The Impact of Student Race in the Determination of Eligibility of Emotional Disturbance as Recommended by School Psychologists: Implications for the Disproportionate Representation of African-American Males in Special Education

Shirley JA. Green
St. John Fisher College

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Abstract
This mixed-method study investigated the impact of student race in the determination of eligibility of emotional disturbance as recommended by school psychologists. The results of this study looked at the implications that the evaluation component of the referral to the Committee on Special Education (CSE) has on the disproportionate representation of African-American males classified with an emotional disturbance. The quantitative component was completed during an experiment involving school psychologists who reviewed student profiles of an African-American male student and a White male student with the same profile. The analysis looked to determine the frequency that the African-American student was classified with an emotional disturbance compared to the White student. The written responses from the school psychologists were analyzed using qualitative data analysis. This analysis looked to determine the rationale school psychologists used in determining eligibility for the classification of emotional disturbance. The data was also analyzed to determine if there was a difference in the rationales provided by the school psychologists based on the race of the student.

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Education (EdD)

Department
Executive Leadership

First Supervisor
Michael Wischnowski

Second Supervisor
Bruce Blaine

Subject Categories
Education

This dissertation is available at Fisher Digital Publications: https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_etd/145
The Impact of Student Race in the Determination of Eligibility of Emotional Disturbance as Recommended by School Psychologists: Implications for the Disproportionate Representation of African-American Males in Special Education

By

Shirley JA Green

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Dr. Michael Wischnowski

Committee Member

Dr. Bruce Blaine

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College

August 2012
Dedication

To God be the Glory! Without Him, there would have been no journey. It is He who has made us and directed our path, and I thank Him for allowing me to travel this path.

I owe much thanks and gratitude to my family who stood by me and encouraged me along the way. My husband, Thomas, has always believed and encouraged me. He never doubted that this journey would begin for me and pushed me to completion. He pushed me on to completion with his constant reference of “finish strong.” Thank you for your belief in me. My children, Courtney and TJ, were right there with me all the way. Never was there a moment where they felt I was stealing time from them; they were just too proud that I was working toward this goal. I know one day they both will be able to travel this path as they continue with their own educational goals. There were times during this journey when we were all in college. It is interesting to note who spent more time in the library.

My siblings (Cathy, Joyce, George, and Louis), church family, and extended family have been a part of this journey with their encouragement and understanding when I just did not have time for them. Each of you knows how you played a special part along the way.

The journey toward completing a dissertation is never easy, but there are lasting memories along the way. Many of these memories are in the classroom with my Cohort 5 colleagues, especially the UNIQUE ONES! We are unique, and an everlasting friendship
was developed. I would not have been able to stay the course without you, a strong team. This has been an engaging, enriching, and inspiring unique journey.

A special thank you to my dissertation team, Dr. Wischnowski and Dr. Blain. They were dynamic duos who kept me focused, on task, and they believed in me. We were on a journey together, and it was a Divine connection from the beginning. To my advisor, Dr. Cianca, you are more than an advisor. You are my friend, and you will always be a special person in my life. You know I would not have been at this point in my career without you.

Finally, this is for you MOM and DAD! You both meant so much to me, and I would not be who I am if it were not for each of you. You were so proud of me growing up and always believed in my potential. I know you are looking down right now and saying, “Look at her, that’s MY daughter!”
Biographical Sketch

Shirley JA Green is currently the Executive Director of Specialized Services in a large urban district in New York. Mrs. Green earned her Bachelor of Science in Mathematics/Computer Science from Delaware State University in 1987. She received her Master of Science in Elementary Education in 1992 from Nazareth College and her Certificate of Advanced Study in Administration in 1999 from the State University College at Brockport. Following this program, she became certified as School Administrator & Supervisor and School District Administrator. Mrs. Green entered the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership to begin her doctoral studies at St. John Fisher College in 2010. Mrs. Green pursued her research on The Impact of Student Race in the Determination of Eligibility of Emotional Disturbance as Recommended by School Psychologists: Implications for the Disproportionate Representation of African-American Males in Special Education under the direction of Dr. Michael Wischnowski and Dr. Bruce Blaine. She received her Ed.D. degree in 2012.
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This mixed-method study investigated the impact of student race in the determination of eligibility of emotional disturbance as recommended by school psychologists. The results of this study looked at the implications that the evaluation component of the referral to the Committee on Special Education (CSE) has on the disproportionate representation of African-American males classified with an emotional disturbance. The quantitative component was completed during an experiment involving school psychologists who reviewed student profiles of an African-American male student and a White male student with the same profile. The analysis looked to determine the frequency that the African-American student was classified with an emotional disturbance compared to the White student. The written responses from the school psychologists were analyzed using qualitative data analysis. This analysis looked to determine the rationale school psychologists used in determining eligibility for the classification of emotional disturbance. The data was also analyzed to determine if there was a difference in the rationales provided by the school psychologists based on the race of the student.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

African-American students are placed into special education at a higher rate than any other race/ethnic group. The disproportionality of African Americans in special education has been a problem since 1968 (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002). The Office of Civil Rights began conducting surveys regarding the placement process for students in special education. The survey concluded that there was an over-representation of African Americans in specific classification categories. The three major categories noted in the survey were mental retardation, emotional disturbance, and learning disabled.

Considering the high percentage of African-American students in special education, there continues to be a debate about whether disproportionality is a problem. There is clearly a problem in America’s schools as the number of African Americans in special education continues to be at a higher percentage than any other race/ethnic group.

Background on Disproportionality

The disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education has been an issue in education that has been discussed for more than three decades (Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007). According to data as early as 1990, African Americans comprised 32% of students classified with mental retardation, 24% classified with emotional disturbance, and 18% classified with learning disabilities. This data is
compared to the overall makeup of African Americans in public education of 16.1% (Kearns, Ford, & Linney, 2005).

The data on African-American males is more alarming. During 2001-2002, less than 10% of the public school enrollment comprised African-American males. The classification rates of African-American males continued to be at a disproportionate rate with 20% being classified with mental retardation, 21% classified with emotional disturbance, and 12% classified with learning disabilities (Jordan, 2008). This data supports the research topic that disproportionality is a concern in public education in America’s schools, including rural and suburban school districts (Moore III, Henfield, & Owens, 2008). These classifications are considered “judgmental disabilities” because they are based on professional clinical decisions (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, & Wu, 2006).

Several root causes have been identified by scholars as the reasons for the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education. These root causes include the lack of cultural sensitivity of educators, poverty, biases in the testing and evaluation process, and the lack of research-based instructional practices (Shippen, Curtis, & Miller, 2009). Another root cause identified in the research is the impact that the referral process has on disproportionality (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, & Wu, 2006). Over a 13-year period, data identified that 90 to 92% of students referred were actually tested for special education, and 70 to 74% of those students tested were actually placed into special education programs (Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007). More than 80% of these referrals were originated by teachers.
(Jordan, 2008). Data that is even more compelling indicates that 20% of the teachers make 80% of the referrals for special education (Kunjufu, 2005).

Special education has benefits for children when they are appropriately classified and provided with the services to meet their needs. There are approximately 20,000 African-American males who were classified as mentally retarded who were inappropriately placed into special education (Moore III, Henfield, & Owens, 2008). Schools must ensure that when students who are eligible for services are placed into special education, they are not left there or forgotten. Legislation was not designed so that students placed into these programs are without the possibility of moving back into general education classrooms.

**History of Federal Involvement**

Court cases. Litigation that results in or clarifies and extends state and federal law has led to the right to a free and public education for all students. Legal rights for students with disabilities find their source in the civil rights movement, particularly Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954. Oliver Brown and others filed a suit against the State of Kansas to allow African-American children the right to attend any school of choice. The plaintiffs argued that the educational system of racial separation, while masked as providing separate but equal treatment of both White and Black Americans, instead supported inferior treatment for Blacks. The defendants argued that providing equal, separate facilities was not in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Supreme Court ruled that “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place; separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954). This ruling is in alignment with the Fourteenth
Amendment equal protection clause that requires states to provide equal protection under the law to all people (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998).

Brown v. Board of Education was the basis for many other court cases filed to bring fundamental changes to provide equal protection to all students (Jones & Hancock, 2005). Two other major court cases had an impact in leading the federal government to enact laws to protect the rights of students with disabilities. The first case was Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972). This was a class-action suit filed against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Secretary of Welfare, State Board of Education, and 13 individual school districts throughout Pennsylvania because students with the label of mental retardation were not receiving public education. The PARC was resolved with a consent agreement stating that children ages 6 to 21 with mental retardation must be provided with a public education in the same programs as their nondisabled peers (Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of PA, 1971; Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998).

Another major court case to provide protection for students with disabilities was Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia, 1972. This case was filed against the District of Columbia’s school board for failing to educate students who were labeled with behavioral problems, mental retardation, and emotional disturbance or hyperactivity by keeping them out of school. The case resulted in a judgment that mandated the DC to provide children with disabilities a public education, due process safeguards for labeling, placement, and expulsion (Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia, 1972).
Brown v. BOE was based on discrimination of race, but the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment was applied as discrimination based on disability for many other court cases. Fifty years after the decision of Brown v. BOE mandated racial integration in schools, African Americans continued to be segregated because they were placed into special education programs (Jordan, 2005). Due to the over-representation of African Americans in special education, the U.S. Department of Education has considered this a national crisis.

The three court cases led the way for many other similar court cases for the rights of students with disabilities. The federal government recognized the injustices noted from many court cases and began to mandate laws to protect the civil rights of individuals with disabilities (Smith, 2007). States continued to argue that they could not provide adequate education for students with disabilities because of lack of funding, inadequate facilities, and lack of training available for teachers. Due to the inconsistencies in states, the federal government has taken on the role of ensuring that children with disabilities have the same rights as others when it comes to gaining an education (Smith, 2007). With these concerns, federal legislation became more of a necessity to ensure that students with disabilities were provided access to a free and public education in the same manner as all other children.

Federal Legislation

The first federal law, the Expansion of Teaching in the Education of Mentally Retarded Children Act of 1958, was enacted to increase funding for training teachers to teach children who were labeled as mentally retarded. In the same year, the National Defense Education Act provided an additional increase in funding to educate children
who were labeled as mentally retarded. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provided additional funds to improve the education of students, including those with certain categories of disabilities. In 1970, the Education for the Handicapped Act was an amendment to Title VI of the ESEA (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). This amendment consolidated several federal laws into one law. These early laws addressed the states’ need for funding to support educating students with disabilities.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the first law outlined to protect the civil rights of students with disabilities (Smith, 2007). This law was passed to protect students with disabilities from being discriminated against based on their disability in any program receiving federal funding. Section 504 eligibility is based on a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity (Zirkel, 2009). Section 504 requires that the government allow accommodations for persons not only in schools but in public facilities. Under Section 504, students with disabilities must be allowed free and appropriate public education.

Section 504 was intended to guarantee the basic civil rights of all persons with disabilities; but it was proven not to be sufficient (Smith, 2007). Section 504 set the stage for legislation to ensure the protection of persons with disabilities.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975, also known as P.L. 94-142, was established to guarantee that students with disabilities were provided a free, appropriate public education. There was increased funding and mandated policies and procedures for educating students with disabilities under this act. Policies and procedures under this law included testing, evaluation, and placement of students with disabilities. The law also mandated that students with disabilities should be educated in
the least-restrictive environment. These policies also included due process guidelines for parental involvement (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). This law was enacted in 1975; however, states were given two years to implement the law (Smith, 2007).

The original intention of P.L. 94-142 was to be in effect for 10 years and reauthorized every three years. Each additional reauthorization of the law added additional mandates. In 1986, the additions were mandates for infants and toddlers and for individual family services. In 1990, more additions were made and the law was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The changes included the addition of two new disability categories and strengthened transition services for students leaving high school and entering postsecondary schooling.

More changes were added in 1997 when the law was reauthorized. These changes included providing more access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities and participation in state and local assessments. Although transition was added in prior changes to the law, the requirement for transition services was added to the students’ individual education plans. Discipline of students with disabilities was also addressed in this reauthorization. The mandate for functional behavior assessments and behavioral intervention plans were major inclusions in the law. The IDEA was not reauthorized again until 2004. Prior to that, a major legislation was enacted.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was enacted out of a national concern for the failure in school of America’s children. This was also known as the Elementary and Secondary Act. The primary reasons identified as the national concern in education were: (a) the doubling of spending on education, (b) less than one third of all fourth graders read at or above the proficiency level, (c) there had been no improvement
in reading proficiency over the last 15 years, and (d) less than 20% of high school seniors were proficient in math (Smith, 2007). The NCLB was not a law focused on students with disabilities; however, the mandates included meeting the federal guidelines already established for students with disabilities.

The No Child Left Behind Act was established to provide an accountability system for all students and ensure that students with disabilities had access to the same curriculum, instruction, and assessments as general education students (Hall, 2007). The NCLB Act also mandated that students’ performance be measured using the accommodations identified for these students (Smith, 2007).

Regulations for the NCLB included increased standards for teachers, higher expectations for students, and a rigorous accountability system to measure performance. The accountability system identifies the following subgroups: (a) racial and ethnic, (b) economically disadvantaged, (c) students with disabilities, and (d) limited English proficiency (Hall, 2007). The NCLB Act established a national goal that all students would meet proficiency in reading and math by 2012 (Smith, 2007).

The IDEA was reauthorized in 2004. The major changes to the law at that time were enhancements to the Individual Education Plan (IEP), participation of students with disabilities in state and local assessments with accommodations, clarifications of the discipline procedures, and requiring that special education teachers be highly qualified.

**IDEA and NCLB**

The IDEA and NCLB mandates ensure that students with disabilities are no longer excluded from general education curriculum and that they participate in the same assessments as their peers. Although the federal mandates were to ensure equal access for
all students and an accountability system to monitor the progress of students with
disabilities, there continues to be a disproportionate representation of African-American
males in special education (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010). The 25th
Annual Report to Congress (2001) indicates that Black students make up a larger
proportion of students in special education, 15.1% (Appendix A). The report also
indicates that the percentage of Black students classified with the label of mental
retardation, 17.4%, and emotional disturbance, 11.3%, is higher than the percentage of
other racial/ethnic groups (Appendix B). The National Longitudinal Transition Study of
Special Education Students (NLTS) findings also show a high representation of African-
American males in special education (Harry & Anderson, 1994). These numbers
represent a disproportionate representation of African-American students in special
education. In defining disproportionality, one must look at the percentage of a given
group in the whole population and compare that number to the percentage of a particular
group in special education (Harry & Anderson).

The NCLB requires that all states have an accountability system that measures the
performance of subgroups, one being African-American students. The system must
address several areas to include all students participating in the same accountability
system. Reasonable accommodations must be provided for students with diverse learning
needs and aligned with grade-level content and achievement standards. The assessments
must be valid, reliable, and technically adequate for the purposes that the assessment is
used. States must report disaggregated results as compared to other subgroups and
provide individual student reports to address academic needs (Hall, 2007). The NCLB
mandates created many disputes in states having to meet adequate yearly progress for all
subgroups, primarily students with disabilities and race/ethnicity. This has been one of the greatest challenges faced by many states and school districts as it relates to the NCLB mandates. The benefits that the NCLB has on ensuring that the academic needs of students with disabilities are being addressed is not clear as evidenced by the continuously low performance of students with disabilities.

The IDEA incorporated the NCLB mandates around the assessment requirements. However, there were major differences in the focus of IDEA. The first was to ensure that students with disabilities were involved in, and making progress in, the general education curriculum. The IDEA provisions included accommodations for state and local assessments with accountability reports providing data for the number of students with disabilities who were participating in regular assessments. These mandates also included providing data on the number of students who received accommodations and who participated in alternate assessments and the performance on these assessments. The IDEA provisions also included a focus on students’ Individual Education Plans (IEP). The IEP had to include the students’ present levels of performance, measurable goals and accommodations, and how the disability affects involvement in general education. Finally, the IEP had to provide the reasons a child would not be able to participate in the general education assessments (Hall, 2007). The IDEA provides a better focus on the academic needs and monitoring of students’ performance.

The federal legislation mandates were designed to ensure that students with disabilities were provided adequate funding and access to public education and those teachers were provided with adequate training to teach all children. The legislation is clear that the NCLB provides an accountability system to monitor students with
disabilities, but it is not as clear for ensuring that the instructional practices are in place to meet the needs of students with disabilities. There is also no evidence of the process for placing students into special education. The IDEA is clearer as to the necessary guidelines to ensure that students’ IEPs provide them with a closer focus on the instructional needs of students. There continues to be a need to better understand why African-American males are placed into special education at a disproportionate rate than any other race/ethnic group.

Research on Disproportionality

The research looks at poverty as the primary reason for the disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education. The research considers the relationship of low performance in schools with poverty. The US Census Bureau (2008) indicates that 24.7% of African Americans are living in poverty. Historically, African Americans are more likely to be poor than any other race/ethnic group. The research points out that those students who are poor are more likely to have limited exposure to early growth and development (O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006). The research also indicates that students whose development has been hindered have an increased need for special education. Students living in poverty also have minimal medical care both pre- and postnatal (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002). The lack of health care also impacts the developmental growth of children.

Although the research argues that poverty is a primary factor in the placement of African Americans in special education, recent research argues the research. Losen and Orfield (2003) argue that Latinos are considered at a high poverty rate, 20%; however, they are not placed into special education at the same rate as African Americans. Thus,
the researchers argue that poverty cannot be the sole reason for African Americans to continue to disproportionately be placed into special education.

The research looks at factors other than race that may contribute to the disproportionate representation of African-American students in special education. This study will focus on the special education referral process. Federal mandates are clear about the process for placing students into special education and due process rights.

As previously stated, the classifications of mental retardation, emotional disturbance, and learning disabled are areas that are left to clinical judgment within the referral process. It is the teacher’s decision to refer a student for special education. As part of the referral process, students are given an assessment to determine whether or not they are eligible for classification to receive special education services (Harry & Anderson, 1994).

**Referral Process**

There are federal regulations and state guidelines when referring students for special education services. These regulations define what must be adhered to when determining if a student is eligible to receive special education services. The regulations begin at the federal level. States must use these federal regulations when establishing the state-level guidelines. States can be more specific but must not eliminate any of the federal regulations. Each school district within the state must use the state guidelines. However, school districts can make their guidelines more specific but must be sure that both state and federal regulations are followed.
Federal Regulations

The US Department of Education Federal Register Volume 71, No. 156 provides rules and regulations as they relate to the referral process. The rules and regulations include several sections that must occur when students are referred for special education services. Within these sections are three categories that are necessary within the referral process: evaluations and reevaluations, evaluation procedures, and determination of eligibility.

The evaluation and reevaluation provides specific steps that must occur during the initial evaluation of a student. During this initial stage, a full evaluation must be conducted on the student. This evaluation includes gathering classroom data, state and local assessments, and input from the parent(s). The initial evaluation must be completed within 60 days of a parent’s consent for this process to begin.

The second area that is essential is the evaluation procedure. A variety of assessments must be considered as part of the evaluation. These assessments must be able to determine a child’s functional, developmental, and academic performance. The child’s cognitive, behavioral, and physical development must also be considered as part of the evaluation process. These assessments must be selected to ensure that there are no evident racial or cultural biases.

The third area that is critical during the referral process is the determination of eligibility. This is the final stage where a group of professionals make the determination whether a child is eligible to receive special education services due to a disability. The parents must be included in this determination. The evaluation results must be provided to the parents to inform them of the outcomes of all assessments. Three areas must be
ruled out prior to making a determination for eligibility: lack of appropriate instruction in reading, lack of appropriate instruction in math, and limited English proficiency.

**New York State Regulations**

New York State (NYS) Education Section 200.4 (Appendix C) identifies the procedures for referral, evaluation, individualized education program (IEP) development, placement, and review. Within this section of the regulations, the procedure for referral is aligned with the federal regulations for initial eligibility. These regulations are more specific than those within the federal guidelines.

The major parts of Section 200.4 are: (a) referral, (b) individual evaluation and reevaluation, (c) eligibility determination, (d) recommendation, (e) IEP implementation, (f) annual review, and (g) amendments to IEP.

The content that relates to the referral process resides within sections a, b, and c. The referral for initial evaluation identifies who can initiate a referral. This can be a parent or a designee of the school district, generally it is the school administrator or a school district official or a designee of an educational program or agency where the child is receiving care. The referral must state the reason the referral is being initiated. Documentation must also be provided as to the interventions and strategies used to support the student’s areas of need. Parents must provide consent to proceed with the evaluation.

The second section is focused on the evaluation of the student. This includes who can evaluate the student and the various types of assessments that should be considered. These assessments include classroom data, parental input, and formal assessment tools. A thorough review of all of the assessments must be used as part of this process. Parents
must be provided with the results of the assessments and afforded the opportunity for input.

The final section that is relevant to the referral process is determining eligibility for special education services. There are three factors that have been identified by federal regulations that must be ruled out prior to making a determination for services: lack of appropriate instruction in reading, lack of appropriate instruction in mathematics, and limited English proficiency. If these factors are not clearly evident, a student is not eligible for classification. When eligibility is determined, the committee must consider the criteria for each classification as established in Section 200.1 of the NYS Regulations.

**Theoretical Perspective**

State and federal legislation has been written to ensure that the right to a free and public education is provided to all students. A new form of segregation in America’s schools can be seen in special education with the number of African Americans classified in school systems. In trying to understand the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education, the Critical Race Theory may help to explain what is happening to America’s African-American males.

**Critical Race Theory in Education**

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) began in the mid-1970s with the works of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Bell, an African American, and Freeman, a White American, recognized that racial reform was moving at a very slow pace in America. Although the civil rights movement was in the 1960s, the work of the movement did not address the issues of racism. Bell and Freeman, along with other
scholars, lawyers, and activists were interested in understanding and changing the relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

There are several themes around the basic beliefs of CRT. First, critical race theorists would argue that racism is ordinary (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Racism is defined as “culturally sanctioned beliefs which, regardless of the intentions involved, defend the advantages Whites have because of the subordinated positions of racial minorities” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 55). This is the experience of many African-American people. Scholars argue that the performance of African Americans in a school system is depressing and that the condition of inequity in public schools is the reason. This is referred to as institutional and structural racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). To deal with racism, it must be exposed in a variety of arenas.

Within the theme of racism is the notion of being colorblind. Some scholars believe that colorblindness will eliminate racism, while others see it as a personal issue (Lopez, 2003). Critical race theorists believe that while some may not pay attention to a person’s color, racism will not disappear. It still exists despite one’s notion of being colorblind. One way that colorblindness is evident in education is in attempting to celebrate diversity and multiculturalism in schools. Schools having celebrations, such as Black History Month, is an example of celebrating diversity. This is also considered in the way that curriculum attempts to present African Americans in literature and textbooks.

Another theme of CRT is interest-convergence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Interest-convergence is when the interest of Whites is being advanced through civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). There are two examples that would indicate that the
laws were not only enacted as part of the civil rights movement but as a benefit to
Whites. The first example is affirmative action. These numbers reveal that more White
females have received benefits from affirmative action than African Americans (Ladson-
Billings, 1998). The landmark case, Brown v. Board of Education, is another example of
interest-convergence. Although the decision was to desegregate schools, the outcome can
also be credited with repairing the damages caused after World War II with Black
veterans dealing with racial inequalities in the service (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

A third theme that critical race theorists believe is that race is a product of social
thought and relations. This is called social construction (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The
CRT believes that society is separated by privilege and status. As Judge John Harlem
noted in the Plessy v. Ferguson case of 1896:

The White race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country. And so it is,
in prestige, in achievements, in education, in wealth and in power…But in the
view of the Constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior,
dominant, ruling class of citizens.

Finally, there is the notion of a unique voice or storytelling as a theme of the
critical race theorists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Storytelling allows one to “analyze
the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make-up the common culture
about race” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). Storytelling is a way to allow African
Americans to remember their experiences and apply their own uniqueness to the stories.
The use of storytelling helps to give a voice to the experiences of African Americans.
Storytelling is used by lawyers in the courtroom and teachers in the classroom to help
display the power of persuasion (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).
The use of voice is also termed naming your reality (Ladson-Billings, 1998). There are three reasons noted for the use of voice. First, reality is constructed from meaning or the exchange of stories from one individual to another. Some scholars believe reality is situational or that the truth only exists for that moment in time (Ladson-Billings). A second reason for naming one’s reality is the fact that the stereotypical elements of society are placed on people in marginalized groups. These groups tend to understand the realization of being oppressed and learn to overcome inflicting emotional stress on oneself (Ladson-Billings). Finally, voice can affect the oppressor. This is done through the telling of stories to bring awareness to the oppressor of the injustices of people of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The Critical Race Theory also looks at citizenship and property rights. The CRT scholars note that the United States is a nation founded on the basis of property and not human rights (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). African Americans owned no property; thus, they were seen as property (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This was evident during the time of slavery when Blacks were owned by Whites and deemed property. African Americans became a unique group of people in the United States as they were considered “property transformed into citizens” (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Property became the ideal of Whiteness.

There are four rights that are connected to the term property functions of Whiteness as noted by Harris (1993). These rights are a major interest in the field of education. The first is right of disposition (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This is where non-White students are asked to conform to the norms of White people. The second is the right to use and enjoyment. This allows for White students to use and enjoy the privilege
of being White. There are certain social, economic, and cultural privileges offered to only White students that Black students are not entitled to. The third right of Whiteness is reputation and status of property. To damage someone’s reputation is to damage their personal being. Suburban schools’ reputations are damaged when students of color enroll in their schools. Finally, there is the absolute right to exclude (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This was demonstrated when Blacks were denied access to schools in certain neighborhoods, communities, and states.

The Critical Race Theory has relevance in the field of education. Civil rights laws and legislation argue that equal opportunity should be the basis for ensuring that African-American children have the same access to the same educational opportunities as all other children. These include curriculum, instruction, assessment, and funding (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The CRT perspective in the area of curriculum in public education is a way to maintain the notion of White supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 1998). It is demonstrated by the way African Americans are depicted in history, usually in more demeaning ways than other races. African Americans are omitted from major stories and events, thus not highlighting the value that they played in American history. African Americans are not viewed in ways that raise them to greater levels of power as other groups. Not only does the curriculum downplay the role of African Americans, the courses that are offered to African Americans are less rigorous.

Another perspective of the CRT in education is that instruction is approached from a deficit model (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Educators are continuously trying to find
the right strategy to help the at-risk population, African Americans. The instruction is geared toward remediation rather than enrichment for the African-American learners.

A third perspective of the CRT in education is the types of assessment given to African-American children (Ladson-Billings, 1998). One such assessment that has racial stereotypes is intelligence testing. There are cultural biases in many of the assessments that create poor results (Kunjufu, 2005). When children are exposed to ineffective curriculum and poor instructional practices, performance on traditional assessments will also be poor. These assessments tell what children lack instead of what they know. There is no assessment that is given that assesses what African-American children actually know and are able to do.

Finally, the CRT perspective on education deals with school funding (Ladson-Billings, 1998). States fund schools based on property taxes. The poor, urban schools have a low tax base resulting in less funding. This inequity in funding leads to what scholars deem as institutional racism.

In trying to understand the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education, we must look at the various themes and perspectives of the Critical Race Theory. The notions of racism and structural and institutional racism can be viewed as two of the causes of African Americans being placed into special education. The concept of Whiteness as a privilege, and the inequalities in the curriculum, instruction, assessment, and funding must also be analyzed in looking at this disproportionate representation of African-American males being placed into special education. As (Kunjufu, 2005) stated, one reason that African-Americans males are
placed into special education is due to the lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of educators.

**Problem Statement**

Research has been clear about the fact that African-American males are disproportionately placed into special education in the two judgmental categories of disabilities as described by IDEA, which are emotionally disturbed and mental retardation, referred to as “intellectual disabilities.” It is not clear as to why disproportionality exists. However, what is clear is the high number of African-American males in special education has an impact on the graduation rates and academic achievement for these African-American males.

This study focuses on the disproportionate representation of African-American males classified as emotionally disturbed and placed into special education. This research is designed to find out if there is a bias in the evaluation component of the referral process that impacts on the number of African-American males who are classified with an emotional disturbance and disproportionately placed into special education. The results of this research will be used to guide educational professionals during the evaluation component of the referral process for African-American males possibly being placed into special education.

**Research Questions**

The research about poverty, the referral process, and teacher preparation are just a few factors that account for the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education. Federal legislation has been designed to hold states accountable for the performance of all groups of students, including students in special
education and race/ethnicity. The federal mandates of NCLB and IDEA do not provide all of the necessary components to actually ensure that the processes for identifying students who need special education are being addressed. The two research questions for this study are:

1. Does a student’s race have an effect on school psychologists’ determination of eligibility for emotional disturbance? The assessment results and other demographics in the referral packet are controlled.

2. How do school psychologists explain their rationale when determining eligibility for emotional disturbance? Do explanations differ based on students’ race?

Definition of Terms

There are several definitions that are relevant to understanding the impact that the referral process has on the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education.

- Disproportionality is the inappropriate representation of students by race or ethnicity in special education at either a greater or lesser rate than all special education students (Hardin, Mereoiu, Hung, & Roach-Scott, 2009).

- Emotional disturbance is having one of the following five characteristics:
  - an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
  - an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
  - inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
  - a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or
o a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (Cullinan & Kauffman, 2005).

- Individual Education Program (IEP) is a written document that includes the components provided to meet the educational needs of students identified as having a disability (Regulations of the Commissioner of Education, 2009).

- Judgmental disabilities are classifications in which a diagnosis is based on clinical decisions rather than biological criteria (Harry & Anderson, 1994).

- Learning disability is a psychological processing deficit accompanied by a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and academic achievement (Warner, Dede, Garvan, & Conway, 2002).

- Mental retardation is the impairment of cognitive abilities (Smith, 2007).

- Special education is the individualized instruction and services for students with disabilities (Smith, 2007).

**Chapter Summary**

African-American students are disproportionally placed into special education over any other race/ethnic group. This is a national epidemic. The review of the literature provides an understanding of the involvement of federal legislation and its impact on African-American students with disabilities. These federal mandates were put into place to ensure that all students have equal access to a free and public education. The data indicates that there continues to be a higher percentage of African-American students place into special education.

There are four additional chapters that follow. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on the disproportionality of African-American males in special education. The
literature also looks at the referral process and criteria to refer students and the emotional disturbance classification. Chapter 3 provides an outline of the methodology of the study. This includes the general context of the study. Chapter 4 provides findings from the study that looked at the impact that the evaluation process has on the disproportionate representation of African-American males classified with an emotional disturbance in special education. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the findings, implications of the study, and recommendations to address the disproportionate representation of African-American males classified as emotionally disturbed.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

The literature review looks at empirical studies as they relate to the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education. This review also seeks to address the role of the evaluation component of the referral process on disproportionality. The focus of the studies that are discussed in this paper will be on the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education, the referral criteria and process, and the role of school psychologists in the referral process. The studies also consider the relationship of poverty and culture in placing African-Americans males into special education. The final set of studies is on students classified with emotional disturbance.

The studies reviewed in this paper were identified through research that was conducted on peer-reviewed articles gathered from a search of three databases. The databases used were Education Research Complete, the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), and ProQuest® Education Journals. The keywords that were used as identifiers for the various searches were used in different combinations. The combinations were special education and disproportionality, special education and African-American males, and special education and African Americans. After several initial readings, an additional search was done using the keywords special education, African Americans, and referral process. Finally, a search of the databases was done using the keywords special education and referral process.
Background

The disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education has been an issue in education that has been discussed for more than three decades (Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007). According to data as early as 1990, African Americans comprised 32% of students classified with mental retardation, 24% classified with emotional disturbance, and 18% classified with learning disabilities. This data is compared to the overall makeup of African Americans in public education of 16.1% (Kearns, Ford, & Linney, 2005).

The data on African-American males is just as alarming. During 2001-2002, less than 10% of the public school enrollment comprised African-American males. The classification rates of African-American males continued to be at a disproportionate rate, with 20% being classified with mental retardation, 21% classified with emotional disturbance, and 12% classified with learning disabilities (Jordan, 2008). This data supports the research topic that disproportionality is a concern in public education in America’s schools, including rural and suburban school districts (Moore III, Henfield, & Owens, 2008). The disproportionate representation of African-American males falls into these two major classification categories: emotional disturbance and mental retardation. These classifications are considered judgmental disabilities (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, & Wu, 2006).

Several causes have been identified by scholars as the reasons for the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education. These root causes include the lack of cultural sensitivity of educators, poverty, biases in the testing and evaluation process, and the lack of research-based instructional practices.
Another cause is the impact that the referral process has on disproportionality (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, & Wu, 2006). Over a 13-year period, data identified that 90 to 92% of students referred were actually tested for special education and 70 to 74% of those students tested were actually placed into special education programs (Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007). More than 80% of the referrals were originated by teachers (Jordan, 2008).

Teachers initiate referrals for several reasons. These reasons include three major student characteristics of inattention, misbehavior, and gender bias (Dunn, Cole, & Estrada, 2009). These reasons were further studied by Dunn (2006) to include needing assistance, not able to apply information learned, not able to complete tasks, and the look portrayed by a student.

Special education has benefits for children who are appropriately classified and provided with the services to meet their needs. There are approximately 20,000 African-American males who are classified as mentally retarded who were inappropriately placed into special education (Moore III, Henfield, & Owens, 2008). Students classified with an emotional disturbance have lower graduation rates, 28%, and higher dropout rates, 50%. These students also have poor outcomes after high school, with 58% being arrested within three to five years after leaving school (Serpell, Hayling, Stevenson, & Kern, 2009).

Definitions

There are several definitions that are relevant to understanding the impact that the referral process has on the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education within this literature review. Special education is defined as the
individualized education and services for students with disabilities (Smith, 2007). For the purpose of this literature review, disproportionality is defined as the representation of students by race or ethnicity in special education at either a greater or lesser rate than all special education students (Hardin, Mereoiu, Hung, & Roach-Scott, 2009).

African-American males are more likely than other ethnic groups to be classified with one of the judgmental disabilities. Harry and Anderson (1994) define the judgmental categories as those in which a diagnosis is based on clinical decisions rather than biological criteria. Two of the disabilities that fall into this category are mental retardation and emotional disturbance. Mental retardation is identified by the impairment of cognitive abilities (Smith, 2007). A student with an emotional disturbance classification is described as having one of the following characteristics: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (Cullinan & Kauffman, 2005).

**Over Representation**

For the purpose of this literature review, overrepresentation is synonymous with the definition of disproportionality. The studies that are reviewed look at the factors that influence the overrepresentation of African-American males in the special education classifications of mental retardation and emotional disturbance. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004) requires school districts to ensure that students with disabilities
are appropriately identified and that there are nondiscriminatory practices in place to prevent overrepresentation of any ethnic group (Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999).

**Factors of overrepresentation.** A study conducted by Oswald, Coutinho, Best and Singh (1999) looked at the relationship of economic, demographic, and educational variables on the classification of African-American students as mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed. This experimental design looked at the disproportionate representation across school districts in the United States. The sample of school districts was taken from a survey from the Fall 1992 Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Compliance Report. The survey was conducted by Opportunity Systems Incorporated through a contract with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights.

Information was obtained from 95.7% (4,692) of the districts informed of the study. The districts were selected from a stratified random sampling and weighted to account for the districts that did not respond. Districts were excluded based on three areas: missing ethnicity data, report of no students, and duplication of student identification numbers. The final sample for the study consisted of 4,455 districts. African-American population within the districts ranged from 0 to 99.95%.

Seven variables were selected as part of the study: (1) median value of housing, (2) median income level, (3) percent of children below poverty level, (4) percent of children who are at risk, (5) percent of adult dropout, (6) percent of children who are limited in English proficient, and (7) percent of African Americans enrolled in the district. This study analyzed the data using an odds ratio to determine the extent that school districts classify African-American students as mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed.
disturbed at a disproportionate rate. The study also analyzed data to determine the extent
the districts used other characteristics such as demographics and economic factors.

The results of this study indicated that African-American children were 2.5 times
as likely to be classified as mentally retarded and 1.5 times as likely to be classified as
emotionally disturbed. The results varied when looking at specific variables. The higher
the poverty level, the more African-American students were classified as mentally
retarded. However, the higher the poverty level, the classification of emotionally
disturbed students decreased. The higher the dropout rate of the parents, the higher the
classification for mentally retarded; however, the emotionally disturbed numbers were
lower (Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999).

Another study that looked at causes for overrepresentation was conducted by
Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, and Bridgest (2003). This study looked at the teachers’
perceptions of cultural influences on behavior and academics. Nine dimensions were used
in identifying the essence of African-American culture: (1) spirituality, (2) harmony, (3)
movement, (4) verve, (5) affect, (6) communalism, (7) expressive individualism, (8) oral
tradition, and (9) social time. This study particularly examined the cultural movement
style of African-American males as it relates to aggression and achievement.

The study was conducted in a suburban school district in a southwestern state.
There were 136 middle school teachers from six middle schools, 91% respondents. Each
of the teachers was asked to complete a questionnaire and to view a videotape of males’
movement style. The questionnaire used was the Adjective Checklist (Gough & Heilbrun,
1983). The first section of the questionnaire requested demographic information on each
of the participants. The second section consisted of two scales to rate the teachers’
perceptions of aggression and achievement. The achievement scale consisted of 38 adjectives and 13 contraindicative items. The aggression scale consisted of 44 adjectives, 21 indicative, and 23 contraindicative items. There was one question in section 2 that used a Four-Point Likert scale, asking whether the participant would refer the student in the videotape to special education. The videotape was designed to illustrate the movement style of a middle school male student. Four videos were used in the study. One video contained an African-American male with a standard walk and one with an African American with a stroll movement; one video with a European male with a standard walk and one with a European male with a stroll movement. All of the students in the videos were dressed in similar attire, similar height and weight, and walking from the locker to the classroom.

The data was analyzed looking at the ethnicity factor and the style of movement, standard walk or stroll. The teachers perceived the students with the stroll as having lower academic functioning than the students with the standard walk. The European student with a stroll was ranked lower in achievement than the African-American student. This can be attributed to the research that European males who behave in ways reflective of the perceived notion of an African-American behavior are viewed as more defiant than an African-American child. Teachers also perceived students with a stroll as more aggressive than students with a standard walk. Teachers also rated students with a stroll as more likely to need special education services (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003).

Another study looked at the lack of understanding of communication codes of African Americans as a factor for overrepresentation in special education. This study was
conducted by Sherwin and Schmidt (2003) at two boys’ and girls’ clubs in a Southern California city using participant observation. This study involved the researcher entering the lives and activities of the participants as fully and naturally as possible. The two clubs consisted of 5,800 children and youth. Both clubs, combined, had a population of 15% in need of child care and public assistance and 36% from single-parent homes.

One club, Havenhearst, is a large, two-story, well-maintained building. The area where the club is located is surrounded by single-family houses that are run down, small industrial businesses, and buildings with graffiti. The other club, Santa Fe, is the central location for the two clubs. Santa Fe is located five miles from Havenhearst. The area around Santa Fe is surrounded by middle-class, single-family homes, and a public school. The area does not reflect gang activity or graffiti. There were 17 ethnic groups at Santa Fe. The largest group at Havenhearst was African Americans: 80 participants. The other participants included one Asian, three Latinos, and one Euro-American.

The study consisted of examining the aggressive behaviors of the groups at the two clubs. Data was collected using observations and unstructured interviews. Field notes and daily entries into a diary were completed for the 53 visits at Havenhearst and 44 visits at Santa Fe. The two units of analysis were: (1) action, an event performed between the participants, and (2) operation, the conditions under which the action was carried out (Sherwin & Schmidt, 2003). Coding and analysis was conducted throughout the data collection.

More than 400 acts of aggression were observed at both clubs. Three specific types of verbally aggressive greetings were noted in the analysis. One specific type was noted as a mock-battle greeting. This was noted as how the participants communicate
with one another, not as a harmful act. This aggressive, verbal greeting was consistent
with a style of communication noted by African Americans. This behavior is considered a
cultural way of communicating. However, it can easily be mistaken as aggression. The
study points out the need for educators to be aware of this style of communication among
African-American males to avoid referral to special education (Sherwin & Schmidt,
2003).

The final study for discussion on the factors of overrepresentation was conducted
by Wehmeyer and Schwartz (2001). According to the 1992 Report to Congress, 76.4% of
students classified as emotionally disturbed are males and 73.4% as learning disabled.
The study looked at biology, behavior, and gender bias as the causes of the
disproportionate representation of males in special education. The purpose of the study
was to examine the proportionate relationship between males and females in special
education. The study took place over a three-year period, 1992-1995, in three school
districts in the southern part of the United States. The three districts identified in this
study were a rural district, a medium-size city school district, and a suburban school
district. The rural district had a population ranging from 14,473 to 14,659 over the three
years, the medium-size district ranged from 10,405 to 10,452, and the suburban district
ranged from 18,852 to 19,235.

A review of records was done on almost every student who entered special
education for the first time during one of the three years. The data collected during the
review included demographics, indicators of the three factors, biology, behavior and
gender, and ethnicity. Other data gathered included the referring person, the date special
education services began, placement, and classification. The first district review was
conducted during year one, the second district review during year two, and the third
district review was conducted during all three years. The classifications for review were
limited to mental retardation and learning disabled, as two of the classifications where
overrepresentation is noted. The students selected for record review were at least six
years old. There were a total of 695 student record reviews, 66% males (462). The racial
representation across all districts was 67% White, 19.8% African American, 7.9%
Hispanic, and 3.3% other.

The results of the study indicated that boys were more likely to be placed into
special education classes, with boys outnumbering girls 2 to 1. The results also indicated
that males were referred more often than girls for behavioral reasons. There was no
significant difference in referrals for academic reasons between boys and girls
(Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001).

Overrepresentation of African-American males in special education can be
attributed to several factors as noted in the studies: poverty, lack of cultural
understanding around communication styles, need for movement, and gender biases.
Research must continue to look at these factors and the possible interventions that can
prevent over-representation of African-American males in special education.

**Referral Criteria and Process**

There are federal guidelines established under IDEA that must be adhered to
when making a decision to classify a student for special education services. This process
begins with a teacher’s decision to refer a student for special education services. The
majority of referrals are from general education teachers. Kunjufu (2005) provides data
showing that 20% of teachers make 80% of the referrals for special education. The
majority of referrals are submitted within the first four years of a student’s educational experience (Drame, 2002). The reasons a teacher decides to refer a student can be based on inattentiveness, needing assistance, inability to apply information learned, inability to complete tasks, and students presenting the *look* (Dunn, Cole, & Estrada, 2009). Studies have been conducted looking at the criteria and readiness of teachers to make the decision to refer a child for special education.

Referral criteria. Drame (2002) conducted a study examining the teachers’ perceptions of students’ behaviors and the teachers’ referral tendencies. The study looked at the characteristics of the teachers as it related to their attitudes about behavior, classroom management, and decision to refer a student. The study took place in 17 urban and suburban public elementary schools in the Chicago and Milwaukee areas. The schools selected were either ethnically integrated or comprised predominantly African-American students. There were 63 general education teachers from first to fifth grades selected for the study. Thirty-two teachers taught in the predominantly African-American schools and 31 in the integrated school setting.

The study consisted of a teacher survey to gather demographic information, two Likert scales measuring teacher attitude about classroom behaviors and referral tendency, and surveys to gather classroom and school demographics. The results of the study were analyzed in three areas. The first area looked at the effect of the teachers’ attitudes as it related to the teachers’ contexts. The variables noted were age of teacher, years of experience, educational level, ethnicity, contact with students, grade level taught, and gender. The results indicated that teachers with more education and who taught in higher grade levels were more likely to refer a child for special education services due to
negative behaviors displayed by students. The results also showed that referrals were
generated less often by teachers of students with the same cultural background than
teachers of different backgrounds.

The other two areas analyzed were classroom demographics and school
demographics as it related to teacher attitudes. The results showed that classrooms where
whole-group instruction occurred, the teachers more often submitted more referrals to
special education than classrooms where higher frequencies of small-group instruction
occurred. Schools that had a clear pre-referral process had less referrals than schools
without a pre-referral process. Additionally, results indicated that teachers in large
schools with predominantly African-American students had higher rates of referrals to
special education than smaller schools (Drame, 2002).

Another study that looked at criteria for referral to special education was
completed by Dunn, Cole, and Estrada (2009). This study looked at Response to
Intervention (RTI) steps as part of the criteria for referring students to special education.
The study also looked at the differences in criteria within rural, suburban, and urban
school districts. The participants for the study included 97 teachers, 49% of those
contacted, from the U.S. and Canada who were considered to have the necessary
credentials as a teacher. Women comprised 88.7% of the respondents, which represents
the makup of the teaching profession in both the U.S. and Canada. All of the participants
were teachers from elementary level schools with 44% at grades 1-3, 36% at grades 4-6,
and 20% at a combined grade level.

The participants completed a questionnaire providing demographic information.
The information reported included the number of years teaching, number of students in
the class, number of students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP), and number of referrals submitted during the previous year. Other data gathered included the type of school setting, income level within the community of the school, and the size of the school. A questionnaire was also provided to determine the teacher’s ratings of a set of 15 criteria used to refer students. The Likert scale was used to determine a combined score. The questionnaire also allowed for a written response to identify the teacher’s referral criteria.

The results of the study identified two criteria used to refer students to special education: inattention and aptitude. Inattention accounted for 39% of the total score and aptitude accounted for 11%. The characteristics of inattention included the inability to focus on a task and lack of concentration. Aptitude included lack of reasoning skills, timely completion of task, asking for assistance, and the need for repetition and directions. The results also compared rural, suburban, and urban teacher ratings. Rural teachers rated inattention lower than urban teachers as a reason to refer a student. The study also identified the need for using RTI as a best practice for general education teachers as one of the criteria to use in the referral process (Dunn, Cole, & Estrada, 2009).

The last study for discussion on the criteria for special education was conducted by Dunn (2006). The study looked at the criteria that classroom teachers use when making the decision to refer a child to special education. The study was conducted at Ridgefield Elementary School in Pineville, a large city in Southern Ontario, Canada. The school consisted of 500 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The community was very transient. Forty-four percent of the residents had a first language other than
English, and 36% moved into the area within the last five years. The average income was $37,000, and 11% of the population within the age of 20-34 had less than a high school diploma.

Semi-structured, formal interviews were completed with 13 teachers from the school. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The following themes were identified as reasons for referral to special education: (a) inability to apply information; (b) needing assistance, repetition and directions; (c) inattention; (d) inability to complete tasks; and (e) atypical behavior.

The researcher looked at the teachers’ thinking behind their decision to refer a student to special education. Some of the research noted in the study as reasons for referring a student include disruptive behaviors and academic inability. The researcher noted that teachers failed to reflect on how these issues played a part in the need for a student to be referred and how they may affect the performance and behavior of a student. The teachers also indicated that the evaluation scores completed by the school psychologist and other therapists created a profile of a student needing services. Eight reasons were noted in psychologists’ records for reasons a student was referred. These characteristics included: (1) poor peer relationships, (2) displaying frustrations, (3) low academic performance, (4) shy and withdrawn, (5) disruptive, (6) fighting, (7) refusing to do work, and (8) short attention span. In this school, the psychologists’ results were the determining factor if a student met the criteria for a certain classification. The researcher also noted that at no point in the interviews did teachers indicate that referrals were initiated due to parental concerns or suggestions (Dunn, 2006).
These studies all looked at various criteria teachers used to refer a student for special education. This research was not limited to just African-American males. It is important to have a clear understanding of the criteria and referral process as we look at over-representation of African-American males in special education.

Referral process. Another area that may attribute to the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education is the referral process. Special education placement is predicated based on the initial referral (Hosp & Reschly, 2003). Research points to teacher biases and perceptions as the factors in deciding to refer students for special education services (Moore, 2002). The referral process involves several stages. Early intervention is a critical element in the pre-referral stages (Hart J., Cramer, Harry, Klingner, & Sturges, 2010). These early intervention services occur in the general education classrooms as part of the federal mandate for response to interventions. After the intervention stages, evaluation by the school personnel must occur. Criteria to determine discrepancy must occur in order for a student to qualify for special education services. States vary the requirement for these criteria with 29% establishing a cutoff score for eligibility (Warner, Dede, Garvan, & Conway, 2002). Finally, a stage often less valued is the parental component of the referral process. The IDEA (2004) mandates include parents as having a role in the referral process.

Moore (2002) conducted a study of African-American teachers on their decision to refer students to special education. This qualitative study involved 11 African-American teachers from an urban community in the southwestern part of the United States. Ten of the teachers received their undergraduate degree from a historically Black college or university. Five of the participants were preschool teachers and six were
kindergarten teachers. Each of the participants had referred at least one African-American child within the past three to five years. One of the teachers had been classified with a disability as a student him/herself, and one of the participants has a sibling with a disability.

The study involved open-ended interviews with each of the participants. The data was analyzed into six themes based on the teacher’s decision to refer a student for special education. The major themes were: (1) disability issues, (2) establishment of bias, (3) organizational pressures, (4) student characteristics and teacher expectations, (5) teacher casual beliefs, and (6) emergent themes. The findings in the area of disability included the teachers’ lack of understanding and awareness of disabilities in referring students. The study also identified the need for the district to provide more information to teachers in the area of teaching students with disabilities. The findings identified that teachers established a bias as to the ideal student to teach: fair, female, and mature. These teachers identified the traits of an African-American male, using attributes identified by the establishment bias theory, as the most difficult child to teach. The teachers did not indicate that they felt pressure from other school personnel as a reason to refer a child for special education even though they were African American themselves.

The participants indicated they were not influenced by behaviors of children or lower expectations of teachers as impacting their decision to refer children. They were also not influenced by outside factors. The participants did indicate a lack of preparedness in being able to teach students with disabilities. As African-American teachers, the participants often emerged as the mother figure for students. They felt that they were able to make connections to the family through community and cultural
associations. The participants’ perception was that if and when they made a referral for special education, it was in good faith (Moore, 2002).

What happens prior to a referral has an impact on the placement of African-American males into special education. As part of IDEA (2004), states are required to implement interventions to support student learning prior to initiating a referral for special education. Gravois and Rosenfield (2006) conducted a study looking at the impact that Instructional Consultant (IC) Teams have on referrals. These teams are designed to work with teachers to provide support to students in the general education population. The objective of the team is to ensure that general education provides for a quality learning opportunity that supports students’ academic and behavioral needs with adequate supports. With these supports, students would not need to be referred for special education services (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006).

The study consisted of 22 schools from five districts in a mid-Atlantic state. The schools selected for this study were from rural communities and small districts. Thirteen schools were selected to participate in a two-year study on the implementation of IC Teams. There was a four-day introductory session, one semester of online coaching, seven on-site sessions, and follow-up technical support. There were nine comparison schools; one was eliminated due to lack of response for data after the two-year period. The data that was used as part of the analysis included the racial makeup of the student population, referrals to special education, and the number of students placed into special education. The racial categories were identified as minority or nonminority.

The study looked at three different statistical comparisons: risk index, odds ratio, and composition index. The risk ratio determined that minority students were at less risk
for being referred for special education after two years in the IC Team schools than in the comparison schools. The odds ratio determined that minority students were more likely to be referred to special education than nonminority students whether they had an IC Team or not. Finally, the composition index results identified that minority students were referred for special education at a disproportionate rate in both the study group schools and comparison schools. The findings from this study indicated that IC Teams can have an impact on disproportionality. The data showed that there was a reduction in the number of referrals submitted and the number of African-American students placed into special education as a result of improved instruction supported by the IC Team (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006).

Another study was conducted to look at the factors of the referral process that may contribute to the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education. This was a multi-year project conducted by Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, and Wu (2006) to gain a better understanding of the referral process for minority students. The participants were educators in seven districts in a large Midwestern city. Each of the districts was identified for disproportionality. There were a total of 14 elementary schools selected, two from each district. Two teachers from each of the schools were selected based on the principals’ knowledge of the frequency in submitting referrals or if they rarely submitted referrals.

There were 64 participants interviewed for this study. They included the director of special education from each district, nine psychologists, 20 principals and assistant principals, and 28 classroom teachers. The data from the interviews were grouped by sociodemographic factors, general education, special education process, resources, and
perception of disproportionality. The sociodemographic factors included the impact that poverty has on students being ready for learning and a disconnection between home and school expectations. Some of the participants indicated that there is a lack of support available to assist families with a low socioeconomic status. The general education factors identified were the high-stakes testing requirements and no retention policy in the district. These two areas increased the teachers’ need for reaching out to get support for students who were not making progress in the general education classroom.

Classroom management needs were also noted as being a factor in the referral process. Participants’ responses indicated that they were supportive of getting assistance for students, but the lack of resources and funds were a great impact. Some of the respondents felt that the pre-referral teams were a resource that supported student needs and decreased the need for referrals. The participants’ perception of disproportionality was the most difficult to capture. As race was brought up, the participants seemed to have more of a challenge to respond (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, & Wu, 2006).

**Meta-analysis.** Hosp and Reschly (2003) conducted a meta-analysis looking at the referral rates to the population rates of students from different racial backgrounds. There were six sets of criteria used in deciding which studies would be used in the meta-analysis. The studies had to include:

1. distinguished features which could include the frequency or proportion of a racial group, set of referrals from a school population, and a variety of assessments;
2. research respondents from elementary, middle, and/or secondary students from a public or private school;
3. research methods with quantitative information;
4. cultural and linguistic characteristics from the United States;
5. studies after 1975 when Public Law 94-142 had been enacted; and
6. published or unpublished studies.

After researching studies that met the criteria, 121 were retrieved from databases and journals. A review of the studies retrieved was conducted. Only nine studies were selected for this meta-analysis that contained the required data. An additional report that included some of the data was also presented in this meta-analysis.

Data was analyzed to determine the rate at which referrals were initiated using African Americans, Caucasians, and Hispanics as the comparison groups. The study indicated that there was a difference in the referral rates of the different groups. African Americans were referred 1.5 times more than Caucasians. The rate of referrals for Caucasians and Hispanics were similar. The study also indicated that the most common reasons for referrals were low academic performance and disruptive behaviors (Hosp & Reschly, 2003).

Two of the studies from this meta-analysis looked at the referral process. Andrews, Wisniewski, and Mulick (1997) conducted a study looking at the birth month, height, and weight as factors in referring children for special education services. The study consisted of 140 children in the first sample and 73 children in the second sample. Both of the samples represented students from a large, urban school district in Ohio. The average age of the students in the first sample was 8.7 years, and 10.7 years in the second
sample. Student demographics were 33.6% Caucasian, 62.9% African American, and 1.4% other for sample one and 37% Caucasian and 57% African American in sample two. The findings concluded that African-American students were referred at a higher rate than Caucasian students (Andrews, Wisniewski, & Mulick, 1997).

The second study conducted by Argulewicz and Sanchez (1983) looked at the rate of referrals and the placement process. The study looked at students in grades K-8 who were referred for having learning disabilities over a two-year period from a large, suburban school district. The groups were divided by low and middle socio-economic status, determined by free- and reduced-lunch eligibility. The findings indicated that students in the low socio-economic status group were referred at a higher rate than those in the other group. The findings also showed that the steps within the referral process had a great impact on the disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education (Argulewicz & Sanchez, 1983).

**Emotional Disturbance**

The disproportionality of African-American males in special education is more prevalent in the judgmental categories of emotional disturbance and mental retardation. The fact that these areas are based on subjectivity, it is important to consider the process in which African-American males are classified with an emotional disturbance. This subjectivity can also be looked at as a racial bias that may or may not be intentional but considered as institutionalized racism or lack of cultural understanding as aligned with the tenets of the Critical Race Theory.

Studies have been conducted looking at students classified with an emotional disturbance and the process that leads to this classification. The IDEA (2004) requires
states to monitor and address disproportionality (Hart, Cramer, Harry, Lkingner, & Sturges, 2010). The IDEA also identifies the criteria for the classification of emotional disturbance. A student must meet one of the characteristics of emotional disturbance as listed in the federal definition: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; and (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

The federal regulation also clearly states that socially maladjusted does not meet the criteria of emotional disturbance (Cullinan & Kauffman, 2005). Socially maladjusted is an undefined phenomenon that can be identified as an antisocial behavior outside of the school setting (Cullinan, Harniss, Epstein, & Ryser, 2001).

Hart, Cramer, Harry, Klinger, and Sturges (2010) conducted a three-year ethnographic study of the various phases of the referral process. This study looked at the quality of instruction prior to the referral process as one of the phases. The study took place in K-3 classrooms within 12 schools from one of the nation’s largest and most diverse school districts. The schools ranged in socio-economic status, language, and referral rates. African Americans accounted for 33% of the population, Hispanics 51%, Whites 15%, and other 1%. The observations were focused on 24 classrooms in which 12 case studies were reviewed. From the 12 cases, five of the students were classified as learning disabled; three were classified as educable, mentally retarded; and four as emotionally disturbed.
The study looked at the practices, policies, and placement data within the school district. The study also involved interviews and observations of 24 teachers with a varying degree of teaching experience, grade levels, and ethnic backgrounds. Twelve students were selected for the case studies. The data included classroom observations, home interviews with family members, review of students’ records, interviews with school personnel, and observations of the school teams who discussed the child’s need. There were seven themes that emerged from the study: (1) family/community influences, (2) external pressures on schooling, (3) intrinsic child deficits, (4) teacher skills and/or biases, (5) school system or administrative policies, (6) errors or bias in psychological assessment, and (7) errors or bias in bilingual assessments. The themes were consistently revised over the three years. Three themes emerged as being more relevant to the case studies and the process of identifying students with emotional disturbance: teacher skills and/or bias, school system or administrative policies, and errors or biases in psychological assessments.

The findings indicated that the quality of instruction in general education was a factor in the academic performance of students. Teachers’ skills were being considered when looking at the academic and behavior concerns of a student when considering classification. This factor was ignored when students were referred for special education. The outcomes of referrals were not always consistent with the evaluations. Students were referred and placed into special education despite what the requirements and criteria were for emotional disturbance eligibility. The findings also noted that there was subjectivity in the decision making process when referring, evaluating, and placing classified students as having an emotional disturbance. Teacher tolerance and psychological attitudes with
students and families were noted in the case studies. The psychologists’ outcomes favored the mandated testing rather than the child’s behavior in a natural setting. As noted in this study, there is “a disturbing discrepancy between the world of educational practice and the ideal of an objective, scientifically based referral, assessment, and placement process” (Hart, Cramer, Harry, Klinger, & Sturges, 2010, p. 158).

Cullinan and Kauffman (2005) conducted a study to look at the racial bias of teachers in the referral process for students classified as emotionally disturbed in one of the five characteristics outlined by IDEA. The study involved African-American and White teachers of 769 students from 31 different states in the United States. All of the students were classified with an emotional disturbance. Out of the student population, 245 of the students were African American and 20% of the students were females. Students were selected from elementary, middle, and high schools. The teachers rated the students’ emotional behavior using the five characteristics of emotional disturbance outlined in IDEA.

A four-point scale using the Scale for Assessing Emotional Disturbance was used as the assessment for this study (Epstein & Cullinan, 1998). This included a standarized, non-referenced rating scale. There were 45 emotional and behavioral problem items ratings. The subscales were in the area of inability to learn, relationship problems, inappropriate behavior, unhappiness or depression, physical symptoms or fears, and social maladjustment. There were 45 items in the subscale categories. The analysis looked at how the subscale scores differed across races of African Americans and European Americans; across school levels of elementary, middle, and high school; and the races of the educators.
The findings from this study were grouped into six categories: (1) inability to learn, (2) relationship problems, (3) inappropriate behaviors, (4) unhappiness or depression, (5) physical symptoms or fears, and (6) socially maladjusted. In the area of inappropriate behaviors, the study identified that despite the race of the student and the race of the teacher, the behavior levels for students at each school level had variation. African-American students in the middle school showed more of a behavioral challenge than in the elementary school by both races. The findings showed no difference in results in the areas of unhappiness or depression and physical symptoms or fears from either group of teachers or students. The overall findings from this study indicate that the bias of teachers may not be a factor in disproportionality (Cullinan & Kauffman, 2005).

Another study looked at the referral and identification process when classifying students with an emotional disturbance. This study was conducted in the Los Angeles Unified School District as a result of a consent decree from 1996 by Hernandez, Ramanathan, Harr, and Socias (2008). The focus of the consent decree was to provide evidence of an evaluation process for 90% of African Americans classified as emotionally disturbed. The goal was not to stop classification of African Americans, so there was no target for decreasing the number. It was a longitudinal study that took place during the 2004-2005 and 2006-2007 school years. There was an earlier study conducted in the 2003-2004 school year that was similar to this study (Hernandez & Ramanathan, 2005).

The sample population was African Americans that was initially identified as emotionally disturbed or those who were being reevaluated for continuation of eligibility. Another sample was collected on White students in the same two groups as the African Americans. Data was provided on a monthly basis of all racially ethnic students in one of
the two categories, initially classified or reevaluation. The elements of the evaluation for
the study included the pre-referral and intervention stage, the assessment, the eligibility
determination, and the team considerations of supports for the student being classified.
Data collection included the demographic information about the students in the sample
and a review of the students’ cumulative file and IEP. This information was reviewed by
several researchers to ensure reliability. The Los Angeles Unified School District
developed an instrument to use when referring students for special education and seeking
classification (Appendix D).

The findings indicate that over the three-year period, there has been a reduction in
the number of students initially classified as emotionally disturbed. The number of
African Americans decreased by 35.8%, a total of 530 students. There was an overall
decrease in all emotional disturbance classifications of 30.4% or 1,248 students in all
ethnic groups. However, the overall number of African-American students remained
relatively the same, 36% of the population in 2003-2004 compared to 33.1% in 2006-
2007. The results were similar when looking at the placement of students classified as
emotionally disturbed in nonpublic schools. Although the risk of African Americans
decreased from 1.36 to 1.20, the risk ratio increased a small amount. This was attributed to
the decline in the enrollment and the number of students eligible for classification with
emotional disturbance (Hernandez, Ramanathan, Harr, & Socías, 2008).

The final study looking at emotional disturbance was conducted by Skiba, Poloni-
Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, and Feggins-Azziz, (2006). This study looked at the
placement of students classified with emotional disturbance as a way of monitoring and
addressing strategies for disproportionality of African Americans. This was called the
Indiana Disproportionality Project. The data was collected on individual students with disabilities in 295 school districts in the State of Indiana during the 2001-2002 school year. African-American students made up 11.3% of the total enrollment in the State of Indiana and 23.2% of the enrollment was in the emotional disturbance classification. The data gathered was from general education classrooms and separate class placements. The data was analyzed in five disability categories and within two placement environments.

The results of the study indicated that African Americans were overrepresented in the emotional disturbance category and overrepresented in the separate class placements at a statistically significant level, with a risk ratio of 2.36 and 2.94, respectively. African Americans comprised 23.2% of the total enrollment; 14.2% were in the general education classroom and 26.2% in separate classrooms. The result was that African Americans were 1.2 times more likely to be in a separate classroom (Hernandez, Ramanathan, Harr, & Socias, 2008).

African-American males with the classification of emotional disturbance can be attributed to many factors to include bias in the referral and evaluation process, the subjectivity of the classification, and placement (Hernandez, Ramanathan, Harr, & Socias, 2008). The rubric developed by the Los Angeles Unified School District is a tool that can be used by school districts as they address the issue of disproportionality. The general education classrooms begin the path of identification of troubling or troubled behavior. The teachers’ perceptions as being troubling must be distinguished from a clinical diagnosis of mental behavior that would be considered as troubled (Hart, Cramer, Harry, Klinger, & Sturges, 2010).
Gaps in the Research

Improvements in the disproportionate representation of African-American males will only occur when all constituents, educators, parents, and students take an active role in the referral process (Moore III, Henfield, & Owens, 2008). Teachers’ level of cultural sensitivity and quality of instruction may need to be further researched to determine the impact of referring students to special education (Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007). Research on the quality of instruction and classroom management practices may also provide an understanding of disproportionality (Hart, Cramer, Harry, Klinger, & Sturges, 2010). Parents seek building collaboration within the school community. Increasing the involvement of African-American parents in the process is critical (Williams & Baber, 2007).

The impact of pre-referral teams on the disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education has been researched. More research is needed on how to best meet the needs of African-American males in general education classrooms, preventing the need for special education (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, & Wu, 2006). Williams (2007) noted that the pre-referral stage is where the actual decisions are made about student placement into special education. Moore (2002) suggested further research in understanding teachers’ decision in referring students for special education. Finally, research on the bias of the referral process should be further studied (Hosp & Reschly, 2003).

The studies in this literature review focused on the concern with disproportionality and the potential causes. More research is needed to look into the patterns that occur for these children that put them at risk for being placed into special
education with the classification of emotionally disturbed (Harry, Klinger, Sturges, & Moore, 2002).

Chapter Summary

The literature review provides a clearer understanding of how the evaluation component of the referral process may impact the disproportionate representation of African-American males classified with an emotional disturbance. The research is clear that there is a problem with disproportionality as evidenced by the IDEA (2004) regulation that districts must monitor and address disproportionality. This study seeks to address how the referral process impacts the disproportionality of African-American males classified with an emotional disturbance.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

General Perspective

African-American students are placed into special education at a higher rate than any other race/ethnic group. The disproportionality of African Americans in special education has been a problem since 1968 (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002). Research shows that African-American males are disproportionately placed into special education in the judgmental categories of emotionally disturbed and mentally retarded. It is not clear as to why disproportionality exists. However, what is clear is that there is a detrimental impact on the graduation rates and academic achievement for African-American males who are placed into special education.

This study looked at the impact that the evaluation process has on the disproportionate representation of African-American males classified with an emotional disturbance within special education. The researcher looked to find if there was a bias in the evaluation component of the referral process that leads to a disproportionate number of African-American males classified as emotionally disturbed. This research was used to support psychologists in better defining their role in ensuring that African-American males meet the eligibility criteria for emotional disturbance.

The research questions identified below guided the work of this study:

1. Does a student’s race have an effect on school psychologists’ determination of eligibility for emotional disturbance? The assessment results and other demographics in the referral packet will be controlled.
2. How do school psychologists explain their rationale when determining eligibility for emotional disturbance? Do explanations differ based on students’ race?

Research Context

This study was conducted in an urban school district in Upstate New York. To ensure confidentiality, the district is referred to as the Greenville Heritage School District (GHSD). The profile of the GHSD was identified using the New York State District Report Card (2009). At the time of the study, the GHSD comprised 31,653 students in Grades Pre-K through Grade 12. There were 59 schools within the district, 40 Elementary and 19 Secondary. The schools were structured as PreK-6, K-6, and 7-12. The district was restructuring the school organization to become PreK-8 and 9-12 schools.

The GHSD was identified as a district in need of improvement for English Language Arts (ELA) with graduation rates, 24% and 41%, respectively, during 2009-10. A district in need of improvement is based on students in the subgroup categories identified under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The subgroups are ethnicity, students with disabilities, limited English proficiency, and economically disadvantaged. The district was identified as a district in good standing for math and science. Students with disabilities did not meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2009-10. Only 7.2% of students with disabilities met standards on the New York State English Language Arts (NYS ELA).

The racial composition of the district during 2009-10 was 64% African American, 22% Hispanic, 10% White, 3% Asian or Native, and 1% Other. Eighty-five percent of the students were eligible for the free- and reduced-lunch programs. The students with
disabilities made up 17.6% of the student population, totaling 6,201 students. African-American students made up 63.9% of students with disabilities, with 42.2% being African-American males. The judgmental categories of learning disabled, emotional disturbance, and intellectual disability were 28.0%, 11.8%, and 7.9%, respectively. African-American males comprise 50.8% of students classified with an emotional disturbance, Hispanic males 14.3%, and White males 8.9%. This represents a disproportionate representation of African-American males classified as having an emotional disturbance in the GHSD.

Data on students with disabilities was obtained from the Office of Accountability within the GHSD (2010). The percentage of students with disabilities who met standards on the NYS ELA Grade 3-8 assessment was 7.2%. The percentage of students with disabilities on the NYS ELA Grade 9-12 was 21%. The graduation rate for students with disabilities earning a local or Regents diploma was 21%. There were 247 long-term suspensions and 945 short-term suspensions for students with disabilities. Long-term suspensions are considered six days or more out of school and short term is considered one to five days out of school.

The GHSD had 900 initial referrals to the committee on special education in 2009-10. Initial referrals were submitted for students who were referred to special education for the first time. There were 654 students who were classified as a result of the initial referral. These students were classified in one of the 14 categories identified by IDEA. During this same year, 144 students were declassified from special education.

The students receiving special education services in 2009-10 were in programs where they were in the general education classrooms as well as in self-contained
classrooms. Approximately 56% of the students were in the general education classroom 80% of the day. There were 2,495 students in self-contained programs, 39%. Twenty-four percent of these students spent less than 40% of their day in general education programs.

New York University is working with the GHSD on the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education and with suspensions. This work will bring a culturally relevant instructional framework to the district in an effort to meet the needs of African-American males.

Research Participants

The participants for this study were school psychologists who work in the GHSD. School psychologists in the GHSD are primarily responsible for conducting psychological evaluations for students who are referred for special education as part of the evaluation component of the referral process. There were a total of 54 full-time school psychologists in 2011-12. The psychologists were assigned to elementary and secondary schools based on the school enrollment. There were also psychologists assigned from GHSD to support nonpublic, private, and parochial schools in the surrounding urban area of this Upstate New York school district.

The researcher solicited school psychologists to participate in the research by sending an introductory letter describing the study. The introductory letter was sent to all of the psychologists within the GHSD by email and through the US Postal System. A second email was sent to all of the psychologists from the Director of School Psychologists from the GHSD. This email was sent to seek support from the director to help solicit participation. The researcher was seeking at least 25 school psychologists, 46%, to participate in the study.
The psychologists were asked to spend one session to complete the entire experiment. The session was scheduled for two hours at an offsite location that was convenient for all participants. A second session was scheduled to accommodate the participating psychologists’ schedules. The researcher provided light refreshments during an early-evening timeframe. The participants were provided with a small token of appreciation following the study.

**Instruments Used in Data Collection**

This study was conducted using the sequential explanatory strategy for mixed methods. This type of mixed methods is used when trying to use qualitative results to analyze the results from quantitative information (Creswell, 2009). The experiment involved the dependent variable, male students being evaluated for classification of emotional disturbance, and the independent variable, the race of the student. The experiment looked at the frequency that school psychologists classified the African-American student with an emotional disturbance and the frequency of the White student classified with an emotional disturbance. The researcher looked to determine if the classification has at a higher frequency for the African-American male student.

The study was considered an experiment. The experiment involved randomly assigning the school psychologists from the GHSD to review one of two student profiles. Each psychologist was provided with data regarding one of the two student profiles. The data on each of the students were identical (Appendix E). The independent variable was the race of the student. Psychologists were provided with a folder that contained all of the evaluations of the student. The student profiles were given to allow an equal number of
African-American and White students to be reviewed. The psychologists were provided with as much time as they required to review all of the documentation in the packet.

The psychologists were asked to determine if the student they reviewed was eligible for classification as a student with an emotional disturbance. The psychologists were asked to write a written report indicating their rationale for the decision they made regarding the classification of emotionally disturbed or not. The written response was no more than two paragraphs in length. The written report included the components that are included in all psychological reports written following an evaluation (Appendix F). The written report was to be consistent with what the school psychologists in the GHSD prepare after completing an evaluation of a student as part of the evaluation process.

The decision made by each psychologist was analyzed to determine the frequency of the classification of emotional disturbance for the African-American male. The results of the frequency of classification were analyzed using chi square test of independence.

The written reports were analyzed using qualitative data analysis. The written reports were coded by the researcher in consultation with a retired school psychologist. The data analysis found common themes and patterns to identify the rationale for the classification of emotional disturbance. The researcher also focused on the different rationales based on the race of the two student profiles to determine commonalities and differences.

**Procedures Used**

A letter was provided to the psychologists to seek participation in the study (Appendix G). The researcher sought informed consent from the psychologists in the GHSD. Informed consent provided the participants with information about the purpose,
design, risks, and benefits of the study. The informed consent explained the participants’ rights to voluntarily participate and withdraw from the study at any time (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The confidentiality of participants is an important component when seeking informed consent.

The researcher created the two students’ profiles for the experiment. The student profiles were developed using the components identified in Appendix E. The researcher consulted with a school psychologist from a suburban district located in the same region of Upstate New York to review the profiles of each of the students. The psychologist served as a consultant to the researcher. The consultant provided feedback on whether adequate information was contained in the student profile to make a fair determination for the classification as emotional disturbance. After making the determination, the consultant was asked to answer the same questions that were used during the focus group. Once the researcher determined that the profiles and focus group questions were appropriate, the study was conducted.

The experiment was conducted by providing the two student profiles with identical characteristics as identified in Appendix E. One of the students was an African-American male and one of the students was a White male. The race of the student was included in the profile of the student as part of the characteristics. Each of the participants was asked to review the student profiles that they were given and determine if the student met the eligibility for the classification of emotional disturbance. The psychologists were asked to complete a written report. After completing the written report, the psychologists were asked to complete a manipulation checklist. This checklist was used to determine if race was a factor in the psychologists’ decisions for classification.
The qualitative component was completed by collecting the written responses, following the experiment in which the psychologists indicated their rationale for the decision to classifying the student as having an emotional disturbance. These written responses were coded and analyzed to determine if the school psychologists’ rationale differed based on the race of the student.

The experiment was led by the researcher’s consulting psychologist. This ensured that the participation in the study had no correlation to job evaluation or performance. The researcher was interested in open and honest responses by the school psychologists. The openness and honesty could have been jeopardized if the researcher conducted the experiment.

**Data Analysis**

The study involved gathering two sets of data. The first set of data was from the experiment. The data used was the frequency of the classification for emotional disturbance from each of the participants. A chi square test was used to determine the effect of race on the classification of emotional disturbance. The chi square test was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the frequency of the classification as emotionally disturbed for the African-American and the White male students. This chi square test of independence was testing to see the relationship between the two students and race (Huck, 2008).

The data for the qualitative component of the study was gathered from the written responses following the experiment. The written responses were collected and analyzed to determine if the rationale for the classification of emotional disturbance was dependent upon the race of the student. A qualitative data analysis was conducted using the three-
part process of noticing, collecting, and thinking (Seidel, 1998). These three processes occurred progressively, as the researcher cycled through the stages. The processes were also recursive because the researcher was included in one step and recalled information from another step. This process was also holographic as the researcher was involved in all three processes simultaneously.

Noticing involved two levels, interviewing and coding. Given that the school psychologists completed the written responses as part of the second component of the experiment, interviews were not necessary. The noticing phase involved coding the written responses. Each written response was numbered. Each response was thoroughly read by both the researcher and the consultant. During the coding, commonalities and themes were identified. This initial step of coding involved discovering new information throughout the reading and rereading of the written responses. One theme may be identified during the first reading, and new themes may emerge after multiple readings.

The second process was the collecting and sorting of the information from the written responses. This step involved the identification of common themes. The themes were identified and sorted into various units or patterns. This step also involved bringing order to the data or sorting and sifting through the data (Seidel, 1998). During this process, revisions to the coding changed as themes developed. As previously noted, the researcher moved back and forth between noticing and collecting.

Finally, there was the thinking phase. This phase occurred during the noticing and collecting steps, as well as independently. In this phase, the researcher thought about the things that were noticed and collected from the focus group. Discoveries emerged and influenced the coding during the collecting and sorting phase. During the thinking phase,
the researcher attempted to make sense of the information collected, established relationships between the information, and made discoveries that connected to the research problem and questions. Thinking caused the researcher to make revisions to the codes and to continue to move throughout the notice, collecting, and thinking phases. The process of data analysis was a continuous process as noted in Appendix H.

Once the study was completed, the researcher had the written rationales transcribed. These documents were color coded by race and classification. During the noticing phase of the data analysis, the researcher cut out phrases that were similar in nature. As the researcher moved in and out of noticing, sorting, and thinking phases, the data was continuously reread for clarity. Following the sorting of all phrases, the researcher categorized the phrases by the first level of themes. This first level of themes was reviewed by the psychologist consultant to ensure that the themes were relevant to the terminology used by the school psychologists. The researcher made changes to the themes as part of the review with the consultant. This moved to the second level of the themes.

Once the themes were finalized, the researcher began to analyze the data for similarities and differences based on the race of the student and the decision of classification. This moved into more sorting and organizing of the data to determine the findings as they related to the research questions. This continuous process of data analysis led to the findings identified in Chapter 4.

The first step of the study was to solicit the participants. The letter regarding the study (Appendix G) was distributed to all of the psychologists in the GHSD via email. A
follow-up letter was sent by the Director of Psychologists of the same group of psychologists as a way to show support of the study.

The psychologists were notified as to their participation via email. Notification of date, time, and location of the experiment was sent to the participants who responded that they would be willing to participate.

Once the participants were identified and informed of the date, the study was conducted. Data was collected during the two sessions conducted by the researcher.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provides details on the sequential explanatory mixed methods that were used for this research. The experiment provides information that is used for the qualitative data analysis. The psychologists helped the researcher determine if there was bias in the evaluation component of the referral process when determining classification of emotional disturbance for African-American male.
Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study which examined one urban district’s psychologists’ approaches to student eligibility of emotionally disturbed during special education evaluation. These results will help the researcher determine whether the evaluation process leads to the disproportionate representation of African-American males. The study was conducted to determine if there was a bias in the evaluation component of the referral process that leads to a disproportionate number of African-American males classified as emotionally disturbed.

The experiment involved the dependent variable, male students being evaluated for classification of emotional disturbance, and the independent variable, the race of the student. The experiment looked at the frequency that school psychologists classified the African-American and White male students with an emotional disturbance. This study determined whether the classification had a higher frequency for the African-American male student. The findings answered the research question:

1. Does a student’s race have an effect on school psychologists’ determination of eligibility for emotional disturbance?

The assessment results and other demographics in the referral packet were controlled. The participants of the experiment were also asked to write a written report indicating their rationale for the decision they made in determining eligibility. The written responses were analyzed to answer the second research question:
2. How do school psychologists explain their rationale when determining eligibility for emotional disturbance? Do explanations differ based on students’ race?

The Study

Research participants. There were 13 school psychologists from the GHSD who volunteered to participate in the study. This represents 24% of the school psychologist employed in the district. The gender and race of the participants are identified in Table 4.1. School psychologists were solicited to volunteer following three different correspondences. First, an email was sent to all psychologists from the researcher. Following the email, a letter was sent to the same group of psychologists. Finally, an email of support from the Director of Psychologists in the GHSD was sent to the psychologists. The participants spent one hour to complete the experiment. There were two sessions held on two different days to accommodate the participants.

Table 4.1

Study Participants by Race and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 3        n = 10
Findings

**Quantitative findings.** This section of the chapter provides the results of the quantitative analysis. The data was analyzed using a chi square test of independence to determine if the two variables, race and the classification of emotional disturbance, are independent of each other. The chi square test of independence was calculated to compare the frequency that African-Americans males were classified as emotionally disturbed in comparison to White males. Table 4.2 provides the actual and expected frequencies. The expected frequency shows the proportion of the data that would be expected if the hypothesis was true and no errors were present in the data (Huck, 2008).

The results of the chi square test of independence $X^2(1) = .63, p = .43$, indicates no statistical significance was found between the frequency of the classification as emotionally disturbed for the African-American and White students. These results indicate that the African-American male is less likely to be classified with an emotional disturbance than the White male, but there is no significant difference. There is a small, contingency coefficient of .21, but there is no significant difference in the relationship between the race of the student and the classification of emotionally disturbed.
Table 4.2

*Race and Frequency of the Classification of Emotional Disturbance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ED Classification</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Qualitative findings.** This section describes the qualitative data analysis using the written rationales provided by the school psychologists. The written rationales were used to determine if the psychologists’ decisions were based on consistent information from the evaluation packet about the student. The criteria used to determine eligibility for the classification of emotionally disturbed must be consistent with the federal guidelines identified by IDEA. Students must meet at least one of the following criteria to be considered eligible for classification: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or
depression; and (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

The written responses were categorized using qualitative data analysis. The data analysis looked at the written responses provided by each of the participants to determine the relationships and general themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The data analysis helped the researcher determine if the rationales used by the psychologists differed based on the race of the student. After coding and verification from the psychologist consultant who participated in this study, there were ten themes that emerged from the written rationales. These themes were generated from phrases within the written rationales following the coding. The themes were not influenced by any specific questions provided to the school psychologists.

The themes that emerged were the students’ academics, exhibiting behaviors, environmental influences, interventions, relationships, the duration of behaviors, psychiatric references, social emotional functioning, other classifications, educational setting, and the student’s perceptions. The themes are categorized in Table 4.3 by the recommendation of the classification of emotionally disturbed or not and by the race of the student. Each of the themes is defined in this section. The occurrences of these themes are discussed and comments from the psychologists are highlighted within these findings.
Table 4.3

*Themes by Classification and Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classified as Emotionally Disturbed</th>
<th>Not Classified as Emotionally Disturbed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of Behaviors</td>
<td>Duration of Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Setting</td>
<td>Educational Setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Influences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibiting Behaviors</td>
<td>Exhibiting Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventions</td>
<td>Interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other classifications</td>
<td>Other classifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric References</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Emotional Functioning</td>
<td>Social Emotional Functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s Perception</td>
<td>Student’s Perception</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Themes

Interventions. The theme most often referenced by the school psychologists in the written rationales was interventions. Interventions were referenced for the classified student and the student not classified and for the African-American and White students. An intervention theme is defined in this research study as any reference to the types of interventions offered to the student, the interventions already in place for the student, or when the psychologist references recommending interventions as part of their response.

The interventions that were mentioned in the written rationales of the participants included the use of a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA), the implementation of a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP), counseling or therapy sessions both in and out of school, and explicit teaching strategies identified to support the students’ needs.

Psychologists who recommended the classification of emotionally disturbed provided supporting comments that, despite the use of various interventions, the student had not progressed or the student was not benefitting or responding to the interventions. Psychologist E stated, “They have done a lot in general education and seem to have exhausted resources.” Another psychologist noted that the student has had outside treatment, a BIP, and that the school has done a lot to assist the student. These comments were noted in the rationales for the African-American student. Psychologist H stated that the student did not appear to be benefitting from or responding to school-based interventions to address the students’ needs. Despite various interventions, another psychologist noted that the student had not progressed. These comments were noted in the rationales for the White student.
When psychologists *recommended that the student not be classified as emotionally disturbed*, they also referenced the interventions. The rationale made by Psychologist A was that there had been some behavioral interventions, but they didn’t match with the student’s needs and more tailored interventions were needed. Psychologist I noted that most of the interventions for instruction and behavior had just begun and needed to be followed through. The psychologists also stated that a better FBA and academic interventions were needed for the student. Psychologist D’s comments included the need for replacement behaviors to be directly taught to the student with explicit teaching strategies.

Interventions were mentioned in the psychologists’ rationales to support the classification of emotionally disturbed and to indicate more work in the area of interventions is necessary before classification should be considered. The comments were for both the African-American and the White student.

**Exhibiting behaviors.** Another theme that was often mentioned in the psychologists’ rationales was the *exhibiting behaviors* of the student. The only group where exhibiting behaviors were not referenced by any of the psychologists was for the White student who was not recommended for the classification of emotionally disturbed. The theme exhibiting behaviors is defined in this study as the types of behaviors that have been displayed by the student as referenced in the evaluations and documents included in the packet.

Psychologists who made a *recommendation to classify students as emotionally disturbed* discussed the students’ behaviors. Psychologist L described the student’s behaviors using terms such as “explosive” and “throwing chairs.” This psychologist also
commented that the student’s behavior was often impulsive and uncalculated. These comments were all made for the White student. Psychologist E included statements that the student was reactive and sensitive. Psychologist G mentioned erratic behaviors and intense emotional behaviors. The psychologists who referenced these statements recommended the classification of emotionally disturbed for the African-American student.

Psychologists’ comments regarding exhibiting behaviors were also referenced when the recommendation was not to classify the student as emotionally disturbed. Psychologist I stated that the student demonstrated severe impulsive behavior accompanied by severe anger, defiance, and hostility, and the student was physically aggressive toward other students. Psychologists M and K included comments in their written rationales that the student did not make eye contact. Spinning around, and oppositional and defiant behaviors were referenced in psychologists’ rationales. All of these comments were referring to the African-American student.

The behaviors of the student were noted in the psychologists’ written rationales when the recommendation was to classify both the African-American and the White student. The references to the behaviors were only negative types of behaviors exhibited by the student. There was no mention of any positive behaviors displayed or strengths of either student.

**Other classifications.** Psychologists’ written rationales referenced the theme *other classifications* consistently when they did not recommend the classification of emotionally disturbed. This theme was referenced in the rationales for both the African-American and the White student. The definition for the theme of other classifications in
this research is the references psychologists made for other disability types the student
displayed or when they recommended that a specified classification be ruled out before
consideration of the classification of emotionally disturbed. The various classifications
referenced by the psychologists in their responses were Attention Deficit Hyperactive
Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Disruptive and/or Oppositional
Defiant Disorder, and Other Health Impaired (OHI). When psychologists referenced
possible characteristics of students with ASD, included in the rationale was the statement,
“It would be necessary to rule out the possibility that ASD was the students’ true
diagnosis.”

There were several references by school psychologists that the student may be
socially maladjusted. Social maladjustment is an undefined phenomenon that can be
identified as an antisocial behavior outside of the school setting (Cullinan, Harniss,
Epstein, & Ryser, 2001). Federal regulations state that a socially maladjusted student
does not meet the criteria for the classification of emotionally disturbed. This was noted
in the rationales for the African-American student who was not recommended for the
classification of emotionally disturbed and for the White student who was recommended
for the classification of emotionally disturbed.

Psychologist G recommended that the African-American student be classified as
emotionally disturbed. The rationale included that because the student’s case was
complicated by the fact that the student had Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), the
student should be classified as emotionally disturbed.

Many of the rationales that referenced other classifications were not to
recommend the classification of emotionally disturbed for either the African-American or
the White student. Psychologist B suggested that the student should be classified as a student with autism, and a program specific to autism should be provided to support the student. Psychologist D suggested a classification of OHI for this same student. These comments were all made regarding the White student. The comments made regarding the African-American student were also for classification of OHI and ruled out the possibility of ASD. Psychologist I noted that there was evidence of social maladjustment, which cannot be addressed by special education. Psychologist F also noted that there was possible evidence of social maladjustment.

Psychologists’ rationales that included other classifications were mostly aligned with the recommendation not to classify either student as emotionally disturbed. The rationales provided possible classifications that would be better suited to meet the students’ needs.

**Relationships.** The *relationships* theme emerged often when psychologists recommended a classification and when they did not. This was consistent for the African-American and the White student. The theme relationships is defined in this study as the students’ ability or inability to form and maintain appropriate interactions with peers and adults.

When the psychologist did *recommend the classification of emotionally disturbed*, relationships were still referenced in the written rationales. Psychologist H stated in the rationale that the student had great difficulty in building and maintaining relationships with peers and adults. Psychologist E recommended the classification of emotionally disturbed for the African-American student because the student had, “…little to no friendships in school.” Psychologist F, who also recommended the classification, stated
that, “He seeks conflict with peers, will not let down until a conflict escalates, and he doesn’t have any friends.” This comment was noted in the rationale for the White student.

There were comments noted when the psychologists did not make a recommendation to classify the student as emotionally disturbed when referencing relationships. The references to the theme of relationships included statements that the student was not able to understand verbal and nonverbal social cues, and the student did not know how to interact with peers. These comments were made for the White and African-American student. Psychologist A stated, “If the student does not know how to interact with his peers, why separate him?” The psychologist stated that the student was socially inappropriate and unaware of how to interact with peers. This was the comment regarding the African-American student.

Relationships were addressed in the written rationales despite the classification or the race of the student. The psychologist provided evidence to support their decision.

Duration of behaviors. The duration of behaviors appeared in all groups whether the recommendation was for or against classification and with the student of either race. This theme is defined in this research as the length of time the students’ behaviors, or the period of time that the behaviors, were evident. The duration of the behaviors was determined through the various timelines noted in the evaluation packet.

Psychologists who recommended a classification of emotionally disturbed used rationales that included evidence that the behaviors have occurred over an extended period of time or that the behaviors have occurred to a marked degree over a prolonged period of time. These comments were consistent for both the African-American and
White student. Psychologist E stated that the student met the criteria of emotional disturbance because the issues had been longstanding. This psychologist stated that the behaviors were not new; they were now severe. Psychologist G included a comment that the student had been suffering significant emotional stress for a very long time. Psychologist L is quoted as saying, “An ED classification is reached through considering if behaviors have occurred to a marked degree and over a prolonged period of time.” Using this criterion, the psychologist supported the classification of emotionally disturbed for the White student.

Psychologists who did not recommend a classification of emotionally disturbed also referenced the duration of the behaviors. These comments referenced by the psychologists did not note a history of the behaviors over time. The comments also noted that the behaviors needed to have occurred over many years and steady occurrences needed to be evident in the evaluation packet. Psychologist C specifically commented on the African-American student by stating, “The consideration of classifying a student of color with ED has to take present, as well as past and future implications, into consideration.” This psychologist recommendation was not to classify the African-American student as emotionally disturbed. Psychologist D stated that, “The target behavior concerns need to have been occurring for many years including a steady occurrence of the behavior throughout childhood.” This psychologist recommended that the White student not be classified as emotionally disturbed.

The written rationales consisted of responses that referenced the duration of the behavior. What was inconsistent was the duration of the behaviors as noted by the
different participants when reviewing the same evaluation packet. This occurred for both the African-American and the White student.

**Academics.** Academics was a theme noted by all of the psychologists within the written rationales. The academics are defined, for the purpose of this study, as the performance of the student and the instruction provided to the student. The performance of the student was identified in the evaluation packet.

Psychologist E suggested *classifying the student as emotionally disturbed*. This was specifically noted for the African-American student. The psychologist identified the performance deficits and the lack of skills displayed by the student. Other psychologists noted specific academic skills that the student lacked. These skills included lack of visual and perceptual processing. Psychologist E also noted that the student’s academic delays might have been the result of the conflicts the student engaged in as a result of missing instruction due to being removed from the classroom. Psychologist H noted that there may be learning needs of the White student.

The psychologists who *did not classify the student as emotionally disturbed* also pointed out concerns with academics. Psychologist B noted that the White student had a typical cognitive and academic profile of a high-functioning autistic student. A comment by Psychologist C stated a concern about neurological breakdowns with very weak nonverbal reasoning. Psychologist I noted that that the student’s attention and impulsive problems were interfering with his ability to learn. Psychologist A noted that the student might have been acting out due to his academic difficulties. This resulted in the psychologist’s recommendation of not classifying the African-American student as emotionally disturbed.
Academics were noted, but the psychologists differed as to whether they would support the classification of emotionally disturbed for this student. The academics were a key factor when the psychologists suggested classification.

**Student’s perception.** The theme student’s perception was only identified for the African-American student. This theme was present for the student who was recommended to be classified and also for the student that not recommended to be classified with an emotional disturbance. The student’s perception in this research was defined as the way the student felt or believed about himself and others.

Psychologist G suggested a *classification of emotionally disturbed.* The comments stated that the student showed a lack of engagement in his own education and that the student’s emotional issues impacted how he viewed himself. The psychologists also noted that the misperceptions the student had impacted him emotionally and the student had a negative perception of the world.

Psychologist A who *did not recommend classification of emotionally disturbed* noted that the student was going through personal issues that he had not been able to deal with. Psychologist C mentioned the need for the student to be involved in problem solving to get to his perceptions about his issues.

The student’s perceptions were not considered in many of the psychologists’ written rationale. The consideration of the student’s perception was used as a factor for deciding to classify the African-American student and not to classify the White student.

**Social emotional functioning.** *Social emotional functioning* was only identified a few times in the written rationales by the psychologists. These references were noted when the recommendation was made for classification for both students. There were also
references to social emotional functioning for the African-American student when the recommendation was not to classify the student. There was no mention of the student’s social emotional functioning for the White student who was not classified. Social emotional functioning in this study is defined as the social emotional needs of the student. Psychologists who referenced the students’ social emotional functioning also identified depression as a barrier for the student.

Psychologists who recommended classification of emotionally disturbed did so for both the African-American and the White student. Rationales to support the classification also referred to the students’ social emotional needs as interfering with the students’ ability to progress. Psychologist G noted that the African-American student showed signs of depression and externalized his emotional issues. Psychologist H noted that the White student also showed signs of depression and mental health needs were interfering with the students’ progress.

Psychologist C who did not support a classification of emotionally disturbed noted that the student might be dealing with neurological breakdowns and not emotional concerns.

**Environmental influences.** The theme environmental influences were used only a few times within the rationales identified by the school psychologists. This theme was only referenced for the African-American student who was not classified as emotionally disturbed. The environmental influence as defined in this research is the impact the changes in teachers and home have on the student.

Psychologists used the environmental influences as a rationale for not classifying the student. Psychologist M included in the written rationale a reference that the student’s
home situation was unclear and the student did not have consistency in where he lives. The rationale also included a comment that there may be environmental situations that trigger the students’ behavior since he had been manageable in the past. The change in teachers is also included in the rationale.

Environmental influences were only noted by one psychologist, and it was referenced as a rationale for the decision not to classify the African-American student. There was no recommendation made to classify the students as emotionally disturbed within this theme.

**Educational setting.** *Educational setting* was used minimally, but it appeared in all categories except for the White student who was not classified as emotionally disturbed. The educational setting in this study is described as the environment in which the students’ needs can best be supported within a school.

Psychologist H, who suggested the *classification of emotional disturbed* for the White student, identified the need for a more supportive classroom setting where the student could feel successful to see if behavior changes would occur. Psychologist E, who supported classification for the African-American student, indicated that a smaller classroom environment might be beneficial to the student.

Psychologist A *did not recommend the classification of emotionally disturbed.* This psychologist stated the student could be taught in general education but with a teacher and environment that could assist with his needs. This comment was made for the African-American student.

**Psychiatric reference.** *Psychiatric reference* was used in the rationales when referring to the White student. This occurred when the psychologists recommended the
classification of emotionally disturbed and when they did not recommend classification.

For the purpose of this study, psychiatric reference is defined as the psychologists’ reference to the psychiatric report that was included in the evaluation packet.

Psychologist L supports *classification of a student with an emotional disturbance* based on the psychiatrist’s report that also suggests that an emotional factor is prevalent. Psychologist J who did *not recommend a classification of a student with an emotional disturbance* noted that the psychiatrist’s report was not well aligned with the psychologist’s report.

The psychologist and psychiatrist’s reports were both included in the full evaluation packet reviewed by all participants. There appears to be inconsistency in the interpretation of the two reports as noted by Psychologist L and Psychologist J. In each of their written rationales they reference the psychiatrist’s report, but each psychologist provided a different recommendation for classification of emotional disturbance.

**Qualitative Conclusion**

The findings from the written rationales were used to address the second research questions: How do school psychologists explain their rational when determining eligibility for emotional disturbance? Do explanations differ based on the students’ race? The themes within these findings provide the rationales provided by school psychologists. These rationales include the eligibility decision and the race of the student. Race and eligibility decisions are found within many of the themes with little differences noted. The psychologists’ rationales by theme are included in Appendix I.
Summary

This chapter provides the findings for the study to identify the frequency of the classification of emotionally disturbed for an African-American male student and a White male student. The findings also sought to determine if there is a bias in the evaluation component of the referral process that leads to a disproportionate number of African-American males classified as emotionally disturbed. This chapter summarized the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data analysis. These findings will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This study analyzed the evaluation process used by school psychologists and whether their process contributes to the disproportionate representation of African-American males classified as emotionally disturbed and placed into special education. This chapter begins with a discussion of the results from a theoretical perspective followed by a review of the literature. This chapter also provides implications of the rationales that school psychologists use to determine eligibility of emotional disturbance for African-American males during the evaluation component of the referral process. The implications identified are relevant to practices for school psychologist and special education, followed by implications for further research. The next section of the chapter identifies the limitations of the study. The chapter ends with a summary of the research on the disproportionate representation of African-American males classified as emotionally disturbed within special education.

Discussion

Theoretical perspective. This study looked at how the Critical Race Theory (CRT) applies to the disproportionate representation of African-American males within special education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) described the concept of institutional and structural racism. This concept can be applied to this research when educators look at the performance of African Americans in the school systems in America. The
performance is even more astounding when looking deeper into the performance of African-American males within special education.

Although this study shows no significance in the frequency of African Americans being classified as emotionally disturbed, the number of African-American males in 2001-02 was 21% compared to the overall population of African-American males enrolled in public education of 10% (Jordan, 2008). This can be viewed as institutional and structural racism. The subjectivity that is used when making a determination of eligibility for the classification of emotionally disturbed is evident within this study when analyzing the various written rationales. The rationales that psychologists use may or may not be intentional, but they can be aligned with the CRT’s views on institutional racism. Rationales provided by psychologists who recommended the classification of emotionally disturbed for the African-American student provided comments that did not have substantial objective data to support the criteria. These included the acknowledgement that the student is missing instruction but still needs the classification; exhausted resources in general education so the student must need classification; the student’s case is complicated and a chaotic home life justifies classification. However, the opposite recommendation was made for the White student when these comments were noted.

Critical Race theorists also note that instruction is approached from a deficit model (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The school psychologists’ rationales for the African-American male students who were recommended for the classification of emotionally disturbed provided the deficits of the student. Psychologist E stated that although the students’ achievement was an underestimate, there was still a performance deficit as the
student was unable to display skills. Even when psychologists did not recommend the classification of emotionally disturbed, the comments referenced the deficits of the child. The comments noted in these rationales included weak nonverbal reasoning, deficit in reading fluency and comprehension, and deficits indicated by testing and poor classroom performance. The psychologists made little to no references about what the students actually knew and were able to do. These rationales align with the perspective of the CRT that instruction is approached from a deficit model. This deficit approach was used as a factor in the rationales provided by school psychologists for classifying African-American males as being emotionally disturbed.

Finally, Critical Race theorists note that the types of assessments given to African-American children often have racial stereotypes (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Kunjufu (2005) also pointed out the cultural biases in many of the assessments given to students during the evaluation component of the referral process that creates poor results. When children are provided ineffective curriculum and poor instructional practices, the results will likely be low performance. The themes from this study that focused on the curriculum and instruction are academics and interventions. Rationales for recommendation of emotionally disturbed included comments within both themes. Psychologist E noted that the student was missing instruction and conflicts with peers impacted the students’ academics. Thus, if the student was missing instruction, how can the assessments provide an accurate picture of the student’s performance? Yet, the student was recommended for the classification as emotionally disturbed. Recommendations not to classify the student as emotionally disturbed also referenced the curriculum and instruction. Psychologist A stated that interventions must be tailored to
the needs of the students, Psychologist I stated that instruction must be properly followed through, and Psychologist C stated that they need to know more of what the student had to say. These rationales considered the instruction provided to the student.

The concepts offered by the Critical Race theorists can be applied to this study when looking at the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education. The CRT should be considered in the evaluation process for recommending African-American males to be classified as emotionally disturbed.

The next section of this chapter involves a discussion of the results from this study and previous research on the topic of disproportionality. The discussion includes components of the referral process, and the criteria educators use for referring students and research used for the classification of emotional disturbance.

**Literature Review**

There were studies reviewed that looked at the rate of the classification for African-American students. Although factors that were considered may have been different than the factors identified by the school psychologists, these results differed from the study conducted by this researcher when comparing the frequency of African-American males classified as emotionally disturbed. This study indicated that there was no significant difference in the frequency of African-American males being classified when compared to White males.

The study conducted by Andrew, Wisniewski, and Mulick (1997) that looked at birth month, height, and weight as factors in referring children for special education found that African-American students were referred at a higher rate than Caucasian students. Oswald, Coutinho, Best, and Singh (1999) conducted a study that looked at the
relationship of economics, demographics, and educational variables on the classification of African-American students as emotionally disturbed. This study found that African Americans were 1.5 times as likely to be classified as emotionally disturbed. Although this study did not have the same results as the two studies from the literature, this researcher speculates that race does matter. As the Critical Race theorists believe, racism does exist, but it is often not openly expressed. There was one specific comment provided in the rationales of the psychologists that reference the student’s race. Psychologist C began the rationale with, “The consideration of classifying a student of color...” There were no references of the other student as being White in any of the rationales provided by the psychologists.

Several of the themes that emerged from this study can be linked to the literature review. The themes that are included in this discussion are exhibiting behaviors, academics, interventions, and relationships.

The school psychologists from this study included many of the exhibiting behaviors that the student displayed within their written rationales. These include aggressive behaviors, inattention, impulsive, and atypical and off-task behaviors. The study conducted by Sherwin and Schmidt (2003) at two Southern California clubs used participant observations to examine the aggressive behaviors of children. They found that aggressive behavior was a cultural way of communicating. The study informs the research that educators must have knowledge of the communication codes among African Americans to avoid unnecessarily placing a child into special education. The behaviors identified in the rationales provided by the psychologists that can be viewed as a
misunderstanding of communication include physical aggression, spinning around, and becoming reactive.

Another study that looked at behavior as one factor that causes a disproportionate number of males to be placed into special education was conducted by Wehmeyer and Schwartz (2001). This study found that male students were more likely to be referred to special education for behavioral reasons. Psychologist G stated that the classification of emotionally disturbed for the African-American male was supported because the student was experiencing very high levels of aggression. The rationale for the classification of emotionally disturbed identifies behavior as a primary factor for many of the psychologists’ decisions.

*Academics* were noted as another factor in the rationale of the school psychologists to recommend the classification of emotionally disturbed. Studies that looked at the criteria that teachers use to refer a student for special education identified the students’ academic abilities. One study that included academics was conducted by Dunn, Cole, and Estrada (2009). The study looked at a set of 15 criteria used to refer a student for special education services. The results identified two factors that teacher’s use when referring students to special education: inattention and aptitude. Aptitude in this study was referred to as the lack of reasoning skills, completion of tasks, need for assistance, and repetition. These same criteria were used by the school psychologists in the GHSD when providing their rationales for their decision to classify a student as emotionally disturbed. Psychologists E stated the student should be classified because he was off-task and unable to display skills.
Dunn (2006) conducted a study looking at the reasons teachers use for referring students to special education. This study identified themes that are very similar to the themes identified in this researcher’s study – exhibiting behaviors, academics, interventions, and relationships. The themes from Dunn (2006) were the inability to apply information, needing assistance, repetition and directions, inattention, inability to complete tasks, and atypical behavior. Teachers in Dunn’s study identified a student profile to include poor peer relationships, displaying frustration, low academic performance, shy and withdrawn, disruptive, fighting, refusing to do work, and short attention span. The student profile that the school psychologist from the GHSD was very similar to the profile the teachers identified in Dunn’s study. This is evident from a few of the rationales provided by the psychologists:

- Psychologist L – student is characterized by behaviors that are considered atypical
- Psychologist G – inability to form and maintain friendships
- Psychologist H – struggles with internalizing as well as externalizing difficulties

Intervention was another theme that was identified from this study as well as from the literature review. Psychologists’ rationales reflected on the interventions that were provided to support the student that were mostly focused on the behavioral needs of the student. These interventions included counseling, outside therapy, and behavioral intervention plans. There was little evidence of rationales that focused on the academic needs of the student. Gravois and Rosenfield’s (2006) study looked at the impact that an Instructional Consultant Team (ICT) had on referrals. This study found out that there was a reduction in the number of African-American students placed into special education as a result of improved instruction supported by the ICT.
The studies identified in the literature review provided similar findings to this study when looking at the themes. The findings regarding the frequency may not have aligned due to possible limitations that are discussed later in the chapter.

The implications for this study will be addressed looking at practice and future research. The implications discussed address the practices for psychologists and school districts to address the disproportionality of African-American males classified as emotionally disturbed. Future research can also be done to help identify factors that can reduce the over representation of African-American males in special education.

**Implications**

**Implications for practice.** The findings from this study have implications for school psychologists, those who supervise school psychologists, and special educators who participate in student evaluations and might contribute to the disproportionate representation of African-American males being placed into special education. Shippen, Curtis, and Miller (2009) provided several possible root causes of disproportionality that include biases in the testing and evaluation process. Although it was not clear that a bias existed in the rationales provided by the school psychologists, it was clear that psychologists’ rationales carefully considered the testing provided during the evaluation process. This can become problematic when the tests themselves provide the bias and are used as a basis for determining classifications for African-American males.

The rationales provided by school psychologists vary in terms of the recommendations they make for the classification of emotional disturbance. Although the themes were consistent within the rationales, the final decisions were inconsistent. This is an area where consistency is very critical in determining a classification for a student to
be placed into special education. There are clear criteria for eligibility for the classification of emotionally disturbed, but to identify the element that is valid brings in the psychologists’ subjectivity. This level of subjectivity was also noted in the study conducted by Hart, Cramer, Harry, Klinger, and Sturgis (2010). Psychologists should be able to use an established process for using the results of the evaluations to determine eligibility for emotional disturbance, especially for the most at-risk population of students, African-American males. Psychologists need tools to help provide a more objective view of a students’ profile to determine eligibility. This may be a difficult task, but it must be considered by the federal regulations if we are to address the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education.

The rationales provided by the school psychologists were all focused on a deficit model. There was little to no references of the strength of the student or what the student was capable of doing. Classification of a student should not only consider what the child cannot do or perform, but must also address how the student can use his strengths to compensate for his weaknesses. As psychologists make their recommendations for the classification of emotional disturbance, strengths can play a major role in meeting the needs of the student.

The supervisors of school psychologists also have a role in ensuring that African-American males are not over represented in special education. These supervisors must have an active role in reviewing the recommendations made by school psychologists. There must be assurances that bias and subjectivity are not the basis for the decisions made by school psychologists. The rationales that psychologists provide for the
determination of emotionally disturbed must be evidence based, using the established
criteria under IDEA, and guided by clear the evidence.

Supervisors must also ensure that parents have a stronger voice in the evaluation
process. This is required by IDEA but often not enforced. The rationales provided by the
school psychologists provided no comments relevant to the parents’ perspective or the
voice of the student. Critical Race theorists believe that voice is essential; parents must be
allowed to tell their story. William and Baber (2007) note that increasing the involvement
of African-American parents in the process is critical.

Supervisors also must review the types of assessments school psychologists use to
evaluate African-American students as aligned with Critical Race theorists. This can be
done by consolidating the number of evaluation tools. Supervisors should also ensure
they are providing school psychologists with a set of valid and reliable tools that have
been screened for potential biases toward African-American students. This process was
begun in the GHSD with the consolidation of evaluation tools. The GHSD should
consider taking the next step in ensuring a review for possible bias.

Finally, the special education evaluation process must be reviewed at the federal
and state level. The regulations around eligibility allows for school psychologists to make
interpretations of the data and bring in their own personal biases. Psychologists’
rationales included statements such as “I believe that,” “I think that,” and “I am
concerned that…” These comments bring in the psychologists’ personal feelings,
thoughts, and concerns that interject their personal biases.

There must be more accountability from the teachers who make referrals to
special education. This must occur prior to the evaluation process. Studies have shown
that the pre-referral process can provide support to students to prevent the
disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education. The Los
Angeles Unified School District consent decree in 1996 provided a process that resulted
in a decrease in classification of African Americans by 35.8%. This was attributed to the
implementation of a pre-referral and intervention process that involved the use of the Los
Angeles Unified School District Instrument (Appendix D) when referring students.
Gravois and Rosenfield (2006) looked at the impact the Instructional Consultant Team
has on special education. These findings indicate that there was a reduction in the number
of referrals submitted and the number of African-American students placed into special
education as a result of the implementation of pre-referral teams.

Implementation and review of these practices can help eliminate the
disproportionate representation of African Americans classified as emotionally disturbed
and placed into special education. There may be other root causes, but the evaluation
component has a great impact on the decision to classify a student as emotionally
disturbed. The criteria are identified, but the practicality of following the criteria should
be reviewed. The criteria allows for psychologists to interpret the data and evaluation
results, allowing the outcome to fit into the criteria. This allows for interpretation, a
subjective decision and allows for psychologists to bring in their own biases. Once
African-American males are placed into special education, they become part of the
statistics of high school dropout rates, low academic performance, and high crime rates.

This section looked at the implications for practice. The next section looks at the
implications for future research on disproportionality.
Implications for research. This study looked at the impact that school psychologists have on the classification of emotionally disturbed. Further research should be considered looking at other classifications within the judgmental categories that include learning disabled and intellectually challenged (mental retardation). The research should also consider the classification of Other Health Impaired, as this is becoming the catch-all category. This study could be replicated in other large urban districts in New York to determine if the pattern with the inconsistencies in rationales would be similar.

Additional research is needed to determine the impact that intervention has on reducing the number of African-American males being placed into special education. Psychologists identified the need for interventions to support students in the evaluation process of referrals. The use of Response to Intervention (RTI) has become one of the acceptable models to support students with disabilities as outlined by IDEA. The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities defines RTI as student-centered assessment models that use problem-solving and research-based methods to identify and address learning difficulties in children. The components of RTI include quality classroom instruction, universal screening, continuous progress monitoring, research-based interventions, and instructional interventions (Berkeyley, Bender, Peaster, & Sauders, 2009). RTI is being mandated by state regulations to ensure that students are provided with interventions based on their level of need. Students who have adequate access to these interventions may be less likely to need special educational services, therefore addressing the disproportionate representation of African-American males.
Limitations

This study had at least three limitations that may have had an impact on the results of the study. The first limitation was the number of participants. There were 13 participants in the study. The small significance in the frequency of classification may have been greater with more participants. This may have yielded a greater significance to the study. This would also align with the research that there are a disproportionate number of African-American males in special education.

Another limitation to the study is that the frequency only looked at whether or not the student was classified as emotionally disturbed. If the study looked at the frequency of students being classified in any of the categories under IDEA, there may have been a greater significance in the number of African-American males classified for special education. This was evident in the written rationales by the school psychologists within the theme of other classifications. Several of the rationales provided a recommendation of classification for Other Health Impaired or Autistic. These recommendations were not included in the calculation of the chi square test of independence.

The final limitation involved the researcher. The researchers’ status in the district as the Executive Director of Specialized Services may have posed a concern to participants. The communication to the potential participants was clear that there would not be action taken toward any participants as a result of the findings, it still posed concern for some. There was feedback provided to this researcher that several psychologists were hesitant to participate due to uncertainty as to what the results would display and how the results would be used. This study could have resulted in findings of bias toward African-American students and could expose possible racism.
Conclusion

The disproportionate representation of African-American males classified as emotionally disturbed in special education is evident in the data provided by states and districts. This is even more evident when this researcher walks into classrooms on a daily basis. During any given visit, the classroom comprises 75-85% African-American males, and 90-100% males. This study did not produce this high rate of difference for African-American males, but it is occurring.

African-American males are not graduating from high school, only 10% in 2010 from the GHSD, at the same rate as other races. This is more alarming for special education students, graduating at 22% in 2009. These students are at a disadvantage from the first day they are placed into special education.

African-American males are most often placed into special education for behavior and low academic functioning. The services offered are usually a smaller class environment or separation from their peers. Providing the same instruction, in the same way, in a smaller environment does not provide outcomes that make a difference for African-American males. Educators must consider the cultural needs of these students. CRT concepts focus on providing students with a culturally rich curriculum and instruction—instruction that allows students to find their voice in their education, instruction that allows students to tell their story, and instruction that looks at their strengths and builds on what they can do. Educators must go deeper into knowing and understanding these young African-American males. These males need opportunities to express themselves, which may be demonstrated in aggressive behaviors. They need opportunities to move around, be active, and sometimes have space they can call their
own. These males may not build relationships in the traditional sense, but given the opportunity, they can build strong trusting relationships. This takes time for many African-American males who may not have these experiences in their home.

African-American males are often misunderstood; therefore, they are referred to special education. Their aggressive behavior is seen as a negative behavior and the need for help. Their loud, spoken voice is seen as threatening. Their lack of interaction with others is seen as a lack of social skills. Their lack of academic performance is seen as a disinterest in education. When educators take these areas as weaknesses instead of strengthens, these African Americans are referred for special education. Aggressive behavior can be a sign of high athleticism, loud speaking can be a sign of a great politician, introversion can be a sign of a poet, and lack of academic performance can be a sign of a genius who is not challenged. The rationales provided by the school psychologists did not address strengths of the students or potential areas for opportunities. These rationales focused on the negative aspects of the student.

The inconsistencies in the rationales provided by the school psychologists indicate to this researcher that there is misunderstanding of the student and the process. Psychologists understand the elements within the criteria for the classification of emotionally disturbed because they referenced the very elements in the rationales. But there is too much subjectivity in each of the elements leading to interpretation and potential bias. Thus, African Americans are being classified without clear criteria.

This researcher will continue to advocate for a fair and consistent process leading to referral for special education. The student and the parent(s) must have a voice in this decision. The students’ strengths must be considered. Adequate interventions must be
provided, implemented, and monitored that align with the areas of concerns. As psychologists noted in the study, interventions must match the students’ needs, and appropriate replacement behaviors must be directly taught. The assessment and evaluation process must also be consistent. Psychologists must have adequate tools to ensure that assessments are culturally relevant, with no bias. There must be a clear set of guidelines that provides the evidence necessary to meet the criteria established under IDEA regulations. The subjectivity must be removed from the assessment and evaluation component of referrals to special education. It may be difficult to remove these barriers from the evaluation process, but it must be considered if there is to be a balance in the representation of African-American males in special education.

This researcher strongly believes that the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education exists in the GHSD, as evidence by the visits to the schools and programs offered. The GHSD should consider reviewing the practices psychologists use when making recommendations to classify African-American males as emotionally disturbed. This includes reviewing the evaluation tools to ensure that they provide no bias, clearly identifying the essential elements within the criteria identified by IDEA regulations and establishing a strong pre-referral process to ensure the implementation of interventions. This researcher will use this study to assist the GHSD to address the disproportionate representation of African-American males in special education.
References


Appendix A

Racial/Ethnic Composition

Racial/ethnic composition of students ages 6–21 served under IDEA, Part B: 2001

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs
Appendix B

Disability Distribution by Race/Ethnicity

Disability distribution by race/ethnicity of students ages 6–21 served under IDEA: 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaska Native</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Black (non-Hispanic)</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White (non-Hispanic)</th>
<th>All students served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific learning disabilities</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech or language impairments</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental retardation</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional disturbance</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple disabilities</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing impairments</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthopedic impairments</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other health impairments</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual impairments</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf-blindness</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic brain injury</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental delay</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All disabilities</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs
Appendix C

Flowchart of New York State (NYS) Education Section 200.4
Appendix D

Los Angeles Unified School District Instrument
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT</th>
<th>INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM</th>
<th>MEETING DATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE DISABILITY CERTIFICATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>USE THIS form AT Initial, THREE- YEAR REVIEW AND comprehensive ASSESSMENTS FOR STUDENTS BEING CONSIDERED ELIGIBLE AS HAVING A DISABILITY OF EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE. THIS form IS NOT REQUIRED FOR ANNUAL REVIEW MEETINGS.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. REVIEW OF PRE-REFERRAL AND REFERRAL INTERVENTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-referral Initial Referral for Special Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Check all of the boxes for an initial IEP</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ There is documentation in the student’s records of an initial pre-referral intervention meeting, such as an SST, that addresses the behavioral and/or academic concerns and refers to address these concerns.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ There is documentation in the student’s records of a follow-up pre-referral intervention meeting, such as an SST, that addresses the behavioral and/or academic concerns and refers to address these concerns.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ There is evidence of parent participation in the pre-referral intervention meeting, such as in an SST and/or parent conferences.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ There is documentation in the student’s records of the pre-referral team’s follow-up meeting, including special education and related services, and the student’s progress.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ The report card or cumulative file comments indicate behavioral and academic concerns for more than one semester (secondary) or one year prior to the date of referral.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ There is documentation within the IEP of one of the following: non-DIS counseling, behavior support plan, and/or participation in a school-wide discipline program.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ There is an assessment plan in the student’s records indicating behavioral concerns and consideration for ED as a suspected disability.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. ASSESSMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Check all of the boxes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ The health assessment rule out whether an inability to learn is a result of a health or sensory condition.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Formal academic assessment and consideration of assessments based on curriculum and classroom performance has been conducted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ A cognitive or general ability assessment identifying the student’s strengths and weaknesses has been conducted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ A multi-disciplinary social-emotional evaluation considering home and community behavior using the following measures has been conducted: observation in various settings (formal and informal, settings such as classes or other extracurricular activities, and interviews with at least two teachers and parent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ A comprehensive behavioral evaluation such as a functional behavioral analysis, functional assessment analysis or other behavioral evaluation that identifies the function of the behavior, the frequency and duration of the behavior, and the identification of alternative behaviors that may serve to replace the undesired behavior has been conducted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. IF THE IEP TEAM HAS DETERMINED THAT THE RESPONSE TO ANY OF THE ITEMS IN 1 OR 2 ABOVE IS “NO,” THE STUDENT MAY NOT BE ELIGIBLE AS A STUDENT WITH EMOTIONAL DISRUPTION.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. IF THE IEP TEAM HAS DETERMINED THAT THE RESPONSE TO THE ITEMS IN 1 AND 2 ABOVE IS “YES,” THE IEP TEAM MAY CONSIDER THE CRITERIA FOR THE ELIGIBILITY OF EMOTIONAL DISRUPTION BY CHECKING ONE OR MORE APPLICABLE CHARACTERISTICS BELOW IDENTIFIED THROUGH THE RESULTS OF THE ASSESSMENT IF THEY HAVE EXISTED OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME, TO A MARKED DEGREE, AND THEY HAVE ADEQUATELY AFFECTED THE STUDENT’S EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE. THIS SECTION SHALL SERVE AS THE ELIGIBILITY STATEMENT.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Check one or more of the boxes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ A significant delinquency that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ An inability to control or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and adults.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances exhibited in several situations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal school problems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Check all of the boxes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. IF THE IEP TEAM HAS DOCUMENTED IN THIS IEP THE FOLLOWING:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Check all of the boxes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Consultation of a behavior support plan for initially referred students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ IEP team considerations for placement in the least restrictive environment including appropriate supports and modifications to ensure participation in the IEP, with responsible personnel.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Counseling goals, if appropriate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Parent participation at the IEP meeting determining eligibility and placement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Appendix E

Student Profile for Experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referral</td>
<td>Psychological Evaluation</td>
<td>Psychosocial Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Functioning</td>
<td>Speech Language Assessment</td>
<td>Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Development Assessment</td>
<td>Functional Behavior Assessment</td>
<td>Behavior Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Intervention Plan</td>
<td>Psychiatrist Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F
Sample Written Report by Psychologist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Report</td>
<td>Evaluator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student History: (written narrative)
This includes student’s attendance history, schools attended, whether the student has repeated a grade, previous interventions.

Evaluations used: (a list of the evaluation and results)

Recommendation: ( a written narrative)
This includes the recommended classification and rationale. This also includes possible suggestions that teachers can use to support the student’s needs.
Appendix G

Informed Consent Cover Letter

April 20, 2012

Dear School Psychologist:

My name is Shirley JA Green. I am a doctoral candidate at St. John Fisher College. I am doing research in the Rochester City School District in the area of eligibility for special education. My study is an examination of the evaluation process on the classification of emotional disturbance in urban public school districts. As you may be aware, this is an area that has been discussed in urban education throughout New York. This research is aligned with the No Child Left Behind Act.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. The study will involve making a determination of whether or not the student profiled in the study meets the criteria for the classification of emotional disturbance. In this study, you will be asked to review a student profile. After reviewing the evaluations of the student, you will be asked to make your determination and provide a written response to include your rationale for your decision. This will involve writing approximately two paragraphs indicating the criteria used to make the determination and the rationale for the decision. The results will be shared at the conclusion of the dissertation.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your participation will help make recommendations to the processes used for determining eligibility. If you are interested in participating, you will be asked to sign a consent form outlining the purpose of the study, along with contact information of the researcher and the facilitator of the study. Please respond to Shirley.Green@rcsdk12.org indicating your interest no later than April 27, 2012.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,
Appendix H

Model of Qualitative Data Analysis

Source: Seidel, 1998
Appendix I

Psychologists’ comments by theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMICS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Additionally, I’m concerned about some neurological break downs with very weak non verbal reasoning and lead</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• He seems to reflect clear evidence of attention/impulsive problems that interfere with his learning as well as skill deficit in reading fluency comprehension</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• His impulsive and attention problem interfere greatly with his academic and assessment performance. Skill deficit are also indicated by testing and poor classroom performance is well documented</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• He may also be acting out due to his academic difficulties</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXHIBITING BEHAVIORS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I am concerned about prior behaviors he had displayed such as not making eye contact and spinning around</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• His aggressive and disruptive behavior requires behavior and the therapeutic intervention not specified</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The student demonstrates severe impulsive and attention problems that are beyond his control. These problems appear to be accompanied by additional problems of oppositional and defiant behavior.</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• This student demonstrates severe impulsive behavior accompanied by severe anger, defiance, hostility and physically aggressive behavior toward other students</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In addition, criteria says behavior may not be related to sensory issues. Johnny has been displaying behaviors including avoiding eye contact, repetitive behaviors, and self-stimulating behaviors.</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No doubt a rather chaotic history with disruptive behavior and much support has been delivered to this child</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

attention/impulsive problems 1-0  
anxiety 1-0  
his rigidity 1-0
### ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES

- In addition, it is not clear what Johnny’s home situation is and he doesn’t seem to have much consistency in terms of where he lives or who he lives with.  
- It also appears that Johnny’s behaviors have recently escalated and there must be some environmental situation that triggered his behaviors, since it appears he has been manageable in the past.  
- In addition, reports indicate he has experienced many teacher changes.

### INTERVENTIONS

- I think more tailored interventions should be tried  
- It counseling does not work, and if more appropriate interventions don’t work, then I would classify ED, but if he is able to work through his issues then I would not.  
- I did not read about any social skills training that he has had  
- I do see that there have been some behavioral interventions, but I don’t really feel that they match the student’s issues  
- This student needs possible medical interventions and a better FBA and academic interventions  
- Most instruction or behavior therapy has just begun and need to be properly followed through and properly intervened to address his anger, defiance, hostility  
- I know we have an FBA & BIP but I want to know more of what the students says  

**much support has been delivered to this child**  
**needs to be taught how to be socially appropriate**  
**involve this child more in the problem solving process**  
**counseling, work through his issues**  
**therapeutic intervention not specified**  
**counseling**

### SOCIAL EMOTIONAL FUNCTIONING

- We may not be totally dealing with a child with emotional and behavioral concerns but neuro issues as well.
- neurological break downs  
- inability to take others perspectives
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OTHER CLASSIFICATIONS</th>
<th>1-0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• As at this time he may be exhibiting social maladjustment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I would like for Johnny's pediatrician to refer him to a Developmental Pediatrician in order to rule out the possibility of a Pervasive Developmental Disorder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• His difficulties with defiance on an unwillingness to comply with rules of adults is evidence of social maladjustment which cannot be addressed by Special Ed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pending further evaluations to rule out ASD or if the behaviors <em>continue over a marked period of time</em>, Johnny's classification could be changed to ED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My recommendation would be to classify as a student with an Other Health Impairment based on the diagnosis given by the psychiatrist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Also considering <em>his rigidity and inability to take others perspectives</em>, I would like to first ensure Autism Spectrum Disorders are ruled out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Counseling, perhaps, should center around grief issues related to parent</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Referral to pediatrician to rule out ADHD/ADD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I would look at Other Health Impairment with co morbid features if classification were recommended</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSYCHIATRIC NEED</th>
<th>1-0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RELATIONSHIPS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If he does not know how to interact with peers, why separate him from his peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• He is socially inappropriate and unaware of how to interact with peers and adults</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>grief issues related to parent</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT'S PERCEPTION</th>
<th>1-0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I think he needs to be taught how to be socially appropriate. He is going though personal issues that have not been dealt with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I would also involve more of pre-task rehearsals to minimize anxiety of knowing what to expect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I would involve this child more in the problem solving process getting his perceptions what the issues are</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATIONAL SETTING</th>
<th>1-0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I feel that this only makes it worse. Johnny can be taught in general Ed, but he needs a teacher and environment that can assist his needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DURATION OF BEHAVIORS</th>
<th>1-0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• In order for a student to be classified ED, they must be presenting significant behaviors for a marked period of time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The consideration of classifying a student of color with ED has to take present as well as past and future implications into consideration <em>continue over a marked period of time</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACADEMICS</td>
<td>2-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Has a typical cognitive and academic profile for high functioning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autistic students – below average reading comprehension with above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average decoding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• He has a history of academic concerns and cognitive delays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXHIBITING BEHAVIORS</th>
<th>2-0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES</th>
<th>2-0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERVENTIONS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Also, the BIP from 4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade doesn’t provide explicit plans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to teach him appropriate behaviors. It appears as though he has never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>had a chance or been taught explicit strategies with success.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• From reading documentation from 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; grade it appears as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>though appropriate replacement behaviors were not directly taught to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>him</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Also the sticker chart for working in a group did not seem relevant to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the disruptive behaviors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Little info on his response to the interventions – has behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improved, etc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does not appear that he has had much counseling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL EMOTIONAL FUNCTIONING</th>
<th>2-0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OTHER CLASSIFICATIONS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I would recommend OHI classification. There are psychological</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stressors that need to be addressed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• From reading the reports there were no health concerns although he</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presents with a diagnosis of disruptive Bx NOS with oppositional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defiant Bx</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I would classify this student as having Autism and institute an autism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific program for him with a strong emphasis on social skills i.e.,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 point scale, thinking about you, thinking about me by M.G. Winner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSYCHIATRIC NEED</th>
<th>2-0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• It doesn’t seem that the psychiatric report is well in line with the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>psychological. I did not find any mention of “paranoid distortions”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the psychiatric?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELATIONSHIPS</th>
<th>2-0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Delays in social interactions, social communication, not able to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understand verbal and no verbal social cues; social problem solving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skills weak</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Possible many of the behaviors are related to stress about being</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>separated from mom and not liking being with guardian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT’S PERCEPTION</th>
<th>2-0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATIONAL SETTING</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**DURATION OF BEHAVIORS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Evidence Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• There is no history of this behavior K-2\textsuperscript{nd} grade.</td>
<td>2-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Based on my understanding of the classification of Emotional</td>
<td>2-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disturbance, the target behavior concerns need to have been occurring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for many years including a steady occurrence of the behavior throughout</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>childhood.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Becomes fixated on a task this indicates this is a long standing</td>
<td>2-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problem. Occurring prior to age 3 – need to verify; has a clinically</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>significant score on ‘a typicality’ from the BASC-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There is little evidence of behaviors over an extended period of time</td>
<td>2-0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ACADEMICS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Evidence Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I believe Johnny needs an IEP because he is missing instruction due</td>
<td>1-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to being removed or off-task</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lower achievement even though it was an underestimate’ it’s still a</td>
<td>1-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performance deficit as he is unable to display skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conflicts with peers impacting academics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXHIBITING BEHAVIORS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Evidence Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The fact that he sometimes will participate but become quickly</td>
<td>1-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agitated may be a result of his inability to cope with challenge or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult situations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Becomes super-focused on a person/task</td>
<td>1-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Becomes irritable quickly</td>
<td>1-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Described as avoiding eye contact, spun in place</td>
<td>1-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nevertheless, I would support a classification of Emotional</td>
<td>1-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disturbance due to his intensive emotional reactions, his lack of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control of his impulses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• This erratic behavior and thinking may be related to his negative</td>
<td>1-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perception of his world</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• This psychological indicates that he is experiencing very high levels</td>
<td>1-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of aggression and depression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Described as always being somewhat reactive and sensitive with</td>
<td>1-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tendency to be oppositional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being removed or off-task</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES**

**INTERVENTIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Evidence Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• They have done a lot in general Ed and seem to have exhausted resources</td>
<td>1-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assuming the BIP has been monitored and updated it says so in the psych</td>
<td>1-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>report but I don’t see it on the actual BIP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Getting outside treatment, has BIP and school done a lot to assist him</td>
<td>1-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It is not clear how well he is doing with his BIP</td>
<td>1-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Getting outside treatment*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL EMOTIONAL FUNCTIONING</th>
<th>1-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>depression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>externalize his emotional issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OTHER CLASSIFICATIONS</th>
<th>1-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• As well as elevated lead</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Johnny’s case is complicated by the fact that he has attention deficit disorder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSYCHIATRIC NEED</th>
<th>1-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RELATIONSHIPS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• And chaotic home and background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• His inability to form and maintain friendships and his inability o control his anger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Failure to maintain relationships with peers and adults – seek conflicts with peers impacting academics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Little to no friendships in school “previously”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT’S PERCEPTION</th>
<th>1-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• And has shown a lack of engagement in his own education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• While he tends to externalize his emotional issues, those issues appear to be impacting greatly on how he views himself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Johnny believes his misperceptions – indicative of emotional disturbance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative perception of his world</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inability o control his anger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATIONAL SETTING</th>
<th>1-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A smaller class environment may be beneficial to him</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DURATION OF BEHAVIORS</th>
<th>1-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• In April/May behaviors turned severe and report dated October</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meets criteria for Ed- longstanding issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “not a new behavior although now its severe”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• This history suggests that Johnny has been suffering significant emotional stress for a very long time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMICS</th>
<th>2-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I believe yes, but there are also arguments that attention and perpetual processing issues could be cited as a primary factor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• He does have considerable visual processing issues which may be impacting his academic skill development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning needs are also present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**EXHIBITING BEHAVIORS**

- Johnny’s reaction to his environment are certainly impulsive and atypical, as he’s described as ‘explosive,’ throwing chairs, etc. 2-1
- It differs from strictly conduct disorder behavior in that is often impulsive and ‘uncalculated’/’premeditated’ 2-1
- He struggles with *internalizing (symptoms of depression)* as well as externalizing difficulties (conduct difficulties, disruptive behaviors, aggression, *ADHD traits*). 2-1

| It is characterized by behaviors which are considered atypical in relation to what/how peers of a similar age | 2-1 |

**ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES**

**INTERVENTIONS**

- Additionally he does not appear to be benefitting from/responding to school based interventions to address his social/emotional needs (AIS plan, FBA/BIP is in place) 2-1
- It appears that, despite various interventions, he has not progressed 2-1

**SOCIAL EMOTIONAL FUNCTIONING**

- His social-emotional needs are interfering with his academic progress, although *learning needs are also present*. 2-1
- His mental health needs have been interfering with his progress for *at least a few months if not longer* and don’t appear to be the direct result of trauma or stress (*he misses his father*, but this didn’t seem to be the primary reason for his behavior decline.) 2-1

| social/emotional needs | 2-1 |
| internalizing (symptoms of depression) | 2-1 |
| needs a lot of emotional guidance and support | 2-1 |

**OTHER CLASSIFICATIONS**

- socially maladjusted 2-1

**PSYCHIATRIC NEED**

- It seems as though the psychiatrist is also suggest emotional factors as a prevalent difficult, so that is also an important factor. 2-1
RELATIONSHIPS

- He has great difficulty building and maintain relationships with peers and adults
- He has difficulty maintaining peer relationships and in general he needs a lot of emotional guidance and support
- He ‘seeks conflict with peers,’ ‘will not let down until a conflict escalates’ and he ‘doesn’t have any friends.’
- It is characterized by behaviors which are considered atypical in relation to what/how peers of a similar age would react to situations within their environment and it involved difficulty with peer relations
- The main area that continues to be revisited is his inability to develop these relationships within the school setting
- Due to this student’s abilities to maintain relationships with outside curricular activities and his satisfactory relationship with both his parents and siblings, a student who is socially maladjusted has been ruled out
  (he misses his father;

STUDENT’S PERCEPTION

EDUCATIONAL SETTING

- It would be interesting to trial him in a more supportive classroom setting where he could feel successful to see what behavior changes may occur

DURATION OF BEHAVIORS

- For purposes of this exercise I’ll assume it’s been going on for an extended time, although our notes mentioned it became more intensive as of April/May
- An ED classification is reached through considering if behaviors have occurred to a marked degree and over a prolonged period of time
  at least a few months if not longer
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOT USED</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• At this time, too many variables need to be ruled out in order for</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny to be eligible for a classification of a student with an emotional disturbance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• With the information I have, I still have too many unanswered</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>questions in order to recommend a classification of emotional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disturbance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To be honest, I am having a very hard time classifying this young</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man as ED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Johnny appears to have been exhibiting these behaviors for</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approximately 7 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Based on the information provided several factors would lead me to</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not classify this child as a student with an emotional disturbance (ED)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I’m not sure what the classification brings to the table that he is not already receiving</td>
<td>1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Based on the information provided, I do not feel this student is</td>
<td>2-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eligible for D classification. It was not mentioned as reason for his living with legal guardian as opposed to mom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Could he be classified ED?</td>
<td>2-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In my opinion, Johnny displays many of the hallmark characteristics of a student with an emotional disturbance</td>
<td>2-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It’s difficult without having the full background of K through 3.</td>
<td>2-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• As a professional I feel that this student warrants classification as a student with an emotional disturbance</td>
<td>2-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• These are some factors, however, those raise caution</td>
<td>2-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>