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The disproportionate representation of minorities in special education

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**THE DISROPORTIONATE REPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES IN SPECIAL
EDUCATION**

by

Rasuwl Medina

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Psychology
College of Science and Mathematics
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
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at
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Thesis Chair: Roberta Dihoff, Ph. D.

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Dedication

I dedicate this manuscript to all the Black, Hispanic and non-white children who were placed into an educational system never designed for them.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my mother, Cindy Medina, for her extraordinary job in raising me, Dr. Kristin August who taught me how to conduct research with a critical eye, Dr. Alicia Davis who helped me realize my dream of becoming a School Psychologist, and especially Dr. Roberta Dihoff who helped me throughout this process.

Abstract

Rasuwl Medina

THE DISPOROTIONATE REPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

2016-2017

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Master of Arts in School Psychology

Students throughout the United States who enter the educational system are promised equitable treatment within the schools they attend. Furthermore, students are assured that studying and learning class material will determine not only their placement within school, but the success they will have in life. Despite this long held belief, research and demographic breakdowns of special education placement within the U.S. suggests minorities are disproportionately placed into special education (de Valenzuela, Copeland, & Qi, 2006). This finding is in concert with the already suggested premise that race influences referrals for special education assessments, and that the instruments used to assess are culturally biased (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006). The present correlational study was designed to determine if minorities are disproportionately represented in special education and if race influences placement into special education. Disproportionality within special education was assessed by using public archival data from the official website of the State of New Jersey Department of Education (NJ Department of Education).

Table of Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| Abstract..... | v |
| List of Figures | viii |
| List of Tables | ix |
| Chapter 1: Introduction | 1 |
| Need for Study..... | 1 |
| Hypothesis..... | 1 |
| Purpose | 2 |
| Operational Definitions..... | 3 |
| Limitations | 4 |
| Assumptions..... | 6 |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review..... | 8 |
| Overview..... | 8 |
| Potential Causes | 9 |
| Students..... | 10 |
| Teachers..... | 14 |
| Test and Assessment Tools..... | 24 |
| Entire System..... | 30 |
| Chapter 3: Methodology..... | 38 |
| Participants..... | 38 |
| Materials and Design | 39 |
| Procedures | 40 |
| Chapter 4: Results | 41 |
| Chapter 5: Discussion..... | 44 |

Table of Contents (Continued)

Summary44

Limitations45

Implications.....48

Future Directions.....49

References.....50

List of Figures

| Figure | Page |
|--|------|
| Figure 1. Percentage of students by race in special education..... | 43 |

List of Tables

| Table | Page |
|---|------|
| Table 1. Comparison of students enrolled in special education and general education.... | 42 |

Chapter 1

Introduction

Need for Study

Life is not fair, however young students who enter into the various school districts throughout the United States are promised that this educating environment does not adhere to inequity. Students are told every individual is placed on an even playing field, and that studying and learning class material will determine not only their placement within the school but the success they will have in life. Despite this long held belief, research and demographic breakdowns of special education placement suggests minorities are disproportionately placed into special education (de Valenzuela, Copeland, & Qi, 2006). The purpose of my study was to assess the over representation of minorities in special education.

Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that minorities are disproportionately represented in special education and that race influences placement into special education. This hypothesis was in concert with the already suggested premise that race influences referrals for assessment (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006), in which individuals are screened to see if special education is the best option for that student, and that the instruments used to assess if an individual should be placed into special education are culturally biased (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006). Reasons why race plays a factor in special education demographics as well as assessment referrals will be visited in in chapter 2, as well as the discussion. The country's education system and the termination of school staffing, more research on confounding variables is necessary before these consequential claims are asserted.

This was a correlational study that used descriptive data. Public Archival data was used for this study. Using the official website of the State of New Jersey Department of Education (New Jersey Department of Education) the demographics of each school district in New Jersey were collected. These raw numbers were then converted into percentages. Special education demographics of students from each school district in New Jersey whose ages ranged from 6 to 21 were collected. The raw numbers of special education demographics were then converted into percentages and compared to the percentages of the overall school districts. The race of the individuals compared was limited to White, Black and Hispanic (Hispanic and Latino may be used interchangeably within this text).

Purpose

The significance of this study was to contribute to a body of knowledge. It is the hope of the author that by contributing to the already growing body of knowledge, it will aid in improving multiculturalism within the American education system, as well as assisting in equity for each individual student regardless of race or culture. It was necessary to conduct this study in order to build upon the insightful works of others. There is an abundance of literature suggesting minorities are over represented in special education (de Valenzuela, Copeland, & Qi, 2006). Due to the nature of the consequences that could result from these findings, including a restructuring of this country's education system and the termination of school staffing, more research on confounding variables is necessary before these consequential claims are asserted.

Operational Definitions

The following is a list of terms that directly pertain to this study that may be unknown or unclear to individuals outside of the educational or psychology community.

Confounding Variable- An unaccounted for variable that is unknown and can explain away the relationship between the dependent and independent variable.

Demographic- Statistical data relating to the population and particular groups within it.

Disproportionate- Having or showing a difference that is not fair, reasonable, or expected: too large or too small in relation to something.

I.D.E.A. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) - A law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, Special Education and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities.

I.E.P. - An Individualized Education Program (I.E.P.) is a plan or program developed to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the law and is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives specialized instruction and related services.

L.R.E. (Least Restrictive Environment)- In the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), least restrictive environment (LRE) means that a student who has a disability should have the opportunity to be educated with non-disabled peers, to the greatest extent appropriate.

White supremacy –The belief, theory, or doctrine that white people are inherently superior to people from all other racial groups, especially black people, and are therefore are rightfully the dominant group in any society

Limitations

This study had several limitations, however two limitations in particular stood out as affecting the overall nature of this study. The two limitations that greatly influenced the current study were, how diversity is measured and how schools attempt to decrease disproportionality within special education. When it comes to the residents and students of New Jersey, it is important to understand that diversity does not equate to integration. For instance, within Newark, the city's Black population lives almost entirely separate from the city's White and Hispanic population. Similarly, around the city of Camden, White and Black neighborhoods appear to have distinct boundaries (Stephen Stirling | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com). Therefore, attempting to compare Special Education demographics between districts, while using the assumption that race influences special education placement, may not result in a representative portrayal of the actual causes of disproportionality within Special Education. That is to say, even after attempts to racially integrate the U.S., many neighborhoods and schools remain segregated. In many situations, segregated schools with very different school environments fall under the same school district. As a result, comparing the differences between school districts may not be sufficient in analyzing disproportionality within Special Education, due to the many differences found within school districts.

Pertaining to the second limitation, how schools attempt to decrease disproportionality within special education disproportionality within special education,

there is also an immeasurable barrier present in assessing why disproportionality is prevalent. Across the U.S. educators and administrators are realizing the problem of disproportionality, and may attempt to decrease disproportionality at the expense of students who are in need of special education services. In a technical report from a case study evaluation which sought to understand which strategies were successful in decreasing disproportionality, a teacher was quoted as saying, “people are aware that there is a disproportionate amount of students in certain groups and they try to overcompensate, you know, forcing kids to be in groups or let’s say for example the challenge program, you know, to take an African-American students who’s not necessarily challenge material but putting them in that program just because you need to meet your quota, that’s unsettling as well” (Kozleski, Zion, & Hidalgo 2007). Kozleski, Zion & Hidalgo (2007) also point to the efforts of implementing more Least Restrictive Environments (LRE) for students within special education. Within LRE implementations, students who would previously have been enrolled in special education may spend their school days in a General Education class, with an aid to assist the student. This makes it possible for students who are not reported as receiving special education services to receive special education services. The possible implications of this report are alarming. This indicates that teachers are purposely withholding special education services from minority students, with the sole purpose of appearing to not disproportionately place these students into special education. Whether it is teachers purposely withholding special education services from minorities, or providing special education services to minorities but not reporting these services, the affect can be damaging to the students, as well as helping to maintain disproportionality within special education due to researchers

and school administrators not being able to understand that this problem is still prevalent. If this is indicative of many schools, the problem of disproportionality within special education may be even more difficult to solve than previously thought.

Additional limitations were present within this study, such as numerous unknown or confounding variables may have impacted the suggested correlation between the independent and dependent variables. Factors in the classroom, that would only be possible to understand by observing every classroom environment may exist. School districts differ on curriculum and core focuses, and different expectations of students in each district may affect who is placed into special education. Furthermore, different racial, ethnic and cultural groups differ on the importance they place on education, which this study does not take into account. This study focused on the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education, and although reasons for this over representation were visited in this study's discussion, identifying the degree to which each racial, ethnic and/or cultural group values education was beyond the scope of this study. Lastly, this study hoped to contribute to the large body of knowledge that pertains to educational settings in the United States, however the sample size is restricted to school districts within the state of New Jersey. Since statistics are recorded only from New Jersey, this study should not be generalized to school districts throughout the United States.

Assumptions

This study was conducted under the assumption that institutional racism is prevalent within the United States, in which racism is expressed in the practice of social

and political institutions. Whether implicitly or explicitly expressed, institutional racism occurs when a certain group is targeted and discriminated against based upon race.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Overview

More attention must be given to the over representation of minorities placed into special education that is supported by a bevy of research articles. In 2010, 6- to 21-yearolds receiving services under IDEA (Individuals with Disability Education Act), of which 2,730,345 students were minorities, compared to 3,092,463 White students (U.S. Department of Education 2010) (Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2012). This can be put into perspective when considering Hispanics made up 20.41 % of the school aged children population; African American (non-Hispanic) made up 17.13 %; and White (non-Hispanic) consisted of 56.42 % of the school aged population (Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2012). Broken down further into specific disability categories reported, minority students comprised 51.4 % of the students with intellectual disabilities (ID) (vs. 48.59 % White), 42.8 % of student with emotional behavioral (E/BD) disabilities (vs. 57.20% White), 44.45% of students with specific learning disabilities (LD) (vs. 55.46% White), and 21.66% of students with developmental delays grades k to nine (vs. 60.91% White) (Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2012).

Since the situation was first brought to the attention of social sciences, the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education was attributed to differences in Socio Economic Status, however this explanation must undergo more research before it can be suggested. Available research is inconclusive in establishing that “poverty is the sole or even primary cause of racial and ethnic disparities in special education” (Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2012). Although poverty creates

fluctuation in the rate at which White and Hispanic students are placed into special education, poverty cannot predict the rate at which Black students are placed into special education.

When only considering the isolated rates at which minorities are placed into special education it seems encouraging, however when comparing these numbers the rates of their white peers, the overall over representation has remained consistent over the past decade (Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2012). The over representation of minorities in special education is a very complex problem, and no research to date has been able to identify one specific cause for this (Skiba et al., 2008). Possible causes of the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education will be visited in the following section. This article hopes that this research will help start the conversation of that will lead to the equity of all school aged children being proportionately represented within special education.

Potential Causes

In interpreting the possible reasons for the overrepresentation of minorities in special education, four potential causes were analyzed; 1. A higher proportion of minorities need special education, 2. Teachers are disproportionately referring minority student's to be assessed by child study teams, 3. Once referred, tests and assessment tools are biased against minority students; and the last potential cause analyzed which engulfs the first three, 4. The entirety of the United States educational system within which students are placed into special education is inadequate, and the structure of public education in the United States systemically works to the disadvantage of minority students. In other words, if the entire system in which students are placed into special

education is structured in a way that positions minorities at a disadvantage compared to their white peers, than this would create the incapability of minority students being proportionately placed into special education. As a result from a broken educational system that works to the disadvantage of minority students, an environment would be created in which a higher proportion of minorities need special education, and in which teachers over refer minority students for assessment. In addition, a broken educational system would create biased tools and tests in the assessment of minority students referred to the child study team, due to the fact the system in which they are in was never designed for them.

Students. Despite the abundance of literature that points to the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education, some researchers have suggested not only is this incorrect, but in fact the opposite is true. These and other researchers have proposed that academics and persons who are concerned with the current framework of special education are not taking the many confounding variables minorities face into account, which may cause minority students to be at greater risk for special education placement. Federal legislation and policies have been enacted to reduce minority disproportionate representation (MDR) in special education, but Morgan et. al. (2015) asserts this is a mistake, citing the contradicting studies on the subject of under or over representation of minority students in special education. Morgan et. al. does not undermine the ethnic and racial demographic of special education in the U.S., but instead expresses, “finding that racial-, ethnic-, and language-minority children in the United States are less likely than otherwise similar White, English-speaking children to be identified as disabled and so are comparatively underrepresented in special education

would suggest that federal legislation and policies currently designed to reduce minority overrepresentation in special education may be misdirected. These policies instead may be exacerbating educational inequities by limiting minority children's access to potentially beneficial services to which they may be legally entitled" (Morgan, et al., 2015). Morgan et. al. (2015) cites several articles that suggest minorities are over represented in special education, as well as several articles that suggest minorities are underrepresented in special education. In their research Morgan et. al. (2015) systematically investigated whether and to what extent racial-, ethnic-, or language minority children in the United States were over- or under identified as disabled relative to otherwise similar White, English-speaking children as they attended elementary and middle schools. To accomplish this, they (a) analyzed longitudinal data collected on a nationally representative sample followed from kindergarten entry to the end of middle school, (b) used hazard modeling to estimate over-time dynamics of disability identification across five specific conditions, and (c) extensively corrected for child- and family-level variables that might confound the directional estimates of disproportionality uniquely attributable to children's status as racial, ethnic, or language minorities. Morgan et. al. (2015) point to barriers that exist in the lives of minorities such as socioeconomic, linguistic, and/or cultural obstacles that constrain access by minority families to special education services. Furthermore, minority children in the United States are also more likely to be exposed to biological and environmental factors in early childhood (e.g., fetal alcohol syndrome, low birth weight, lead exposure, poverty) that disproportionately increase their risk for impaired cognitive, academic, and behavioral functioning and disability. Other factors that may increase the risk of minorities being placed into special

education are being raised in poverty, receiving lower quality (e.g., fewer language-based interactions) parenting and being raised in lower-resourced home environments, experiencing multiple risk factors, and the state of residence (Morgan, et al., 2015). This is of great concern, as Morgan et. al. states minorities are potentially less likely to be granted special education services due to the fact minority families may experience fewer interactions with pediatricians and other health professionals who often diagnose disorders (e.g., autism) during early childhood (Morgan, et al., 2015). This may occur as a result of less access to health care as well as language barriers. In other words, children may not receive special education services due to a lack of resources, including monetary resources that are indirectly necessary to receive access into special education. In addition, children attending disadvantaged schools may also be less likely to be identified as displaying atypical academic or behavioral functioning (Morgan, et al., 2015).

Morgan et. al. (2015) critiques the methodology of other studies that have indicated minority students are over represented in special education. By using extensive covariate adjustment to account for confounding variables, it was consistently found that racial-, ethnic-, and language-minority children are under identified as disabled. Children who are Black were found to be less likely to be diagnosed with autism, learning disabilities, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder following covariate adjustment for IQ, prior academic achievement and behavior, maternal education, and additional factors. Furthermore, those minorities who receive a diagnosis have been reported to be disproportionately less likely than otherwise similar White children to make use of empirically based treatments for their disorders.

Results from Morgan et. al. (2015) analyses using extensive covariate adjustment of longitudinal and nationally representative data consistently indicate that racial-, ethnic, and language-minority schoolchildren in the United States are less likely than otherwise similar White, English-speaking schoolchildren to be identified as disabled and so are comparatively underrepresented in special education. Minority children's underrepresentation was reportedly obvious across elementary and middle school time periods. Racial and ethnic minority children in the United States are less likely to receive special education services as a result of being identified as having learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, intellectual disabilities, health impairments, or emotional disturbances. Language-minority children are less likely to be identified as having learning disabilities or speech or language impairments. Morgan et. al. (2015) estimates of minority disproportionate underrepresentation were extensively corrected for potential confounding variables, including individual child-level academic achievement and behavioral functioning as well as family-level SES.

Although what Morgan et. al. (2015) reported was accurate, their study has major limitations, which may cause the questioning of the reliability of this study. The first limitation is students were not observed throughout high school; although this was a longitudinal study, the study did not record information past middle school. The second, and more compromising limitation is the fact that the entire sample from which this study was composed of came from a single cohort. The study's sample included 20,100 children participating in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort, 1998-1999 (Morgan, et al., 2015). Not only were students not assessed at the high school level, but this cohort could not be compared to other cohorts from different time periods.

Consequently, they were unable to report on the extent to which federal policies (e.g., the Reading Excellent Act, No Child Left Behind Act) introduced across this same time period may have resulted in changes in disability identification rates. They were also unable to report whether minority underrepresentation occurs across other types of IDEA-eligible conditions (e.g., autism, hearing or vision impairments) due to an extremely small sample size. The study did not allow us to identify the specific mechanisms resulting in the observed disparities. Although we controlled for many potential confounding variables, it is possible that unmeasured factors (e.g., IQ, genetic disorders, parenting quality, the home environment) may have contributed to the lower risk we attributed to children's racial-, ethnic-, and language-minority status (Morgan, et al., 2015).

In the end, Morgan et. al. (2015) succumbed to the same problem that they critiqued other articles researching the same subject for. Many factors were left out or unaccounted for. It should be noted that analyzing the under or over representation of minority students in special education is a very complex subject which cannot be easily figured out. Despite the complexity of this problem, in using a small sample size which only consisted of a single cohort, Morgan et. al. did this literature a disservice, as this study's participant makeup has compromised the reliability of this research.

Teachers. Teachers are the backbone of our society, as other professions would not be possible if it were not for those teachers who put forth their full effort in order to prepare the next generation for the world's challenges, including but not limited to obtaining a career. Despite teachers being the individuals who help students in a countless number of ways, they may be a source of the disproportionate representation of

minorities in special education. This consideration of teachers being the cause of the overrepresentation of minorities in special education comes from the acknowledgement that teachers are themselves human, and as humans may have preconceived notions or biases that may potentially affect what they put into practice as well as who in particular they put these practices into place for. "A common interpretation of the research findings in the area of teacher expectations is that teachers hold race- and ethnicity-based expectations for their students" (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Based on their definitions of neutrality, Tenenbaum & Ruck (2007) used unconditional race neutrality and race neutrality based on potential to measure bias within teachers. In unconditional race neutrality, teachers expect the same of children from different ethnic backgrounds regardless of past performance. For race neutrality based on potential, neutrality is based on the potential of a student. However, potential cannot be measured, and so this type of race neutrality is difficult to determine. Their meta-analysis relied on a combination of the two types of neutrality noted to define bias. Thus, rating, referring, or treating students differently on the basis of their ethnic background constituted bias.

On the basis of available research, Tenenbaum & Ruck (2007) hypothesized that teachers would hold more negative expectations and demonstrate correspondingly more negative behaviors toward African American and Latino/a students than toward Asian American students. It was also predicted that teachers would perceive European American students more favorably than African American ones. In researching this disturbing hypothesis, and taking into account the research that suggests teachers hold race- and ethnicity-based expectations for their students, four separate meta-analyses were conducted. These meta-analyses conducted were (a) differences in teachers'

expectations for ethnic minority versus European American children, (b) differences in teachers' special education, disciplinary, or gifted referral rates between ethnic minority and European American children, (c) teachers' positive and neutral speech, and (d) teachers' negative speech. The largest group of ethnic minority children included in the meta-analysis consisted of African American children (n = 30 samples out of the total of 39 separate samples). Considering the history of discrimination for African Americans, teachers may hold different expectations for African American children than for other ethnic minority children. For these reasons, an additional and separate meta-analysis was conducted that focused solely on differences in teachers' expectations of African Americans compared with European American children (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

Considering Tenenbaum & Ruck (2007), conducted a meta-analysis in which different studies assessed the same concepts differently, attributing methodological moderators to this study was a bit of a challenge. How the researchers defined teacher may influence ratings. Methodologically, studies have operationally defined teachers in a number of ways. In addition, these different methodologies may further be subdivided into experimental or non-experimental designs. Experimental designs have asked college students, student teachers, or actual teachers to rate and/or teach hypothetical students. In many of the experimental designs participants read written vignettes, made judgments based on photographs, watched videotapes or listened to audiotapes, simulated teaching, or used a combination of various methods, in which student ratings were simulated. In contrast, non-experimental designs have asked teachers to rate and teach students in their classrooms. In classroom settings, teachers may change their evaluations to become more accurate over time, rather than having a student with a fixed permanent rating. The

current study used computation formulas in DSTAT, which allowed for the conversion of all statistics to a common metric, g , which represents the difference in standard deviation units. More specifically, g is computed by calculating the difference of the two means divided by the pooled standard deviation of the two samples (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Because g values may “overestimate the population effect size,” effect sizes in Cohen’s d were also provided (Cohen’s d ’s between .20 and .50 indicate a small effect size, Cohen’s d ’s between .50 and .80 indicate a medium effect, and Cohen’s d ’s greater than .80 indicate a large effect size.)

Tenenbaum & Ruck (2007) hypothesized that teachers would be less likely to differentiate students on the basis of ethnicity than would research participants simulating the teaching role. In addition to design, studies in this area also vary in the particular outcome of focus, which may influence the results. For example, researchers have asked teachers or those simulating the role of teacher to rate children’s academic, social, or a combination of behaviors. Alternatively, teachers may be requested to recommend children for special education, disciplinary action, or gifted programs (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). The unit of analysis—students or teachers—was investigated as a possible moderator. Some studies used teachers as the unit of analyses, which required teachers to rate one child each from four different ethnic backgrounds for a total of four students rated by each teacher. Other studies used students as the unit of analysis, in which teachers rated more than one child from each ethnic group, and then the researchers either listed mean scores received for students of different ethnic backgrounds, or they reported the number of students from different ethnic backgrounds who received referrals without providing the number of teachers involved in the referrals (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

The final set of moderators in the meta-analysis included different publication characteristics, which included geographic location, year of publication, and the publication source. Due to the United States' past of segregation, publication date may be the most important publication characteristic, to critically analyze. For example, the gap in achievement test scores between African American and European American high school seniors narrowed between 1965 and 1992. Most of the reduction in the test score gap was accounted for by the gains received by African Americans after segregation ended, however some variance has not accounted for this. If teachers' expectations are related to children's achievement through self-fulfilling prophecies, then one would expect that differences in teachers' expectations between African American and European American students may have caused the unaccounted for variance between the test gap. Tenenbaum & Ruck's (2007), meta-analysis sought to answer this question. As mentioned previously, four separate meta-analyses were conducted. These meta-analyses were (a) differences in teachers' expectations for ethnic minority versus European American children, (b) differences in teachers' special education, disciplinary, or gifted referral rates between ethnic minority and European American children, (c) teachers' positive and neutral speech, and (d) teachers' negative speech. Whenever heterogeneity of variance was indicated, three types of moderators were tested: characteristics of the participants, design, and publications. A positive Cohen's d indicated that teachers held more positive expectations of European American children than children of color (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

A total of 39 group samples examined differences in teachers' expectations based on children's ethnic backgrounds. Samples computed separately for group samples had a

mean weighted effect size of $d = .23$ (95% CI = .19 –.27). These all constitute small but meaningful correlations. The positive sign indicates that teachers had more positive expectations for European American children than for ethnic minority children. When effect sizes were calculated with publication as the unit of analysis, the mean weighted effect size across 32 studies was $d = .23$ (95% CI = .19 –.27). Homogeneity analyses for the group sample indicated that the effects were highly heterogeneous, $Q_w(31) = 182.77$, $p = .00$. Teachers held more positive expectations about European American children compared with Latino/a children ($d = .46$) than when the comparison was African American children ($d = .25$). In contrast, teachers held significantly more positive expectations for Asian American children than they did for European American children ($d = .17$). When students were the unit of analysis ($d = .28$), the effect was larger than when teachers were the unit of analysis ($d = .15$), $Q_B(1) = 12.30$, $p < .001$. Participants in studies conducted in the South ($d = .39$) favored European American children over ethnic minority children more than did participants in studies conducted in the Northeast ($d = .26$) or Southwest ($d = .24$). Additionally, when authors did not list the specific geographic location of the study ($d = .53$) effect sizes were similar to those of studies conducted in the South and were larger than those of studies conducted in the Northeast or Southwest, $Q_B(5) = 137.50$, $p .001$. In contrast, studies conducted in the West ($d = .14$) found that raters favored ethnic minority children over European American children, whereas studies conducted in the Midwest found virtually no differences ($d = .02$) (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

Given that African American children were the largest group of children in the meta-analysis, separate analyses were conducted on this sample. Teachers were more

likely to rate African American students lower than European American students after teaching a simulated lesson ($d = .51$) than after viewing a videotape or listening to an audiotape ($d = .21$). Teachers rating students after viewing a photograph ($d = .39$), rating their own students ($d = .34$), or using a combination of methods ($d = .29$) did not differ from those teaching a simulated lesson or viewing a videotape or listening to an audiotape. Participants who read vignettes ($d = .03$) favored African American children more than European American children. Possible causes for participants who read vignettes favoring African American students could be the vignettes were not realistic enough to trigger differential expectations, those who read the vignettes do not hold lower expectations for minorities, or the participants understood the nature of the study and did not want to be perceived as bias.

When students were the unit of analysis ($d = .33$), the effect size was larger than when teachers were the unit of analysis ($d = .14$), $QB(1) = 16.33$, $p < .001$. In other words, studies asking teachers to rate more than one child from each ethnic group (students as the unit of analysis) or examining the number of students referred without listing the number of teachers involved in the referrals had larger effect sizes than studies asking teachers to rate one child each of different ethnic backgrounds (teachers as the unit of analysis). One possibility for the larger effect size in studies where the students were the unit of analyses as opposed to studies in which teachers were the unit of analysis may stem from teachers realizing the purpose of the study, not wanting to appear biased, teachers may rate students more similarly if they believe a study is assessing teacher differential treatment (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

Fifteen samples examined differences in teachers' referrals based on children's ethnic background. The mean weighted effect size ($d = .31$) was small and positive. Similarly, the mean weighted effect size ($d = .34$) of separate publications also resulted in a small and positive effect size. Tenenbaum & Ruck (2007) found no significant differences in referrals based solely on students' ethnic background. However, when referring students in their own schools ($d = .32$), participants favored European American children more than ethnic minority children compared with when participants referred hypothetical children in vignettes ($d = .02$), $QB(1) = 16.60$, $p < .001$. When rating students for gifted evaluations ($d = .92$), teachers were more likely to recommend European American than ethnic minority students. In contrast, teachers were more likely to recommend ethnic minority students than European American students for special education ($d = .25$) or disciplinary action ($d = .30$) (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Although it is stated that Tenenbaum & Ruck (2007) found no significant differences in referrals based solely on students' ethnic background, this does not indicate race or ethnicity is not a primary cause or moderating variable for positive or negative referrals. More appropriately stated, this subject is too complex to statistically attribute referrals to only race, while not analyzing how race affects, and has a bidirectional relationship with many confounding variables.

The 11 separate publications examining differences in teachers' positive and neutral speech directed toward ethnic minority and European American students had a weighted d of $.21$ ($r = .11$) with a 95% confidence interval of $.11$ to $.32$, which is small but statistically significant. This showed that teachers directed more positive and neutral speech toward European American children than toward ethnic minority children. Among

the 10 studies examining teachers' negative speech, the mean weighted d was .02 ($r = .01$), which is not significant.

Summed up, four quantitative meta-analyses were conducted examining whether teachers' expectations, referrals, positive behaviors, and negative behaviors differed for ethnic minority compared with European American children. Three of the four meta-analyses found small but significant effects suggesting that teachers held more positive expectations, made more positive referrals and fewer negative referrals, and provided more positive and neutral speech for European American children than for African American and Latino/a children. An additional meta-analysis comparing teachers' expectations of African American and European American students confirmed that teachers favored European American compared with African American children. In general, teachers hold more positive expectations for European American children than for African American and Latino/a children (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Although teachers may have used more positive and neutral speech with European American children than with ethnic minority children, they did not use more negative speech with ethnic minority children than with European American children. Being given fewer response opportunities and less positive feedback could have negative ramifications for children's learning. This may negatively impact minority students, which is indicated by research that suggests children believe teachers ask more questions of high achievers than low achievers and make high achievers feel good about their answers. Conversely, children assert that teachers provide more negative feedback to low achievers than to high achievers (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

Overall, studies conducted in the United States generally ($d = .53$) found raters that favored European American over African American children (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). A teacher's low expectation of a student is likely to create a self-fulfilling prophecy, depriving the student whose ability is being questioned from their full potential in an educational setting. A teacher's lack of confidence can be extremely detrimental when expectations are based solely on race/ethnicity, rather than actual ability.

Examination of teachers' expectations of African American and European American students revealed that teachers favored European American students compared to African American students more in the 1980s ($d = .47$) than during the other decades (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Although teachers' expectations differentiated the most between ethnic minority and European American children in the 1980s, Grissmer et al. (1998) reported a narrowing of the Black-White test score gap in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, teachers' expectations do not seem to follow national trends. This is indicative of the society we live in, in which individuals are not judge by their ability, but instead their ethnicity and race. Despite most teachers attempting to do the right thing, many have implicit biases. Some may believe we have come a long way in terms of how different racial and ethnic groups perceive each other since the 80's, however the damaging affects placed on students resulting from teachers' preconceived negative expectations in shown under this current meta-analysis. Teachers differentiated among ethnic minority children in their experiences of their social competencies more than their academic competencies. Social competencies may be less anchored in reality and, thus, more open to interpretation than academic competencies. The opposite was found when making referrals. Teachers were must less likely to refer ethnic minority children than European American children for

gifted programs, with a difference of almost one full standard deviation ($d=0.92$).

Although teachers were more likely to refer ethnic minority children than European American students for special education and disciplinary action, the effect sizes were small.

In the end, the findings of three of our four meta-analyses suggest that teachers favor European American students more than African American and Latino/a students. Although the effect sizes were small, they were statistically significant, suggesting that teachers hold lower expectations for African American and Latino/a children than for European children. Moreover, these expectations translate into a more positive and natural speech patterns towards European American students than toward African American and Latino/a students. Teacher's expectations may lead to differential academic performance for children (Rosen & Jacobson, 1968) and are likely to contribute to a less than fair classroom climate and limited educational opportunities for African American and Latino/a students (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

Tests and assessment tools. A test is biased “if a test design, or the way results are interpreted..., systematically disadvantages certain groups... over others. . . . [it is] a systematic error in the [design of the test that results in the erroneous] measurement of a psychological attribute as a function of membership in one or another cultural or racial subgroup” (Scheiber, 2016). If the test scores of an assessment tool measures different constructs for one group as compared with another group, such a finding would conceivably constitute bias of the instrument. Scheiber (2016) investigated test bias in terms of the test scores' construct validity across a nationally representative sample of Caucasian, Black, and Hispanic (N 2,001) children in Grades 1–12. Construct validity

encompasses an integrated, multilayered framework, consisting of six components: (a) consequential, (b) content, (c), substantive, (d) structural, (e) external, and (f) generalizability. Scheiber's study tests content and structural validity of the test scores by assessing whether the test items measure the constructs of interest (intelligence and achievement) accurately and by assessing whether the test items correlate in the same way across the three ethnic groups (Scheiber, 2016). The study's data came from a group of children and adolescents in the standardization samples of the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children—2nd Edition (KABC-II) and the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement- 2nd Edition (KTEA-II), who were administered both instruments. The KABC-II is an individually administered test of intelligence designed for individuals ages 3-18, while the KTEA-II is an individually administered test of achievement for children, adolescents, and young adults ages 4.5- to 25-years-old. This study used the Cattell-Horn-Carroll (CHC) model of cognitive abilities, a comprehensive theory combining different domains of intelligence, as a marker of intelligence. Using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), Scheiber explored test score bias, in the form of differential construct validity, of the KABC-II and KTEA-II, to assess if these tests were racially or culturally biased against Black and/or Hispanic students. (Scheiber, 2016).

For the KABC-II, internal-consistency reliability, as measured by split-half coefficients, was generally high for the KABC-II test scores. For global scaled scores, coefficients ranged from the low to high .90s and for the index level scores coefficients ranged from the high .80s to the low .90s. Test-retest reliabilities for children and adolescents for the global scores were high, ranging from .87 to .94 over a 4-week interval. CFA was employed to confirm the factor structure of the KABC-II scores,

which examined the construct validity of the core subtest scores. It was indicated that the KABC-II had excellent fit for all age levels. Using several different measures, the KTEAII showed significantly high scores for several different areas of reliability and validity. Variable structure of the KABC-II and KTEA-II scores, as outlined by Kaufman et al. (2012) for the total sample, was explored to determine whether it is invariant across the three ethnic groups. Based on skewness and kurtosis data, data points for the total sample and for each ethnic group were normally distributed. Together the results for these analyses provided strong evidence for good model fit for each Cattell-Horn-Carroll (CHC) factor, including general intelligence, for Caucasians, Blacks and Hispanics. This, CHC theory recognizes that achievement ability constitutes an important part of human intelligence and findings of this study provide evidence that these two tests are invariant across ethnic groups (Scheiber, 2016). Scheiber asserts that these findings can be generalized to other intelligence tests such as the Woodcock-Johnson III, due to the fact that general intelligence is conceptualized in a similar way. Of importance is to note that “scores of cognitive or achievement tests, are not biased in terms of their construct and theoretical interpretations, such findings do, by no means, imply that group mean differences found are not biased”(Scheiber, 2016). Too many variables, such as home environment, that cannot be controlled may impact the tests scores of minority students. Of more importance is that fact that although this study found no bias in the KABC-II and KTEA-II using the CHC model of intelligence, there is a lack of empirical evidence to suggest that the CHC model of intelligence is not itself biased.

If Scheiber’s findings are accurate, a potential explanation for differences in test scores between minority students and their White peers may be assessor bias. Tests

administered individually by psychologists or other specialists (in contrast to paper-and-pencil test administrations) are highly vulnerable to error sources beyond content and time sampling. Assessor bias refers to error variance in scores that are rooted in the systematic and erratic errors of those who administer and score the tests (Mcdermott, Watkins, & Rhoad, 2014). Assessor bias can occur any time a psychologist conducting a test drifts away from standard protocol. This breach in protocol may include ignoring rules or verbal prompts, failure to score a test correctly (give too little or too much credit for an answer), or failure to adhere to time limits.

To test assessor bias Mcdermott et. al. examined Full Scale IQ(FSIQ) scores, as well as each subtest and factor index scores of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-IV, to measure if there were variations between children within examining psychologists and/or variations between psychologists. Measures through a two-level unconditional HLM (Hierarchical Linear Modeling) model were analyzed, in which Level 1 represented variation between children within examining psychologist and Level 2 variation between psychologists. Two large southwestern school districts were used for this study in which psychologists administered the WISC-IV from 2003-2010. School District 1 had an enrollment of 32,500 students and included 31 elementary, eight middle, and six high schools. Ethnic composition for the 2009-2010 academic year was 67.2% Caucasian, 23.8% Hispanic, 4.0% African American, 3.9% Asian, and 1.1% Native American. District 2 served 26,000 students in 2009-2010 with 16 elementary schools, three kindergarten through eighth-grade schools, six middle schools, five high schools, and one alternative school. Caucasian students comprised 83.1% of enrollments, Hispanic 10.5%, Asian 2.9%, African American 1.7%, and other ethnic minorities 1.8%.

Information was collected for a total of 2,783 children assessed for the first time via WISC-IV, that information having been provided by 448 psychologists over the study years, with 2,044 assessments collected through District 1 files and 739 District 2 files (Mcdermott, Watkins, & Rhoad, 2014). The demographic breakdown for this study consisted of 66.0% male children, 78.3% Caucasian, 13.0% Hispanic, 5.4% African American, and 3.3% other less represented ethnic minorities.

The coefficient for random intercepts of children within psychologists was statistically significant for almost all models, but the coefficient for psychologists nested within districts was nonsignificant for every model. In addition, a preliminary multilevel model for each IQ score measured cross-classified children nested within data collectors as well as psychologists. No model produced a statistically significant effect for collectors, whereas most models revealed a significant effect for psychologists. Therefore, school district and data collection effects were deemed inconsequential, and subsequent HLM models tested a random intercept for nesting within psychologists only (Mcdermott, Watkins, & Rhoad, 2014). Returning to the main focus of Mcdermott et. al., the FSIQ and all four factor index scores imply significant (viz. >5%) assessor bias. bias for FSIQ (12.5%) and Verbal Comprehension Index (10.0%) was substantial (>10%). Within Verbal Comprehension Index, the Vocabulary subtest (14.3% bias variance) and Comprehension subtest (10.7% bias variance) were the main areas of concern, each conveying substantial bias. Furthermore, within the Processing Speed Index the Symbol Search subtest was loaded with substantial bias variance (12.7%) (Mcdermott, Wtkins, & Rhoad, 2014).

Mcdermott's et. al. study raises a great deal of concern for those who are administered psychological assessments or intelligence tests such as the WISC-IV. The decision of a student being placed in special education, regular education or gifted classes is based largely on, among other aspects, the scores of the WISC's FSIQ, subtests and factor index scores, while these recorded scores may not accurately represent a student's actual intellectual ability. Students who show the greatest gap from the norm on intelligence scores may be unaffected, however those who are near the cutoff of intellectually deficient may have their life negatively affected due to assessor bias. The decision of labeling a child as intellectually deficient, which may result in that child being placed into special education, depends on an accurate measurement of the FSIQ. This decision cannot be decided with confidence because the IQ measures reflect substantial score variations representative of differences among examining psychologists rather than among children (Mcdermott, Watkins, & Rhoad, 2014).

Assessor bias could potentially be solved through more competent and continued training of practicing psychologists, although this may be underestimating the complexity of this issue. Characteristics of the examiner, examinee, or examiner-examinee relationship may impact test scores. It is of importance to understand, psychological examiners are vulnerable to the same cognitive limitations and biases as other humans and test scores may be influenced by the examinee's familiarity with the examiner. Children from low socioeconomic and minority households have been found to achieve lower scores on demanding cognitive tests if tested by unfamiliar examiners. The extent of how much the examiner and examinee's relationship impacts test scores is not likely to be extensively researched. Pertaining to this subject, random assignment may be

unrealistic due to participant children, their families and schools expecting psychological services from those practitioners who have the best relationships with given schools or school personnel or have expertise with certain levels of child development. The implications associated with random assignment for high-stakes assessments could do harm or be perceived as doing harm (Mcdermott, Watkins, & Rhoad, 2014). This limitation does not excuse the fact that there is simply too much score variation that has nothing to do with actual differences between (or within) children and too much variation that is fundamentally errant (Mcdermott, Watkins, & Rhoad, 2014). This effectively diminishes the legitimacy of analyses of score, and causes us to question if these tests should be as influential on a student's placement as they are.

Entire system. "I, the man of color, want only this: That the tool never possess the man. That the enslavement of man by man cease forever" (Fanon, 1967, p. 231). As a nation we like to believe we have come a long way since the 1954 Brown legal decision requiring schools to provide equal educational opportunities for all students, but how far have we really come? French psychiatrist, Frantz Fanon argued that the disadvantaged conditions of Black people are the result of the broken system they live in. Fanon also stated that, "A given society is racist or it is not" (Fanon, 1967, p.85), emphasizing that the structure of a society or country is either equitable for all or systematically oppresses a racial group within that society. Based off the disproportionate representation of minorities within special education, it is safe to assume that Fanon would argue that the U.S. educational system is a tool used to maintain the oppression formed by the colonization of minorities within the United States.

To fully comprehend how the structure of the U.S. educational system is not equitable to minorities, it is important to understand Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Structural Theory. CRT names race as the defining issue that underlies all our law and public policy, and explains that only when it is to the benefit of those in power are those who are marginalized allowed civil rights gains (Zion & Blanchett, 2011). Zion & Blanchett (2011) argued that “inclusive education never had the potential to be truly inclusive because it is built on the premises of an inferiority paradigm. Issues of race, class, and privilege have rarely been incorporated into the inclusive education definitions or debates in the United States, and certainly not in practice.” Structural Theory, which overlaps CRT, provides us with a framework for understanding disproportionality in education and society as a whole. Structural Theory states, “Educational, economic, political, and social, stratification is predicated, at least in part, on racial categorization that results in particular relations between groups within social systems and come to be reflected in people’s beliefs and behaviors. Race relations are at the heart of educational stratification and disproportionality can be conceptualized as a means of maintaining educational stratification” (Sullivan & Artiles, 2011). Sullivan & Artiles (2011) define stratification as the differential distribution of resources, life chances, and costs/benefits among separate groups of a population. This hierarchal structure results in racial ideology (or racism) that influences the behaviors of individuals within the system (Sullivan & Artiles, 2011). This system is socially constructed, which is of relevance to Special Education because when many learning and educational disabilities are determined by the judgment of professionals within a school setting, Structural Theory states that race is a

major factor in the categorization of individuals, as well as race determining what resources that individual will receive.

To recognize why the structure of the U.S. educational system has never been equitable for minority students it is important to understand the historical context of education in this country. A major motive for the creation of U.S. public schooling was for the purpose of controlling and sorting children considered problematic. In 1647 the first U.S. public school was created so that children would understand the rules of their religion. In 1779 Thomas Jefferson proposed a two-track system of laborers and learners in order to segregate working class individuals. In 1851 the first law was passed making it a requirement for children to attend school; this law was enacted to ensure that working class and immigrant children learned obedience and how to become civilized, so they would make good workers for the upper class. During this time black slaves were not allowed to attend school or learn how to read. In contrast to this, Native Americans were removed from their homes and forced to attend public schools (Zion & Blanchett, 2011). The forced assimilation of Native Americans included various requirements such as only being allowed to speak English. Although Black slaves and Native Americans had contrasting experiences with public schooling in the mid 1800's, the reasoning was the same, for the dominant white society in the U.S. to maintain control. Native Americans, who were independent of the dominant white society in the U.S. were forced to assimilate. The most effective way for Native Americans to be assimilated, and to become a marginalized group under the dominant society in the U.S. was through schooling (Gram, 2016). Black slaves in the U.S. were already under the control of the dominant white society, and education may have presented them with an opportunity to

learn how to escape this control. In 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson* approved separate but equal schooling, allowing Black children to attend school, but segregated from their white counterparts. Finally, in 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* eliminated segregation in public schools based on race. Despite the ruling more than 50 years ago making it illegal to segregate education based off race, we must acknowledge that our schools are as segregated as they ever were (Ferri & Connor, 2005).

Ideally the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision would have ended the story of racial segregation in U.S. schools, however what was a documented law was far from actual practice. Following desegregation of U.S. public schools, many teachers reported that their black students greatly lagged behind their white counterparts in academic aptitude (Ferri & Connor, 2005). Ferri & Connor (2005) reported that no documents supported the discrepancy in academic achievement between white and black students, but rather teachers simply reported the academic gap as fact. Interviews of parents with white children attending recently desegregated schools confirm this was the preconceived thought of the entire dominant white society in the U.S. In order to maintain race and class privilege class tracking, supposedly based on academic ability, was instituted to appease White parents who assumed that integration would result in lower academic standards for their own children (Ferri & Connor, 2005). Even more troublesome than class tracking which re-segregated classrooms, was the over referral of black students to be placed into special education. Approximately 77% of students in special education classes 1 year after schools were ordered to desegregate were Black (Ferri & Connor, 2005). Black students were often labeled with the learning disabilities that relied on the most subjectivity. Students were placed into separate classrooms based

on their specific learning disability, and because most black students were diagnosed with a learning disability that required a subjective judgment, classrooms lacked diversity. Even today, the risk of being labeled with the disabilities that require professional judgments that are most subjective is much greater for minority students (Sullivan & Artiles, 2011).

Although special education was created to provide support and access to previously excluded students, it was now being used as a tool to segregate students and to maintain inequalities between the dominant white society and minorities. Thus educational segregation never ended, but now instead of using separate buildings, schools rely on class tracking and special education to place black and other minority students into separate classrooms (Ferri & Connor, 2005). These practices, which were implemented after *Brown v. Board of Education*, have never ended, which supports the potential consequences of Structural Theory. “Structural theory allows for the consideration of institutional racism—biased racial outcomes associated with policies and practices—that may intentionally or unintentionally have racially disproportionate consequences (such as special education disproportionality) and can collectively reinforce advantage or disadvantage”(Sullivan & Artiles, 2011). Institutional racism clarifies how once equitable minded policies and concepts such as Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Special Education can be used as a tool to marginalize racial minorities.

Understanding that the U.S. educational system was never designed for minority student’s to receive equitable education gives credence to Zion & Blanchett’s (2011) assertion that “inclusive education never had the potential to be truly inclusive because it

is built on the premises of an inferiority paradigm.” Given that the United States never ended segregation, but rather renamed it special education and class tracking, creates colossal affects that many are unaware of. This “refined” form of segregation has both psychological as well as practical consequences on the lives of many minority students. A major factor in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to desegregate schools cited by Earl Warren, 14th Chief Justice of the United States, was segregating students “generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way very unlikely ever to be undone” (Ferri & Connor, 2005). With schools still segregating children into separate classrooms, these words are as relevant today as they were in 1954. Ferri & Connor (2005) also reported many preconceived notions of white teachers from recently desegregated schools, which gave insight to their beliefs that their black students were inferior. The shared belief between teachers and students that minority students are inferior to their white counterparts can create a dangerous environment that is damaging to the psyche of minority students, as well as provide unfair justification for the over referral of minority students to be assessed by child study teams.

Throughout *Black Skin White Masks*, Frantz Fanon assesses how this system of white supremacy or institutional racism can create a form of psychosis in Black individuals and may render them without an identity. Fanon analyzes how in an environment where the dominant society is seen as normal, the minority society will strive to become a part of that dominant society. This occurs as the dominant society aids minorities to become as normal, or as white as possible. Fanon admits to falling victim to this system of white supremacy by his desire to suddenly be white, “I wish to be

acknowledged not as black but as white” (Fanon, 1967, p. 63). Fanon also analyzes this same experience separately, from the perspective of a black woman by citing his analyses from a bevy of case studies by affirming, “It is because the Negress feels inferior that she aspires to win admittance into the white world” (Fanon, 1967, p. 60). Fanon summarizes his findings on the impact white supremacy can have by articulating, “The black man wants to be like the white man. For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white. Long ago the black man admitted the unarguable superiority of the white man, and all his efforts are aimed at achieving a white existence” (Fanon, 1967, p. 228). Fanon would later conclude Black people develop a form of psychosis after the realization they would never truly be white. In the context of the current U.S. educational structure, this subconsciously gives schoolteachers and child study members the justification needed to over refer and to disproportionately place minorities into special education. White teachers, who make up 83% of U.S. public school teachers (as of the 2007-08 school year) (Cowan, 2010), believe they are benefiting minority students by placing them into special education because this will help them become as normal, or white as possible. Due to Fanon basing the bulk of his findings on societal structures where a dominant white society has colonized people of color, this would most likely happen at the unconscious level for biased teachers. This can be coupled with the findings of Sullivan & Artiles (2011), who explain that institutional racism is a systemic and social issue rather than an individual one.

Teachers and child study team members truly believe they are doing what is best for each individual child, however they are not taking the history of the U.S., the history of U.S. education, Critical Race Theory, Structural Theory or unconscious biases they

may have into consideration when they are disproportionately placing minorities into special education. Due to the history of the United States, which has never shown equitable treatment toward minorities, this process is ingrained in our psyches as normal. In short, we have given segregation a new name, Special Education.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The current study investigated if minority students are disproportionately represented within special education.

Participants

The current study included students that are categorized as White, Black or Hispanic, aged 6-21, who attended a public school in New Jersey during the 2015-2016 school year. Unidentifiable, school demographics, as well as special education demographics were obtained from the official website of the State of New Jersey Department of Education (New Jersey Department of Education) additional racial/ethnic groups were excluded due to the potential that these racial groups may make up such a small percentage of a school district's demographic makeup, that including those individuals may have led to misleading or skewed results. For example, if only 2 individuals in a school district identify as Pacific Islander's, and 1 receives special education services, it may be misleading to state that 50% of that school district's Pacific Islander population receives special education services. According to the New Jersey Department of Education, during the 2015-2016 school year, within all the public school districts of New Jersey, there were 329,064 White male students and 307,948 White female students, which combined for 637,012 White students. There were 110,197 Black male students and 106,132 Black female students, which combined for 216,329 Black students within the state of New Jersey. Lastly, there were 184,411 Hispanic male students and 175,568 Hispanic female students, which summed up to 359,979 Hispanic students within the state of New Jersey during the 2015-2016 school year. As of October

2015, the demographic makeup of students receiving special education services within the state of New Jersey, aged 6-12, was comprised of 110,795 students who were White (51.84%), 38,436 students who were Black (17.98%) and 52,607 students who were Hispanic (24.61%).

Materials and Design

The current study was a correlational study, which used unidentifiable Public Archival data. Using the official website of the State of New Jersey Department of Education (New Jersey Department of Education). The demographic of each school district's White, Black, Hispanic population in New Jersey for the 2015-2016 school year was collected. Also, using the State of New Jersey's Department of Education official website (New Jersey Department of Education), each school district's special education demographic as of October 2015, was recorded. An attempt was made to compare differences between the special education demographics among similar school districts, in addition to analyzing possible causes for these differences based on various factors (i.e. poverty), however the New Jersey Department of Education has innumerable gaps in its data pertaining to special education demographics as of 2015. That it, due to missing data on the part of the New Jersey Department of Education for Children Receiving Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE), making assumptions on the possible causes for Disproportionality within special education would be just an assumption, and therefore would be inappropriate. Due to this limitation, total demographic numbers for the state of New Jersey as a whole were used. The independent variable of student's race (Black, White, and Hispanic) and the dependent variable of special education demographics, were both recovered from the official website of the State of New Jersey of Education.

Procedures

Using the official website of the State of New Jersey Department of Education (New Jersey Department of Education), racial demographics for all White, Black and Hispanic students, who attended a New Jersey public school during the 2015-2016 school year, were recorded. This was followed by using the official website of the State of New Jersey Department of Education (New Jersey Department of Education), to record the special education demographics for all White, Black and Hispanic students who attended a New Jersey public school during the 2015-2016 school year. The raw data, of New Jersey public school demographics, were then converted into percentages. This procedure was accomplished by dividing the total amount of White New Jersey students by the amount of White New Jersey special education students, dividing the total amount of Black New Jersey students by the amount of Black New Jersey special education students, and by dividing the total amount of Hispanic New Jersey students by the amount of Hispanic New Jersey special education students. This operation provided the proportion of White, Black and Hispanic students enrolled within special education. In comparing, the data was evaluated to assess if any disproportionalities existed within special education demographics between the three groups. By using public archival data, this study included no risk.

Chapter 4

Results

The current study's primary hypothesis was "Minorities are disproportionately represented in special education and that race influences placement into special education." Although there is an abundance of research that suggests throughout the United States minorities are over represented within special education, which can be attributed to race, for the state of New Jersey this hypothesis was not supported. When data was taken specifically for students within the state of New Jersey, during the 2015-2016 school year, this hypothesis was refuted.

According to the New Jersey Department of Education, during the 2015-2016 school year, within all the public school districts of New Jersey, there were 329,064 White male students and 307,948 White female students, which combined for 637,012 White students. There were 110,197 Black male students and 106,132 Black female students, which combined for 216,329 Black students within the state of New Jersey. Lastly, there were 184,411 Hispanic male students and 175,568 Hispanic female students, which summed up to 359,979 Hispanic students within the state of New Jersey during the 2015-2016 school year. As seen below, within Table 1, demographics are shown for White, Black and Hispanic students who were enrolled in special education, as well as the demographics for White, Black and Hispanic students who were not enrolled in special education, within the state of New Jersey during the 2015-2016 school year.

Table 1 uses the description, "Not Enrolled in Special Education" rather than "General Education Students", due to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandate on the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Under IDEA, to the

maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, must be educated with children who are not disabled (U.S. Department of Education). Therefore, an overlap occurs as those enrolled in Special Education may also be enrolled in General Education classes for a portion or the entirety of the school day.

Table 1

Comparison of Students Enrolled in Special Education and General Education

| Enrollment | White Students | Black Students | Hispanic Students |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Enrolled in Special Education | 110,795 | 38,436 | 52,607 |
| Not Enrolled in Special education | 526,217 | 177,893 | 307,372 |

As of October 2015, the demographic makeup of students receiving special education services within the state of New Jersey, age 6-21, was comprised of 110,795 students who were White (51.84% of special education students) , 38,436 students who were Black (17.98% of special education students) and 52,607 students who were Hispanic (24.61% of special education students). As shown in figure 1 below, this means that out of all the White students in the state of New Jersey 17.39% received special education services, 17.77% of all Black students in the state of New Jersey received special education services and 14.61% of Hispanic students within New Jersey received special education services.

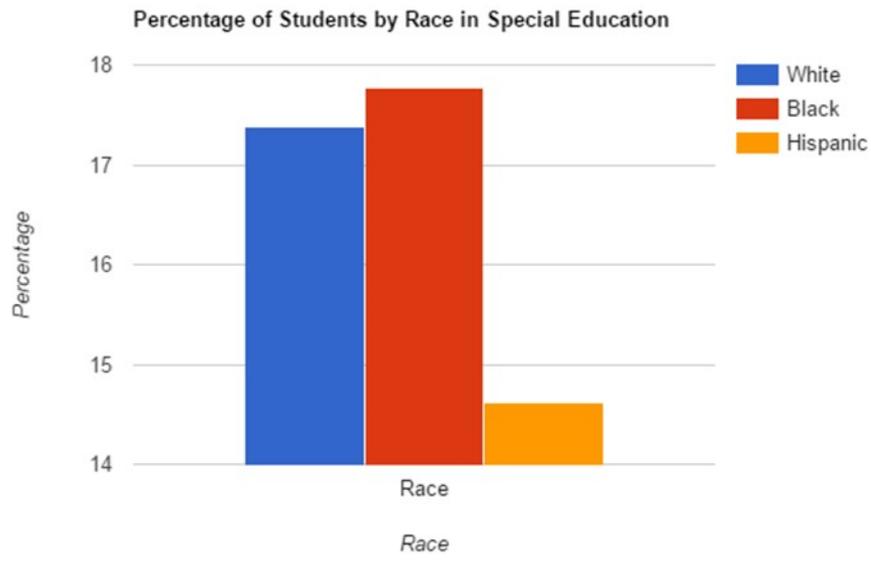


Figure 1. Percentage of students by race in special education

Chapter 5

Discussion

Summary

The present study was designed to determine if minorities are disproportionately represented in special education and if race influences placement into special education. It was hypothesized that minorities are disproportionately represented within special education and that race influences placement into special education, however by correlating public archival data from the New Jersey Department of Education's website, this hypothesis was refuted. The current study's findings contradict the bevy of research pertaining to the subject of disproportionality within special education.

Within this study four potential reasons for the over representation of minorities were analyzed, the first three were 1. A higher proportion of minorities need special education, 2. Teachers are disproportionately referring minority student's to be assessed by child study teams, and 3. Once referred, tests and assessment tools are biased against minority students. Although public archival data from the New Jersey Department of Education refuted this study's hypothesis, which can be explained by this study's limitations in the following section, it was concluded that the actual cause for the over representation of minorities in special education is due to the 4th potential cause, the entirety of the United States educational system within which students are placed into special education is inadequate, and the structure of public education in the United States systemically works to the disadvantage of minority students. That is, the entire U.S. educational system in which students are placed into special education is structured in a way that positions minorities at a disadvantage compared to their white peers. This

broken educational system creates and engulfs the first three potential causes, as they become but a part of the broken educational system.

The over representation of minorities in special education is a very complex problem, and no research to date has been able to identify one specific cause for this (Skiba et al., 2008). Tenenbaum & Ruck (2007) found that teachers hold higher expectations for their white students in comparison to their minority students, causing teachers to over refer minority students for special education assessments based on preexisting expectations. After being referred for assessment Mcdermott, Watkins, & Rhoad (2014) found that minority students are negatively affected by assessor bias, in which error variance in scores are rooted in the systematic and erratic errors of those who administer and score the tests. Although race-based teacher expectations and assessor bias are two subjects' researchers and child study members should explore, efforts to fix these issues will be futile unless we look at the larger system in which these issues are placed. Only by first understanding that the U.S. educational system was never designed for minority student's to receive equitable education (Zion & Blanchett, 2011), and that our nation's entire educational system is broken, can we begin to approach the systematic problem which disproportionately places minority students into special education.

Limitations

This study's hypothesis being refuted, in conjunction with this study's refuted hypothesis contradicting the research addressing disproportionality within special education, can be linked to three limitations present within the study. The first limitation, which affected this study's results, was how diversity is measured. Diversity does not equate integration, and too often schools within the same districts are racially segregated.

For this reason, comparing special education demographics between New Jersey School districts may not have accurately represented which school districts have an over representation of minorities within special education.

The second limitation, which may have affected the current study's results, was a lack of information reported by the New Jersey Department of Education. The current study relied on public archival data from the New Jersey Department of Education's website, however a great deal of information was not reported, or missing, with respect to special education demographics. Of New Jersey's 653 school districts, data is not present on the amount of White students receiving special education services for 57 of New Jersey's school districts. This is in addition to the New Jersey Department of Education missing information for the amount of Black students receiving special education services for 254 of the state's school districts. The New Jersey Department also failed to report the amount of Hispanic students receiving special education services within 205 of the state's school districts. Due to the amount of data not reported by the New Jersey Department of Education, the validity of the current study's results must be questioned.

The third limitation, which affected the results of this study, was how schools are attempting to decrease disproportionality within special education. Within the business world, there is a practice known as, "Cooking the Books" in which companies falsify their financial statements, or fraudulently alter financial data, in order to gain previously non-existent earnings. Unfortunately this type of fraudulent behavior is not unique to the business world, but also exists within the educational system. Rather than take appropriate measures to decrease disproportionality within special education, schools and teachers across the nation have taken actions to only maintain status-quo, or to give the

illusion that they are contributing toward solving this problem. (Kozleski, Zion, & Hidalgo 2007).

A lack of systematic and strategic planning for schools that have been categorized as disproportionately placing minority students into special education has resulted in those schools resorting to fraudulence, in order to quiet those who have addressed this problem (Kozleski, Zion, & Hidalgo 2007). In certain situations, minority students are giving Least Restrictive Environment special education services, however since a portion of these student's spend their days in General Education classrooms, with the help of aids, they are not reported as receiving special education services. In other occurrences, teachers/child study teams purposely withhold special education services from minorities, with the sole purpose of not being reported as having minority students over represented within special education. In a technical report from a case study evaluation, which sought to understand which strategies were successful in decreasing disproportionality, a teacher was quoted as saying, "people are aware that there is a disproportionate amount of students in certain groups and they try to overcompensate, you know, forcing kids to be in groups or let's say for example the challenge program, you know, to take an African American student who's not necessarily challenge material but putting them in that program just because you need to meet your quota, that's unsettling as well" (Kozleski, Zion, & Hidalgo 2007).

Implications

While the current study's hypothesis of, "Minorities are disproportionately represented within special education, and race influences placement into special education" was refuted, due to this study's limitations, especially how schools are

attempting to decrease disproportionality within special education, the results of this study may not be valid. For this reason, future researchers investigating disproportionality within special education, and those responsible for recording data on New Jersey public school demographics, must take a different approach. First, future researchers must reach a consensus with respect to defining diversity. Without an established way to measure diversity, comparing differences within and between school districts may be futile. Second, The New Jersey Department of Education must improve in reporting demographic information for students within the state of New Jersey. Without this information, faulty assumptions may be made, in addition into to researchers and school administrators not being aware of what groups are in need of the most help.

While these two approaches are of importance, the most significant and challenging obstacle that must be addressed, with respect to disproportionality within special education, is how schools are attempting to decrease disproportionality within special education. While it is not independently their duty, this responsibility falls largely on schoolteachers. Many teachers who have become aware of disproportionality within special education have resorted to purposely withholding special education services from minority students; that is they do not refer them to be evaluated for special education services, for the sole purpose of not being labeled as a teacher who over refers minority students. School psychologists are culpable as well, as many may not provide minority students with special education services, in order to be perceived as unbiased towards minority students. As educators, school administrators and child study team members we must remind ourselves why we chose our profession, to help students.

Future Directions

Only after the aforementioned issues have been addressed, can we further evaluate potential causes for the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education. Future research must address teachers holding higher expectations for White students than for Black and Hispanic students (Tenenbaum, H. R., & Ruck, M. D., 2007), test administration in which assessor bias may occur (Mcdermott, P. A., Watkins, M. W., & Rhoad, A. M., 2014), and especially the overall educational system in which minorities are marginalized (Zion & Blanchett, 2011). In the end, we must strive to help students prosper in a system that was never designed for them.

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