teaching boys as opposed to girls?

Not many...actually I guess none. You just have to treat them differently. You can't teach boys and girls at this age the same way. But obstacles, I don't really think there are any.

Interviewer: You've already addressed this question to some degree earlier, however I want to ask you this specific question now . What diversity/multicultural training have you received (pre-service and/or professional development) to enhance your understanding about the educational needs of African-American boys?

I haven't. That was easy. Next. (laughter)

Interviewer: Should we move on?

Well, yes. I'm telling you, I just haven't had diversity training....I haven't had multicultural training. The district just hasn't offered it. I don't even think I had to take a class that included diversity training. That's crazy, isn't it? That shows you that we are telling our kids, we just don't care what works for them. That really angers me.

Interviewer: Ok, thank you so much for your time.

APPENDIX L
COLOR CODING KEY

APPENDIX L: COLOR CODING KEY

Red - cultural bias

Black - redacted personal information

Yellow - personal information / may need to redact

Dark Green - love for kids

Dark Blue - gender disconnect

Light Purple - prejudice / racism / discrimination

Light Green - teacher training deficiency

Dark Purple - low expectations for AA males students

Gray - gender bias

Dark Yellow (Mustard) - colorblindness

Light Blue - special education referral / assessment process