University of Missouri, St. Louis
IRL @ UMSL

Dissertations | Graduate Works

4-6-2017

Under-Representation in Autism: An Examination of Educational Evaluation Practices for Black Students

Erika L. Ayanaw
University of Missouri-St. Louis, elr883@mail.umsl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation

 Part of the Special Education and Teaching Commons

Recommended Citation
Ayanaw, Erika L., "Under-Representation in Autism: An Examination of Educational Evaluation Practices for Black Students" (2017). *Dissertations*. 632.
http://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation/632

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Works at IRL @ UMSL. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of IRL @ UMSL. For more information, please contact marvinh@umsl.edu.

UNDER-REPRESENTATION IN AUTISM: AN EXAMINATION OF EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION PRACTICES FOR BLACK STUDENTS

Erika L. Redmond-Ayanaw
B.S. University of Missouri-Columbia, 2004
M.A. Lindenwood University, 2006
Ed.S, University of Missouri-Saint Louis, 2011

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate School at the
University of Missouri- Saint Louis in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

May, 2017

Advisory Committee

April Regester, Ph.D.
Chairperson

Michael Bahr, Ph.D.

Matthew Davis, Ph.D.

Nicholas Husbye, Ph.D.

Copyright, Erika Ayanaw, 2017

ABSTRACT

Black students are negatively affected by disproportionality in school discipline practices, special education identification, and over-restrictive special education placement. Critical race theory is an operative framework that can be applied to increase understanding of such disproportionality (Blanchett, 2011). Through the use of qualitative retrospective chart review methods, this research investigated the underrepresentation of Black students with Autism in the context of educational evaluations, and from the Ordinariness and Social Construction Tenets of CRT. Analysis of 12 reports, six of Black students and six of White students, resulted in several findings: (1) Between group differences were present in terms of parental reporting of Autism features; (2) Analysis of full evaluative findings revealed between-group variability in Autism traits expressed/reported; (3) Determining need for special education services differed for Black and White students, as Black students' special education eligibility was more associated with deficits in Q2:Relating to Events and White students' eligibility was more related to deficits in Q1:Language/Social Communication; (4) Other findings indicated Autism characteristic overlap with behaviors associated with Emotional Disturbance and Defiance/Discipline, specifically within Black student reports.

DEDICATION

It was my late grandmother Hazel that was the first person to spark the idea of “doctor” in my mind with her frequent referring to me as her “little doctor.” She must have seen something in me that even I did not think was possible. I dedicate this to her. My mother, who has spent days-on-end watching after my two little boys, allowing me the time to focus on completing this dissertation; I dedicate this to you. My father, who constantly reminded me of how close I was to the finish line, and ending every call that we engaged in dialogue about my dissertation with, “I’m so proud of you;” I dedicate this to him. My two little boys, Caden and Kaleb, that entered my world in the process of writing this dissertation, I hope one day they will look back with proud eyes of a mom who dared to wear many hats and fulfill her dreams while tirelessly working to be a good mom and make them feel cared for and loved. Last, but not least, my husband who has always made me believe that the best is yet to come, and even when I was exhausted from working and wrangling a rambunctious toddler and infant, encouraged me in knowing that I could and would complete this. I’m thankful for the inspiration God gave me in putting my passion into this study. I dedicate this to my great support system of family and friends that helped me stay encouraged and believed that I could and would reach this milestone.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

.
I provide acknowledgement for the many individuals that labored with me in this process. To my dissertation committee who nurtured me through my research study and provided continued valuable feedback to take me deeper in my thinking and understanding. To Dr. April Regester, who took me on as one of her first doctoral students, I thank-you. You Dr. April Regester have been more than a doctoral advisor, but a mentor and friend, someone I greatly admire and hope only I can become as great of a teacher, researcher, and advocate with great passion one day. I provide great thanks to my research committee that gave their extra time to complete qualitative coding and lend their expertise to this study. To these and many more who have made the completion of this dissertation possible, I thank-you.

LIST OF TABLE/FIGURES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

From the onset of laws that denied slaves the right to learn and read, placed Native Americans in boarding schools, denied the use of languages other than English, and criminalized children who failed to go to school; American public schools have long been utilized as a vehicle of segregation and forced assimilation (Gato, 2005). Disproportionate representation of racial/ethnic-minority students, and more specifically Black students, in special education disability categories and over-restrictive placements remains an issue in U.S. public schools –further, the quality of these students' educational experiences is considered a significant concern (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Dunn, 1968; Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Kaufman, Hallahan, & Ford, 1998; Marks, Lemley, & Wood, 2010). The literature is saturated in studies surrounding the disproportionality of Black students, and other students of color, in terms of discipline practices, special education identification, and special education placement, (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Harris, Brown, Ford, & Richardson, 2004; Harry, 1992, 1994; Skiba, 2013); yet, these issues of disproportionality remain unresolved and controversial (Blanchett, Klinger, & Harry, 2009). From *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the desegregation of schools, to the development of special education law, a historical perspective leads to a better understanding of disproportionality for students of color (Blanchett, 2009).

Background/Context

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) is cited as one of the most influential court decisions in American educational history (Blanchett, 2009). Prior to the *Brown* decision,

and subsequent litigations, Black students and students with disabilities had similar experiences when it came to equitable rights in the American educational system (Blanchett, 2009). During the 1950's, nearly 2 million of the nation's 4 million children with disabilities were underserved, or inadequately served, in U.S. public schools. Students with disabilities, receiving educational services, often did so in separate settings that lacked resources, and were characterized as "run-down" (Losen & Ortfield, 2002). The lack of resources and poor educational environments were similar to that which Black students had endured in their segregated educational environments for years (Losen & Ortfield, 2002).

Blanchett, Mumford, and Beachum (2005) contends that *Brown*, which sought equal protection under the law and the desegregation of schools, served as the stimulus in challenging many inequities of Jim Crow law and in protecting the civil rights of Blacks (Blanchett, 2009; Harris, Brown, Ford, & Richardson, 2004). Later, *Brown* became significant in fighting for the equitable rights of individuals with disabilities. For instance, the *Brown* case provided a foundation in challenging the exclusion of children with disabilities in public schools (Blanchett et al., 2005). Essentially, parents of students with disabilities challenged the notion of "separate but equal" in their students' educational experience.

Currently, students of color, and more so Black students, remain at a great disadvantage in special education. Blanchett (2009) identifies the intersection of race, culture, disability, language, and poverty as an urban education issue. Blanchett (2009) states that the intersection of race, culture, disability, language, and poverty influences

urban children and their families' quest for equitable educational rights. Further, the intersection of race with disability, perceived disability and poverty, and race and poverty has resulted in significant challenges for urban schools, often mentioned as a vehicle for resegregation (Blanchett, 2009). For instance, soon after courts ordered schools to begin enforcing desegregation, subsequent to the *Brow*n decision, there was an apparent shift in the number of Black children being identified, at the time, as mildly "mentally retarded" and placed in separate educational settings. This was despite the evident presence of White students, with more obvious disabilities, not being placed in separate educational settings (Blanchett et al., 2005;Mercer, 1973). Presently, the disproportionate representation of Black students receiving special education services remains a reality (Blanchett et al., 2005; Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas, 2012; Raines, Dever, & Kamphaus, 2012; Skiba, Poloni, Simmons, Feggins, & Chung, 2005).

Overview of Disproportionality

The law defines disproportionality as the significant overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a particular demographic group in three main areas:

(1) In terms of special education identification in one of the thirteen disability categories

(2) In terms of placement of students identified as having a disability within the educational setting

(3) In terms of incidence, duration, and type of disciplinary actions assigned to students (this includes suspensions and expulsions) (IDEA, 2004)

With this very broad definition, each state determines what constitutes disproportionality. Hence, each state must decide what is considered significant disproportionality—one such method, completed with statistically significant levels (e.g., the risk index). The U.S. Department of Education states that determination of a national significant disproportionality rate is not appropriate, as there are varying factors at the State level that have to be considered in determining what accounts as "significant" (IDEA, 2004).

There exist a long history of disproportionate representation of racial-ethnic minority students in special education (Hosp & Reschly, 2004), and recent data suggest continued concerns. The Department of Education (DOE) (2014) report revealed that in 2012, American Indian/Alaska Native, Black or Black, and Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander groups had the highest risk ratios of 1.7, 1.4, and 1.6 respectively; indicating a 1.4 to 1.6 times greater likelihood of being identified as a student with a disability in one of the thirteen disability categories. Risk ratios for Asian and White children ages 6 to 21 were 0.5, and 0.9 respectively, indicating a lesser likelihood of identification as a student with a disability.

When considering individual disability categories based upon Department of Education (2014) report in 2012 Specific Learning Disability remains the most prevalent disability category for all racial/ethnic group. Particularly, Specific Learning Disability accounted for 46.4 percent of American Indian or Alaska Native students, 26.7 percent of Asian students, 41.8 percent of Black or Black students, 49- percent of Hispanic/Latino students, 52.9 percent of Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students, 36- percent

of White students, and 35.6 percent of students reported as of two or more races. For the disability category of Other Health Impairment, the highest identification rate was for White students (15.6%) followed by Black (12.8%), American Indian/Alaska Native (11.1%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (10%), Hispanic (8.9%), and Asian students (7.9%).

According to APA (2008) and the Department of Education (2014), a particular area of concern is the increase of Black students identified as having an Intellectual Impairment or Emotional Disturbance, as compared to White students ages 6 to 21. According to the Department of Education (2013), Black students are identified more often with Intellectual Disability (10.5%) and Emotional Disturbance (8.8%) when compared to students of all other racial-ethnic groups. When considering the risk index, Skiba et al., (2008) notes that Black students are identified as having Emotional Disturbance three times more frequently than White students. Black students are identified with Intellectual Disability 2.3 times more frequently than White students are.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Disproportionality

Although there is much research that addresses the overrepresentation of Black students in such judgmental disability categories like Intellectual Disability and Emotional Disability, only recently has questions been raised regarding the under-identification of Black children receiving a diagnosis of Autism. Mandell et al. (2009), in a review of health and educational records, found that Black children were less likely to have documented Autism Spectrum Disorder when compared to White children. According to the Department of Education (2013), an identification of Autism was

highest for Asian students at 16.8% and White students at 8.2%. Black students and American Indian/Alaska Native students had the lowest identification of Autism. Data from the Autism Developmental Disability Monitoring Network (ADDM) (2012), who tracks the prevalence of Autism in twelve states in order to generate an understanding of national rates, found that White children were identified more with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) than Black and Hispanic children were. White students were 1.2 times more likely to be diagnosed with ASD when compared to Black children and 1.5 times more likely when compared to Hispanic children. Further, Black children were identified with Autism later, when compared to White children –ADDM (2012) notes that trends in underrepresentation, and later diagnosis of Autism for Black students, varies by State.

In the State of Missouri, in which this research was focused, MO-ADDM for 2010 estimated that 1 in 70 children are identified with ASD. Trends revealed that boys were identified five times more with ASD, as compared to girls. White children had a higher likelihood of being identified with ASD than Black children. Consistently, for the 2013-2014 school year, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) found that White students were more likely to be identified with Autism, risk ratio of 1.01 for White children and .90 for Black.

Early theorists have suggested that ASD occurred more frequently in upper middle class White families (cf. Bettelheim, 1967); yet, recent research indicates that this is not the case and that ASD is the same regardless of race, ethnicity, or place of origin (Fombonne, 2007). Thus, the question remains as to why Black children are being under-identified or later identified with Autism? In explaining this under-identification, Kharod

Sell et al., (2012) research suggest differences in symptoms expression among Black children and White children, which may lead to non or misdiagnosis. Specifically, in evaluating existing records of children from the Pennsylvania Autism and Developmental Disabilities Surveillance system, and using the DSM-V to compare reported characteristics –it was determined that a higher frequency of White children, as compared to Black children, had documented criteria of inflexible adherence to nonfunctional routine/rituals, persistent preoccupation with objects, abnormal motor development, and odd response to sensory stimuli. Mandell et al. (2007) examined the health records of 406 Medicaid eligible children and found that Black children were 2.6 times less likely than White children to receive a diagnosis of Autism. Comparatively, they were 5.1 times more likely to receive a diagnosis of adjustment disorder and 2.4 times more likely to receive a diagnosis of conduct disorder when compared to White children. Possible causes for these differences include: children presentation, parental behavior in response to symptoms, and clinical reporting and response to symptoms and complaints from parents (Mandell & Novak, 2005; Mandell et al., 2007).

Another such explanation includes a lack of cultural sensitivity in School Autism assessment practices (Tincani et al., 2009). For one, cultural differences might play a role in parent and school staff perceptions of diverse groups and the presence of a disability. Further, Evans (2004) suggest that impoverished Black children might attend underprivileged schools whereby less experienced teachers and fewer involved school activities may present as a barrier to facilitating parental awareness of their student possibly having ASD. Also, Tincani et al., (2009) suggest a need to examine the

assessment practices for culturally diverse groups who are being identified with Autism in the school setting, as the research in this area is lacking.

When considering these explanations for the difference in prevalence rates and first age of diagnosis of ASD between Black and White children, Danielle et al., (2014) notes that these differences are unobserved universally, and much of the research consist of clinical settings. When referring to an educational disability of Autism Spectrum disorder and evaluation practices, there is no known study to examine directly these differences. Thus, the focus of this research was to assess the evaluation process and practices for White students and Black students who received an educational disability of Autism. Determination of disability differs, as clinical assessment for Autism is based on the DSM-V (previously, DSM-IV TR) and an Educational Disability of Autism is based on national and state regulations.

Theoretical Framework

Much research has examined the reasons for disproportionality overall. Blanchett (2009) propose that the reason disproportionality has persisted, is because it is unaddressed in terms of a system of structures that place Black students, and other students of color, at a disadvantage. Blanchett (2009) suggests that racism and White privilege contributes to, and maintains, disproportionality. For instance, inequitable educational resources, inappropriate teacher preparation, and culturally unresponsive curriculum and pedagogy contribute to the disproportionality of Black students. Further, educational research and policies based on norms of the majority contributes to

disproportionality. Disproportionality is complex and can be analyzed as a social phenomenon through a Critical Race Theory lens (Blanchett, 2009).

Critical Race Theory lends to a better understanding of disproportionality in discipline practices, special education identification, and special education placement for Black students and other students of color (Blanchett, 2009). Critical Race Theory (CRT), applied as a theoretical/interpretive framework, increases understanding in analyzing the realities of racial inequities in education (Closson, 2010). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) define CRT in education as "a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogies that seek to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education" (p.25).

CRT challenges traditional views of education in terms of meritocracy, color-blind objectivity, and equal opportunity. CRT developed in the context of legal theory in response to the removal of race as a significant social category of perception in terms of a legal doctrine of color-blindness (Crenshaw et al., 1995). CRT discusses how racism is silently and methodically embedded in many facets of day-to-day life (Bell, 1992).

There are five basic tenets of CRT: (1) **Ordinariness** observes racism as common, typical, and present in everyday life. (2) **Interest Convergence** states that culture changes in response to the interest of the dominant group. (3) **Social Construction** addresses race as historically and socially constructed by the perception of individuals in everyday life. (4) **Differential Racialization** explains how society assigns roles to various racial/ethnic-minority groups and encourages competition among those groups. It also addresses *Intersectionality*, which considers the multiple identities one

may hold (e.g. race, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation etc.). Lastly, (5) **Legal Storytelling** consists of the use of the voice of individuals from racial/ethnic-minority groups to communicate their experience (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

CRT provides a framework for investigating the marginalization of Blacks students, and other students of color, in education and provides way to address these concerns. For instance, Zion and Blanchett (2011) contend that the inclusive movement in special education has not resulted in positive outcomes for all students, because its' basis is upon failed assumptions that focused on ability and placement. The movement failed to address the intersection of ability/disability with race, class, culture, and language. Further, the movement did not address concerns of racism, White privilege, White dominance, and social/class dominance. Thus, in order to understand and address issues of disproportionality, it should be situated in terms of race, systemic bias, and privilege (Blanchett, 2009; Marks et al., 2010, Zion & Blanchett, 2011).

Purpose of Study & Research Question (s)

Disproportionality significantly affects Black students in terms of discipline practices, special education identification, and special education placement. Black students are overrepresented in the disability categories of Intellectual Disability and Emotional Disturbance (Skiba et al., 2002). They are more likely to receive their education in more restrictive school placements. Black children are less likely to receive a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, and when they do receive a diagnosis, it is typically later than their White peers –ADDM (2012) reports that, on average, Black children receive a diagnosis of Autism 18 to 24 months later than White children. This

negatively affects their ability to participate in early intervention services, known to be beneficial for children with Autism. Much of the research that has examined these differences occurred in clinical settings. There is, to date, no known research to assess these differences in the context of educational evaluation practices. The purpose of this study was to examine the differences in school psychological evaluation practices for Black and White students, found eligible for Educational Autism.

Tincani et al., (2009) suggest that issues of diversity and cultural responsiveness likely plays a role in our understanding of the under-identification of Black and other ethnic-minority children with ASD. Addressing disproportionality as a social justice issue is not a new concern. Zion and Blanchett (2011) reflects that one of the reasons legislation promoting the inclusion of Black students has not been successful, is because of a failed acknowledgement of addressing systemic race and bias, which act as benefit to the dominant class and perpetuates racism and disadvantage for racial/ethnic-minority groups through the CRT lens of interest convergence. For instance, there must be an examination of whose interests are involved in the continued segregation of Black students, and other students of color, through disparate practices in discipline and special education, and how those interests converge (Milner, 2008; Zion & Blanchett, 2011). Hence, this research sought to explore disproportionality through a CRT lens, draw specifically from the CRT Tenets of Ordinariness and Social Construction.

Using qualitative retrospective chart review methods, and thought a CRT lens, this research analyzed prior educational evaluation reports for Black students, as

compared to White students who received an Educational Disability of Autism. It sought to answer the following related research questions:

1. Are there differences reported in symptom expression among Black and White students with Educational Disability of Autism?
2. Are there differences in reported Autism traits by parents of Black and White students with Educational Disability of Autism?
3. Are there differences in behavioral and discipline reporting for Black and White students with Educational Disability of Autism?
4. Are there differences in how "Need for Special Education" is described for Black and White students with Educational Disability of Autism?

These above questions address prior theoretical propositions in the literature for the underrepresentation of Autism for Black children. Thus, this research sought to inform the evaluation practices for Black students and increase understanding of these theoretical propositions in an educational context. This research had a goal of lending to the practices of school psychologists, who often evaluate these students, and to gain a richer and deeper understanding of disproportionality as it relates to Autism and Black students.

Limitations

Limitations of this study may include the following. First, review of evaluation reports for this study represented students in the Midwest state of Missouri; therefore, this research did not address differences that are present in educational settings in other states. Second, evaluation reports selected for this retrospective review were purposefully selected from school districts in which underrepresentation of Autism was a concerns, as

measured by the risk ratio (Skiba & Rausch, 2006); therefore, limitations exist in this research in understanding the experience of those students in districts that are not affected by disproportionality of Autism. Lastly, this research focused on students found eligible for Autism and did not address differences that exist among students whereby Autism was suspected through an educational evaluation, but not confirmed in that the student was found ineligible for special education services or found eligible for a different disability; again, this is an area of future needed research.

Operational Definitions

The following terms, which may have various meanings, are central to this study. For the purpose of this research, they are defined as follows:

1. **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):** Often referred to as ASD, consists of a group of disorders, which include Autism, Asperger's syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder (atypical Autism). Diagnosed by use of the DSM-IV TR or DSM-V.
2. **Autism (ASD), Educational Identification**- The determination of whether a student meets criteria for Autism, based on federal identification. In this case, medical definition of Autism is not needed. Further, educational impact is considered in making this identification and in, or cases called eligibility.
3. **Critical Race Theory:** A theoretical/interpretive framework used in understanding and analyzing the realities of racial inequities (Closson, 2010). It includes five basic tenets Ordinariness, Interest Convergence, Social Construction, Differential Racialization, and Legal Storytelling.

4. **Difficult-To-Teach (DTT):** Students who exhibit significantly greater difficulties learning new educational materials, when compared to typical peers. DTT students also include those that may display significant behavior concerns (e.g. inattention, tendency to act impulsively, verbal defiance, aggression). Such behavior difficulties may fall along a continuum ranging from less severe to more severe (Wright, n.d).
5. **Disproportionality:** The over and/or underrepresentation of a specific racial and ethnic group within educational discipline practices, special education disability categories, and special education placement (Marks et al., 2010).
6. **Full Inclusion:** Students with disabilities, regardless of type or severity, are only educated in the general education class in their home school. There are no separate educational settings for students with disabilities, and general educators assume sole responsibility for educating all students (Kaufman & Hallahan, 2005).
7. **Inclusion:** Educating of students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers.
8. **Initial Evaluation:** A process in which a student, who is not identified with an educational disability, is evaluated by a diagnostic school team to determine if they meet eligibility for one or more of the thirteen special education disability categories.
9. **In-School Suspension:** Instance when a child is removed temporarily from his/her regular classroom for at least half a day, but remains under the supervision of a school personnel (CRDC, 2014).

10. **Least Restrictive Environment**: Students receiving access to the general education class setting to the maximum extent possible (IDEA, 2004).
11. **Mainstreaming:** Students receiving part of their education outside of the general education class setting (e.g. resource rooms) (Idol, 2006).
12. **Out-of-School Suspension:** Instance in which a child is temporarily removed from his/her regular classroom for disciplinary purpose and sent to another setting, which may constitute home or a behavioral center (CRDC, 2014).
13. **Over-Restrictive Placement:** Students receiving lack of access to the general education environment and being disproportionally placed in a separate educational settings, when compared to other subgroups (Department of Education, 2008) as determined by the risk-index (APA, 2008)
14. **Racial/Ethnic-Minority:** Defined as: Asian American, Black or Black, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, or American Indian and Alaska Native (CRDC, 2014).
15. **School Psychological Evaluation-** A psychological evaluation completed in the school setting by a certified school psychologist, in some cases school psychological examiner, to assess for a specific school-related disability (as determined by state and federal guidelines). Other related school staff (i.e. speech language pathologist, occupational therapist etc.) may also assist with this evaluation.
16. **Segregated Schools:** Students receiving education in a school setting that only serves students with disabilities.

17. **Special Education Identification**: A student's eligibility for one or more of the thirteen disability categories as defined by the Department of Education (2013) and IDEA (2004).
18. **Suburban School:** For the purpose of this study, a school situated in the outer suburb of a city, often having a high population of White students and staff, and may tend to serve a high population of students that are considered middle-class, as assessed by the number of students receiving free and reduced lunch.
19. **Urban School:** For the purpose of this study, a school located in or near a major city, often having high population of Black students and staff, and often serving a high population of students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, as assessed by the number of students receiving free or reduced lunch.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The segregation of students based on race and ability has long been a concern in U.S. public schools (Continho & Oswald, 2000). The disproportionality of Black students in terms of school discipline practices, special education identification, and special education placement remains a concern (Blanchett et al., 2006). Therefore, this study sought to develop a better understanding of disproportionality, specifically in the educational disability category of Autism, by answering the following research questions:

1. Are there differences reported in symptom expression among Black and White students with Educational Disability of Autism?
2. Are there differences in reported Autism traits by parents of Black and White students with Educational Disability of Autism?
3. Are there differences in behavioral and discipline reporting for Black and White students with Educational Disability of Autism?
4. Are there differences in how "Need for Special Education" is described for Black and White students with Educational Disability of Autism?

A historical perspective of U.S public schools in terms of discriminatory practices provides a foundation for this discussion. Blanchett (2006) contends that evaluating disproportionality from a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens provides context for understanding why it remains a concern. Thus, this review of literature has several purposes. First, it will review special education law by tracing the development of *Brown versus Board of Education* to the rights for individuals with disabilities in schools. Next, it will examine the various dimensions of disproportionality in school discipline

practices, special education identification, and special education placement. Third, it will provide a discussion on the underrepresentation of Black students in the disability category of Autism; it will relate differences in identification of ASD clinically and educationally. Lastly, it will discuss disproportionality from a CRT lens, which will be the theoretical framework for this study.

Law and Special Education

Brown versus board of education. Individuals that influenced the first legal challenges to the inappropriate exclusion of students with disabilities were motivated by, and set their standards consistent with, the legal strategies of the civil rights movements in the 1950's and 1960's (Smith & Kozleski, 2005). *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) is credited as one of the most influential court decisions in American Educational History. Blanchett, Mumford, and Beachum (2005; Blanchett, 2009; Harris, Brown, Ford, & Richardson, 2004) contend that *Brown,* which sought equal protection under the law for all individuals, served as the stimulus in challenging many inequities of Jim Crow law and in protecting the civil rights of Blacks. Later, *Brown* became significant in the fight for equitable rights among individuals with disabilities.

In 1950, the Topeka NAACP led by McKinley Burnett organized in challenging the 1879 Kansas law, which prohibited racially integrated elementary schools in certain cities depending on population. It was the *Plessy v. Ferguson*, (1896) case that resulted in segregated settings, suggesting separate but equal school systems for Blacks and Whites. Yet, following *Plessy v. Ferguson*, (1896) Black families remained overwhelmed with concerns of poor physical conditions and lack of resources provided to Black

schools at that time. Thus, frustration with having to watch their children walk, on numerous occasions, many miles to school because they could not attend their neighborhood school, as a byproduct of their race; the *Browns* fought for equality in the educational system. *Brown v. Board of Education (*1954) was the 12th case filed in the state of Kansas, which focused on ending segregation in public schools. There were similar cases filed in Delaware, District of Columbia, South Carolina, and Virginia (Knappman, 2001). The Board of Education's defense was that segregated schools prepared Black children for the segregation they would face during adulthood (Knappman, 2001).

In response, the NAACP continued to argue that Black schools were inferior to their White counterparts. The NAACP argued for segregation, in terms of equitable resource distribution and a more inclusive society and school system for Black and White students. This argument was not convincing to the state, and the court ruled in favor of the Board of Education. However, in an appeal by the NAACP to the Supreme Court, in 1954 there was a unanimous court ruling that ended "separate but equal" dogma of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) for public education. This was after sixty-years of legal discrimination in American public schools. Chief Justice Earl Warren, of the Supreme Court, presented this essential issue, "Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other tangible factors may be equal, deprive the children of the racial/ethnic-minority group of equal educational opportunities?" The response was, "We believe it does." Therefore, states were required to undergo educational reform, based upon the premise that the idea of

separate but equal has no place in public education. Furthermore, segregated educational facilities are inherently unequal (Harris et al., 2004).

Orfield and Lee (2001) reflect that the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling did not result in a prompt end to segregation and discrimination outside of public education, nor did it set a specific timeframe for the desegregation of public schools. Furthermore, the long-term stains of segregation and exclusion remained. As a result, much contention and resistance grew in response to desegregation. For instance, in the South it took two-decades to break down the barriers of segregation and to shift toward integration. States with the highest percentage of Blacks; such as, Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia were the slowest to integrate. From the 1970s to 1991, Florida had up to fifty-percent of Black students attending majority White schools (Knappman, 2001; Orfield & Lee, 2001). The integration of Black students into schools with majority White students reached its' peak in the 1980's. For instance, Ortfield, Frakenberg, Ee, and Kuscera (2014) showed that in 1988 as high as 43.5 percent of Black students attended schools with majority White students. However, by the 1990's structural desegregation efforts emerged and resulted in a decline in desegregation. According to Orfield et al., (2014), the percent of Black students at majority White schools in 2011 (23.2) declined to that reported in 1968 (23.4). Orfield et al., (2014) also reflects that currently Black and Latino students are more likely to attend schools with the majority of the children identified as experiencing poverty. Conversely, White and Asian students are typically in middle-class schools.

Brown and subsequent litigation. Before *Brown* and additional litigations, Black students had experiences similar to those of students with disabilities in the American educational system (Blanchett, 2009). The *Brown case* provided basis in challenging the exclusion of children with disabilities in public schools (Blanchett et al., 2005). Essentially, this allowed parents of students with disabilities to challenge the belief of "separate but equal" in their students' educational experience. Losen and Ortfield (2002) suggest that during the 1950's, nearly 2 million of the nation's 4 million children with disabilities were not being served, or were being inadequately served in U.S. public schools. Students receiving educational services often did so in separate settings that where characterized as harsh and meager. This lack of resources and poor educational environments were similar to that which Black students had endured in their segregated educational environments.

Osgood (2008) contends that during the 1950's, there was great public fear of deviation from normalcy and students with disabilities exemplified this deviation. It was thought that students with disabilities could not be effectively educated in the same environment with their peers without disabilities. Though some questioned the effectiveness of separate educational settings, the larger society established such as universal practice. It was the belief that the special nature of instruction mandated segregated educational settings, and that this was at a benefit to all students (Osgood, 2008). Yet, parents of students with disabilities were at greater liberty of challenging the idea of separate, but equal following the *Brown* decision. The *Brown* decision provided parents of students with disabilities legal precedence in disputing educational inequities.

Several court cases set the stage in challenging this segregated educational system (Blanchett, 2009).

In 1971, the *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* had a lawsuit filed against them by the *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC).* Before this case, children identified with "mental retardation" were denied a free public education in Pennsylvania and other states. Perceiving that their rights were violated, the plaintiffs, Nancy Beth Bowman and PARC, filed a class action suit against Pennsylvania on behalf of all "mentally retarded" persons. The claim was that laws and practices of Pennsylvania negated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. The lawsuit spoke to the concerns of all "Exceptional Children," which was defined as those with physical, mental, emotional, or social capabilities that deviate from "normal." The plaintiffs spoke to the benefit of educating students with disabilities. They encouraged the court to instill free public education for students with "mental retardation." On October 8th, 1971 PARC won this case, and this became a landmark decision in American law, and a staple for the disability rights movement. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was informed that they could no longer deny education to children with disabilities. Alternatively, they were informed that they must provide free public education to all children, including those with disabilities from the age of six to twenty-one. It was also determined that the education each child received must be appropriate to the child's ability (*PARC v. Pennsylvania*, 1972*).*

Moreover, Pennsylvania schools were instructed to, at preference, place students with disabilities in general education public school classes. If these schools were not able

to provide appropriate placement for such student with disabilities, it was the school district's responsibility to locate and accommodate students in an appropriate placement with no expense to the students' families (*PARC v. Pennsylvania, 1972*). One limitation of *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) was that it failed to address provisions for all children, other than those with mental retardation (Blanchett, 2009). On the heels of *PARC v. Commonwealth* (1972), in 1973, *Mills v. District of Columbia* further extended the provisions of PARC to all children with disabilities. These cases laid the ground for the normalization of individuals with disabilities, and the disability rights movement and the development of federal law (e.g. IDEA).

In following years, Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (also known as IDEA, 2004), and the American Disabilities Act of 1990 had been credited with changing how American society viewed, educated, and served individuals with disabilities (ADA, 1990; Blanchett et al., 2005; Blanchett, 2009). Section 504 (Rehabilitation Act of 1973) is considered one of the first significant legislative steps in securing and providing protection for the rights of individuals with disabilities. Section 504 (Rehabilitation Act of 1973) defined disability, including standards for the prohibiting of discrimination on the basis of disabilities, and highlighted the importance of educational services for student with disabilities. The American Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) extended civil rights protection for individuals with disabilities by mandating accommodations and modifications for such individuals in the public and private sectors.

Subsequently, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA: P.L. 105-17, 1997, 2004); originally, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142, 1975) mandated the following for students ages 3 to 22 with disabilities: a free and appropriate public education; the least restrictive environment or placement; an individualized educational program; nondiscriminatory assessment, identification, and placement practices; parental and student participation in decision; and, procedural safeguards (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Hallahan, et al., 2009; IDEA, 2004). Particularly, the least restrictive environment based on mandates of IDEA (2004) supported the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Essentially, least restrictive environment (LRE) states that to the maximum extent possible, children with disabilities should be educated with their peers without disabilities in the regular classroom. Removal of children with disabilities from the regular classroom occurs only when the nature of the disability is such that with the use of appropriate support, appropriate education is unachievable in the regular classroom (IDEA, 2004).

Currently, those in support of inclusion state that it confirms concepts of normalization for individuals with disabilities, a tenet of the disabilities rights movement. Furthermore, reported benefits for individuals with disabilities who are educated in inclusive classrooms consist of higher levels of success in academics and social skills (Blanchett & Shealey, 2005). More specifically, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) of IDEA (2004) points out the education of students with disabilities in the general education class setting. LRE notes that to the maximum extent possible, students with disabilities should be educated in the general education setting with their peers without

disabilities. Research has indicated that this is not the case, specifically for Black students, and that such occurrences can be traced to zero tolerance and disproportionality in terms of school discipline practices (Skiba, 2012). The next section will trace the progression of disproportionality in terms of school discipline, special education disability, and special education placement.

Disproportionality

Blanchett (2006; 2009) state that the initial theoretical basis of special education was to provide additional support to students with disabilities that was not provided in the general education class. The intent of special education, which remains true today, was not a placement, but a service delivery model (Blanchett, 2006). In receiving services in the least restrictive setting, assuming the starting point would be the general education classroom in the student's home school, the goal of this service delivery structure was to provide individualized and appropriate support and instruction. When students' needs were met, or strategies and modifications were provided, the students would be reintegrated into their initial general education class setting. Research has shown that this has not been the case; specifically, for Black students (Blanchett, et al., 2005, 2006; Losen & Ortfield, 2002; Mooe & Lewis, 2012). Instead, some contend that special education has resulted in re-segregation of students of color (Blanchett et al., 2005, 2006; Losen & Ortfield, 2002). These concerns, directly related to inequities in education, suggests two intersecting systems that further challenge the success of Black students in American schools (Blanchett et al., 2005).

Zero tolerance. Review of literature reveals that students of certain racial/ethnic-minority groups, specifically Black students, are negatively affected by discrepant practices in school discipline, special education disability identification, and special education placement (Dunn, 1968; Department of Education, 2008; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Skiba, 2012, 2014). Many have postulated reasons for disproportionality. It has been contended that these disparities have roots in zero tolerance policies (Skiba, 2014).

Skiba (2012, 2014) asserts that "Zero Tolerance" surfaced in the 1980's and 1990's in response to a seeming growth of violence in schools. Since its inception, zero tolerance has been considered a controversial policy. The first recorded use of the expression "Zero Tolerance" was in response to sailors for apparent drug use in Norfolk, Virginia. In 1986, during the Reagan administration, zero tolerance policy was suggested for schools in the U.S., but was later rejected by lawmakers. In 1994, the Clinton administration passed the "Gun Free School Act"—which mandated, for one-year, the expulsion of any student that brought firearms on school grounds (*Guns Free School Act*, 1994).

As applied to the educational setting, zero tolerance policy assumes that the use of strong punishment has the ability to deter potentially disruptive student behavior (Skiba, 2012). Zero tolerance policy implements exclusionary practices in discipline (e.g. suspension and expulsions). It suggests that even minor disruptive behaviors must be addressed harshly, in order to "send a message" of non-tolerance for such behaviors. Zero tolerance policy suggests that failure to intervene will result in a cycle of disruptive and violent behavior (Skiba, 2012, 2014).

For instance, Skiba (2014) suggests that following the implementation of such policies, there was a noticeable increase in suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to the juvenile justice system. In Chicago, Illinois, the number of expulsions increased from 81 to 1000 in the matter of three years. In Pennsylvania, referrals to the juvenile justice system more than doubled within seven years (Skiba, 2014).

Another concern with zero tolerance policy is the great amount of discrepancy given to administrators in applying punitive and exclusionary measures—consequently, leading to an increase in suspension rates for behaviors that were traditionally disciplined with a lower level of punishment (Skiba, 2012). Apprehensions have surfaced regarding the lack of empirical support in implementing such punitive measures. Presently, there is no data to confirm that the use of punitive measures (e.g. expulsion and suspension) is effective in reducing disruptive behavior, or in improving school climate (Skiba, 2014).

On the contrary, exclusionary discipline practices result in negative student outcomes and learning, places students at greater risk for academic deficits (Arica, 2006; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Skiba, 2012), school dropout, and increases the likelihood of a student's contact with the juvenile justice system (Gregory et al., 2010; Skiba, 2012). For instance, Arica (2006) found that in one-year, students suspended at a frequent rate fell three grade levels behind in their reading skills when compared to non-suspended peers. At two-years, suspended students were five years behind in their reading skills. Moreover, the American Psychological Association (2008) states that zero tolerance policy challenges what is developmentally appropriate in terms of discipline, for youth, when considering judgment and neurological immaturity.

Of even greater concern with zero tolerance policy, are the discriminatory practices affecting students of specific racial/ethnic-minority groups. Research has suggested that that zero tolerance policies has had the greatest impact on the discipline prescribed to Black students (APA, 2008; Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas, 2012; Gregory et al., 2010; Milner, 2013; Skiba, 2012;2014; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Milner (2013) states that institutional policy at the school and district level, which stem from zero tolerance policy, can be laden with racism—specifically, when they are determined by White norms excluding aspects of non-White individuals.

Research indicates that Black students are suspended at a rate two to three times higher than their counterparts of other races. Moreover, they are overrepresented in other general school discipline practices and corporal punishment (Milner, 2013; Gregory, et al., 2010). The following will discuss these discriminatory discipline practices, as a potential consequence of zero tolerance policy.

Discriminatory discipline practices. Zero tolerance policy has had the greatest impact on Black students. For school suspensions, Black males are impacted at the highest rate (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson, 2002). According to Lewis, Butler, Bonner, and Joubert (2010), through an investigation of school discipline patterns of Black students during the 2005-2006 school year, Black students were overrepresented in school discipline sanctions and received more exclusionary punishments. Likewise, Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) evaluated the disciplinary practices in two urban middle schools and concluded that Black students received the highest number of

referrals, and were on average suspended more when compared to all other ethnic groups except Native American-students.

The US Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection (2014) investigated school discipline practices for the 2011-2012 school year. Data was collected from all public schools and public school districts in the nation that serves students for at least 50% of the school day. Results indicated that in terms of school discipline practices, disproportionality was high in terms of suspension and expulsion for students of color. Specifically, the data revealed that Black students are expelled at a rate three times more than that of White students. On average, 5% of White students are suspended, compared to 16% of Black students. Black students represented 16% of the student population for the CRDC (2014) data, but were 32-42% of students suspended or expelled. When considering referral to law enforcement, Black students were disproportionality referred at 27% and represented 16% of the student population (CRDC, 2014).

Several reasons are provided for the disproportionality in disciplinary practices. Poverty has been ascertained as a reason; however, there are mixed reviews regarding this viewpoint, as research has indicated that poverty alone is a weak predictor. Skiba et al. (2002) reflect that socioeconomic status was a minimal indicator of disciplinary practices in terms of race and gender. Similarly, Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman (2008) research, which examined school discipline practices in terms of racial group and gender, found that the racial gaps in discipline occur equally in affluent suburban and urban school districts.

A second proposed hypothesis links disparities in discipline to Black students having higher rates of disruptive behavior. Yet, there has been limited research to provide evidence of African America students having, inherently, more behavioral difficulties when compared to students of other ethnic groups (Skiba et al., 2002). On the contrary, disparate discipline practices has most notably been linked to teacher referrals that begin in the classroom—as Black students receive more discipline referrals (Bryan et al., 2012; Gravois & Rosenfeld, 2006; Scott, Hirn, & Barber, 2012; Skiba et al., 1997; Skiba, 2012), are more likely to be referred for subjective offenses (Skiba et al., 2002), and are more likely to receive harsher punishments consistent with zero tolerance philosophy (Bryan et al., 2012; Gravois & Rosenfeld, 2006; Lewis et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 1997; Skiba, 2012).

These differences in referral practices and punishment for Black students can be connected to Differential Processing and Differential Selection (Piquero, 2008). Differential Processing states that racial bias occurs in the correctional system, and results in disproportional arrest and incarcerations for minorities. Such is the same in school, whereby a discrepancy in sanctions and addressing student behavior is present. This results in Black students being punished in a harsh manner for less serious offenses. When considering differential selection, Piquero (2008) suggests that minorities have a greater chance of being arrested as a byproduct of being more likely to be picked out for wrongdoings. In the school setting, despite similar infractions, Black, Latino, and Native American students are more likely to receive disciplinary consequences for behaviors that

often begin at the classroom level; likely a result of societal stereotypes, implicit bias, or cultural mismatch.

Discipline and special education referral. Discriminatory discipline practices, as a result of zero tolerance policy, have indicated a relationship between referral for behavior concerns, suspension, expulsion, and special education eligibility. Students who have history of expulsion and suspension are more likely to be referred for special education, and are more likely to be found eligible. Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins, and Chung (2005) investigated disproportionality, special education, and poverty. When considering all variables, including poverty, suspension-expulsion proved to be the most consistent indicator of disproportionality in terms of disability categories. These exclusionary discipline practices were positively related to disproportionate identification of Black students as having Emotional Disturbance and Intellectual Disability. It was also related to disproportionality in terms of Specific Learning Disability, whereby Black students were underrepresented (Skiba et al., 2005).

Similarly, Skiba et al. (2006) findings reveal that teachers, administrators, and other educational staff members view disproportionate referral for special education of low SES racial/ethnic-minority students as an area of concern. Reasons for special education referrals stemmed from behavioral concerns of which the teachers viewed they could not handle in the class setting. As it was noted, teachers viewed Black students' behaviors as different. Specifically, it was stated by teachers that Black students seemed to "talk louder, be more active, and seemed disrespectful (p.1434)." Similarly, findings from Skiba et al. (2006), revealed that teachers and administrators admitted that Black

students were over-referred for special education because of behaviors—possible explanations for this included “a cultural mismatch” or “insufficient training” among staff and teachers. These findings were consistent with the National Research Council, as cited in Skiba et al. (2006), which states that a lack of resource for teachers and ineffective means for managing difficult behavior contributes to the racial disparity in discipline and special education.

Inherent differences have been found by racial background in the special education referral practices by teachers. For instance, Bahr et al. (1991) conducted a study that suggests that race of students’ disproportionally affected special education referrals. In contrast, race of the teacher did not have a significant impact on special education referrals. Within this study, an assessment of 40 classroom teachers and their rating of Difficult-to-Teach (DTT) students, Black and White teachers equally rated Black students significantly more as DTT, and as being appropriate for special education referral. Similarly, Gottlieb, Gottlieb, and Trongone (1991) looked at the special education referral practices for 439 students. It was determined that racial/ethnic-minority students were referred more for special education; and generally were referred for behavior over academic concerns. Thus, research has consistently demonstrated disparate discipline practices for Black students, as it relates to special education (Bryan et al., 2012; Skiba, 2012).

Disproportionality in special education disability category. When considering individual disability categories based upon 2011 data, specific learning disability was the most prevalent disability category for all racial groups except Asian. Particularly, specific

learning disability accounted for 46.2 percent of American Indian or Alaska Native students, 42.4 percent of Black or Black students, 49.7 percent of Hispanic/Latino students, 49.8 percent of Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students, and 36.8 percent of White students. Speech or language impairment was the most prevalent for Asian and second most prevalent for all other racial/ethnic groups. For the disability category of other health impairment, the highest identification rate was for White students (15%) followed by Black, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic, and Asian students.

According to Skiba (2008) and the Department of Education (2014), a particular area of concern is the increased likelihood of Black students to be identified with intellectual disability or emotional disturbance as compared to White students ages 6 to 21. According to the Department of Education (2014), Black students were identified more often with intellectual disability and emotional disturbance when compared to students of all other racial-ethnic groups. When considering the risk index, Skiba (2008) notes that Black students are identified as having emotional disturbance three times more frequently than White students. They are identified as having intellectual disability 2.3 times more often than White students. High identification of Black students in what constitute judgmental disability categories (intellectual disability and emotional disturbance), can also be connected with their placement in over-restrictive educational settings.

Disproportionality: Inclusion and over-restrictive placement. The Florida State University, Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy (2002), states that

no legal definition of inclusive education or inclusion exists; yet, many definitions have been proposed. Giangreco (2006) describes inclusion as welcoming all students in the general education setting. Students are educated in the school they would typically attend if they did not have a disability. Students with disabilities are educated with their same-age peers, and participate in a shared educational experience.

Comparatively, inclusion is not the same as mainstreaming or integration. Mainstreaming consists of students receiving part of their education outside of the general education class (Idol, 2006). It is closely associated with "pull-out" programs. This type of integration utilizes a half-time inclusion method that negates the goal of students with disabilities becoming a full member of the classroom community (Florida State University Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, 2002; National Institute for Urban School Improvement, nd).

Variability exists when considering disability of a student and special education placement. Of all disability categories, students with intellectual disability spend the most time receiving instruction outside of the general education class. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014) Annual Report on IDEA, for the fall 2011 school year, students with intellectual disability were educated less in the general education class setting. Specifically, 48.87-percent of students with intellectual disability received less than 40% of the education in the general education class setting. 46.2% of students with multiple disabilities and 33.1% of students with Deaf/Blindness received less than 40% of the education in the general education class setting (Department of Education, 2014).

When considering students educated in a separate school setting, students identified with a deaf-blindness disability was the highest at 33.1%, followed by multiple disabilities (24.5%) and emotional disturbance (17.8%). Of all disability categories, students with speech /language impairment received the highest amount of instruction in the general education class for fall 2012; students identified with specific learning disability were the second highest (Department of Education, 2014).

In terms of racial-ethnic background, the Department of Education (2014) reflects that for students, ages 6 through 21, 53.9% of Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students spend 80% or more of their school day in the general education setting. This is followed by 55.6% of Black students, 56.6% of Asian students, and 60.1% of Hispanic/Latino students. Comparatively, 64.5% of White students with disabilities receive 80% or more of their education in the general education setting. For separate education setting, this was highest for Black students at 6.1%.

The research is saturated in studies that address disproportionality of Black students in terms of discipline, special education disability category, and special education placement. Yet, as Blanchett (2009) notes, disproportionality remains a concern. As will be discussed in the proceeding section, the under-identification and late identification of Black students with Autism presents further concerns, and is an area of needed research.

Underrepresentation: Autism and Disproportionality

Black children are under-identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder. A review of health and educational records for children who were identified as having an Autism

spectrum disorder (ASD) by Mandell et al. (2009) found Black, Hispanic, or other non-White ethnicities were less likely than were White children to have documentation of an ASD in their records. According to DOE (2013) data, the Autism identification rates were highest for Asian (16.8) and White (8.2) students. A disability of Autism was identified least often for American Indian/Alaska Native students (3.9) and Black students (5.0). Using the risk ratio approach, this indicates that White students are 1.4 times as likely as Black students to be identified as having Autism.

ADDM (2010) reflect that differences in disproportionality of Autism vary by state and region. In the state of Missouri, in which the research is located, disproportionality of Autism appeared consistent with national trends. The Missouri Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Project (MO-ADDM) (2013) estimates that 1 in 70 children (or 14.2 per 1,000 8-year-olds) are identified with Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) based on information collected from the health records of children who were 8 years old and living in one of five Missouri counties (Franklin, Jefferson, St. Charles, St. Louis, and St. Louis city) in 2010. Overall, the MO-ADDM team identified 359 children with ASD. Overall trends revealed boys were almost 5 times more likely to be identified with ASD than girls and White children were more likely to be identified with ASD than Black children. For the 2013 to 2014 school year, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE, 2014) reported a total Autism incidence rate of 1.01%. Consistent with the trend identified in the MO-ADDM data, the risk ratio for White students with educational Autism diagnoses was 1.04, Black students' risk ratio was .90.

Explaining underrepresentation in Autism. A number of authors have investigated or proposed tentative explanations for differences in Autism prevalence rates and first age at diagnosis between Black and White children, though as noted in a recent review by Daniels and colleagues (2014), such disparities have not been identified universally. Generally, these studies have focused on clinical rather than educational ASD diagnosis; no studies, identified, have directly investigated assessment practices of school evaluators that could contribute to differences in rates of identification for special education eligibility under the category of Autism.

Possible explanatory factors suggested in the literature include differences in symptom expression (Kharod Sell et al., 2012; Mandell et al., 2007); the potential impact of diagnostic biases (e.g., statistical discrimination) on the part of clinicians (Cuccaro et al., 2007; Mandell et al., 2009); differences in level of parental concern and reporting on Autism symptomology (Cuccaro et al., 2007; Mandell et al., 2007; Mandell et al. 2009; Sun et al. 2014); diagnostic substitution in special education eligibility decisions (Morrier & Hess, 2012), along with greater clinical misdiagnosis of other conditions with similar features, such as ADHD and conduct disorder, among Black children (Mandell, et al., 2007); lack of cultural sensitivity in school Autism assessment practices (Tincani et al., 2009); the confounding impact of co-occurring Intellectual Disability (Mandell et al., 2009); and parent-clinician interaction patterns (Daniels et al., 2014; Mandell et al., 2007). In addition, some data suggest that prevalence differences and delayed age of diagnosis may be connected to SES and associated ascertainment bias as much or more so than ethnic category (Cuccaro et al., 1996; Durkin et al., 2010), although a recent UK

study found no effect of SES when controlling for levels of parental concern (Sun et al. 2014).

One recent study compared diagnostic/clinical presentation among Black and White 8-year-olds in the Philadelphia area diagnosed with ASD using data collected through the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) project (Kharod Sell et al., 2012). The authors found that White children with ASD had more documented *DSM-IV* criteria of restricted interests and repetitive/stereotyped behaviors, as well as greater symptoms of abnormal motor development and odd responses to sensory stimuli. Counter to initial hypotheses, no differences between White and Black children in core social symptoms of ASD or the extent of externalizing behaviors were found. The authors speculated that attribute predilection might play a role in disparities in the diagnosis of ASD. Of note, the sample contained a greater proportion of Black than White children, and no significant differences between age of first evaluation or age at identification between White and Black subjects were identified, suggesting characteristics of this sample and/or practices around Autism assessment may differ from those found in areas of the U.S. that have alternate demographic makeups and prevalence/identification discrepancies. An earlier preliminary study examining phenotypic differences, based on parent report, in a sample of 344 Black and White children identified with ASD (Cuccaro et al., 2007) found that Black members of the sample showed later acquisition of first words and phrase speech but similar levels of social impairments and repetitive behavior in comparison to Whites. It was hypothesized that the language differences between the two groups could indicate ascertainment bias or

that Blacks with less marked language delays had been overlooked in Autism identification.

In discussing the findings of a national study of ASD disproportionality, Travers et al. (2011) hypothesized that diagnostic substitution, particularly between the categories of Intellectual Disability (ID) and Autism, may contribute to racial discrepancies in special education identification. The authors also proposed that delayed administrative (i.e., educational) identification of non-White students could result from lesser likelihood of timely clinical diagnosis of Autism outside the school setting. They concluded that administrative Autism identification may be more subjective (and thus more susceptible to misdiagnosis on the basis of cultural factors) than previously assumed. Another study examining ADDM data trends concluded that the presence of significant global intellectual disability can complicate the diagnosis of ASD and that clinicians may be less likely to assess for ASD in non-White children once cognitive impairment is established (Mandell et al., 2009). Ladner and colleagues (Testimony of Dr. Michael Ladner, 2007) found that as the percentage of minorities in a particular county increased, the percentage of students in special education decreased. This was interpreted as indicating that minority students are more likely to be placed in special education if they attend primarily nonminority districts, which indicates that eligibility decisions may be impacted by an interaction of race and location.

Autism: School assessment practices. In order to accurately identify Autism, one must select the criteria for identification. This varies across public and private settings with schools adhering to their states' interpretation of the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act (US DOE, 2010). According to the Missouri State Plan (2013):

> "Autism" means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal or nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three (3) that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with Autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences (pg. 19).

This is operationalized as disturbances of speech, language-cognitive, and nonverbal communication and disturbances of the capacity to relate appropriately to people, events, or objects, which adversely affects educational performance and is not a result of an emotional disability (MO State Plan, 2013). Outside of the school setting, Autism is identified in accordance with the *DSM-5, see figure 2.1.*

A. Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction (all three must be present)	1. Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity 2. Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction 3. Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships
B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities(at least two present)	1. Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech 2. Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior 3. Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus 4. Hyper- or hyporeactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of environment
C. Symptoms must be present in the early developmental period. D. Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other areas E. The behaviors are not better explained by intellectual disability or global developmental delay.	

Figure 2.1 Summary of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th Ed.; *DSM-5;* American Psychiatric Association, 2013) autism spectrum disorder criteria.

Best practice recommendations for Autism identification typically include records review, parent interview, direct observation, and standardized measures, including rating scales and direct assessment (Volker & Lopata, 2008; Williams, Atkins, & Soles, 2009). Expectations for identification practices vary by setting. For example, in private settings the Missouri Autism Guidelines Initiative (2010) recommends a three-tiered approach. At Tier 1, when unambiguous symptoms of an Autism spectrum disorder are present the lead diagnostic clinician can independently make a diagnosis with use of standardized instruments being optional. At Tier 2, milder or more complex symptoms that result in differential diagnosis being more difficult and/or questions about cognitive level require standardized instruments to be used and consultation with at least one other professional to be conducted. At Tier 3, very complex presentations, such as some Autism symptoms with many coexisting concerns or a complex medical or psychosocial history, require working with a team of professionals with specific areas of expertise (e.g., speech-language, psychology, OT) and administration of standardized instruments. In the school setting, federal law and states' interpretations of that law dictate that a multidisciplinary team makes eligibility decisions with each member of the team providing unique information as part of assessment team. For example, parents provide developmental history; school psychologists or other assessment personnel administer and interpret tests across cognitive, development, adaptive behavior, and social-emotional behavior and can make differential diagnoses; teachers, administrators, and special educators communicate how characteristics impact academic and social functioning; occupational therapists and physical therapists can assess sensory and motor issues; and, medical professionals and

applied behavior analysis (ABA) specialists may also contribute (Klose, Plotts, Kozeneski, & Skinner-Foster, 2012).

Addressing the impact upon academic and social functioning is a requirement for school evaluations as well, as federal law requires not only that a student demonstrate characteristics of Autism, but that Autism also "adversely affects a child's educational performance" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). At least one state defines educational impact as significantly below average performance in any of the following: academic, cognitive, social, behavioral, communication (including pragmatics), social skills, fine and gross motor skills, and self-help/adaptive skills (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2005).

According to Fogt, Miller, and Zirkel (2003) case law thus far has not been extensively applied to Autism eligibility, with only 13 of 290 cases at that time specifically concerning identification of Autism. In the applicable case law, direct interaction measures were not referenced, verbal report measures were referenced for 8% of cases, and direct observation was referenced for 15% of cases (Fogt et al., 2003). Several studies have looked more specifically at the best measures to use within an Autism evaluation, though, with the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) and Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R) being consistently mentioned. Klose et al. (2012) examined the adequacy of several measures and determined the ADOS and ADI-R to best assess the characteristics of Autism. Corsello, Akshoomoff, & Stahmer, (2013) concluded the ADOS was the most effective instrument in their study with strong sensitivity and specificity in identifying Autism versus not Autism and Autism spectrum

disorder versus not Autism spectrum disorder in a 2-year-old community clinic sample. Both measures are also specifically recommended by Volker and Lopata (2008).

Although there is documentation of disproportionality in Autism diagnoses, and research investigating the causes in clinical or private settings, there is a dearth of studies investigating the possible causes of disproportionality within the educational evaluation process. The purpose of the present study was to apply clinical theoretical propositions of differences in Autism identification between Black and White children, to the educational setting.

Federal and State Response to Disproportionality

IDEA (2004) has implemented measures, including having state and local education agencies monitor their data, in addressing national concerns with disproportionality. As an example of this response, states are now required to have procedures to address disproportionality. Secondly, states receiving federal funding must collect and provide data to determine if significant disproportionality exists, in terms of race and ethnicity, within their states and within their local educational agencies for disability category, placement, and disciplinary practices. If significant disproportionality is discovered, states are required to review preventative policies and procedures and determine if revisions are needed (IDEA, 2004).

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) identified as having disproportionality, are required to use their maximum amount of their Part B federal funding to provide comprehensive coordination of early intervening services for children within their LEA; particularly, those that were significantly over identified. In addition, the identified LEA

is required to report on their changes of polices, practices, and procedures (IDEA, 2004). States are required to continuously monitor their LEAs using quantifiable and qualitative indicators to appropriately measure performance in terms of addressing disproportionality. Such provisions are deemed needed in ensuring the most equitable educational experience for students.

Despite these state and federal mandates of addressing disproportionality, such has continued. Explanations have been provided (e.g. assessing the effect of poverty and environmental variables e.g.) (Skiba, 2012); yet, disproportionality in school discipline and special education has continued. Blanchett (2006) contends that disproportionality has continued because it has not been examined in the context of systems and structures that continue to lend to a system of inequalities. The assessment of zero tolerance philosophy, as it relates to disparate discipline practices, has begun a discussion on systems of thinking and policies that perpetuate inequities within education (Skiba, 2012) –however, additional dialogue is needed. Critical Race Theory can be applied to further examine factors of disproportionality in discipline and special education; as such, this will be area of focus in this final section of the literature review (Blanchett, 2006).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory can be used to better understand disproportionality in discipline practices, special education identification, and special education placement for Black students and other students of color. Zion and Blanchett (2011) argued that the inclusive education movement failed to have the potential to be truly “inclusive”, because it is based on an inferiority paradigm. It is argued that the inclusive movement has not

resulted in positive outcomes, specifically for Black students, because it is built upon faulty assumptions that do not address the intersection of ability/disability with race, class, culture, and language. Further, it has failed to address issues of racism, White privilege, White dominance, and social class dominance. In order to be effective in improving outcomes in education for all students, the concerns must be framed in a legacy of racism in the United States, and as an issue of civil rights and social justice through a critical lens (Zion and Blanchett, 2011). Thus, as the research seeks to examine why disproportionality has persisted, CRT can provide that means to further examine and answer those related questions (Zion & Blanchett, 2011).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has lbeen applied as a theoretical/interpretive framework in understanding and analyzing the realities of racial inequities in education (Closson, 2010). CRT, as a theoretical framework, emerged from the legal field whereby scholars including Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman developed an understanding of race and racism that shifted away from the Civil Rights movement and was more situated in a Critical Legal Studies movement. CRT was introduced to the field of educational research by scholars like Gloria Landson-Billings and William Tate (1995) (Decuir & Dixson, 2004).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) define CRT in education as "a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogies that seek to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education" (p.25). CRT in education developed in response to persistent inequities; for instance, disparate discipline practices, disproportionality in special education, Black/White Achievement Gap, and greater

diversity within U.S. schools (Blanchett, 2006; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992; Gay, 2000). CRT names race as a defining issue that underlies many of our laws and public policies. CRT applies the principle of "interest convergence" to critique elements of the civil rights movement and legislation; in order to provide reasoning for why those of the majority makes ways for policies and laws that "invite in" the racial/ethnic-minority, but at the gain of the majority. CRT's understanding of race is characterized as socially constructed, versus biologically and/or genetically established; yet, race is "real" and is created and sustained by law (Crenshaw et al., 1995).CRT investigates the social construction of race and the means by which it impacts educational policies and minorities.

CRT is built upon the following theoretical claims: Ordinariness, Interest Convergence, Social Construction, Differential Racialization, and Legal Storytelling. These tenets will be discussed in detail in the following section.

Figure 2.2. *Critical Race Theory Tenets*

CRT Tenet	Definition	Source
Ordinariness	In society, racism is considered common and the norm. As a result, racism is difficult to address and cure.	Delgado & Stefancic (2001)
Interest Convergence	Components of the larger culture will only change when the interests of the majority/dominant group coincide with those of the racial/ethnic-minority.	Bell (1980)
Social Construction	Race is a byproduct of social thoughts and relations. Race is historically and socially determined by how individuals are perceived in day-to-day life	Marable (2002)
Differential Racialization	The means by which the dominant society ascribes roles and privileges to varying racial/ethnic-minority groups, resulting in	Delgado & Stefancic (2001)

	competition between the groups.	
Intersectionality	Refers to the varying identities that individuals may have. Essentially, no individual has one single/unitary identity and this can result in conflict and overlap between one's identities and allegiances.	Delgado & Stefancic (2001)
Legal Storytelling	Individuals from racial/ethnic-minority groups communicate their perspectives and experience with racism through stories.	Delgado & Stefancic (2001)

Ordinariness. The first claim of ordinariness suggests that racism is difficult to address or cure, because our society fails to acknowledge it. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) reflect that there is great majorities that deny that race matters or that it exists. This is despite racism being deeply embedded in our day-to-day life. Tate (1997) recalls this color-blind thinking in universal practices that has been ascribed to all individuals, without acknowledgement of variations that exist within a diverse population. There is a failure in recognizing this variance in race, gender, class, language; as such, it is argued that this continues to perpetuate inequities (Tate, 1997). Thus, in addressing inequities in education for students color, this color-blind mentality must be acknowledged and addressed (Zion & Blanchett, 2011; Tate, 1997).

Interest convergence. Interest convergence has also been termed as material determinism. Interest convergence asserts that since racism advances the interests of the larger privileged majority, a large proportion of society has limited inducement to eradicate it. This tenet states that aspects of the larger culture will only change when the interest of the majority/dominant group coincide with those of the racial/ethnic-minority. Further, the White-Black hierarchy results in benefits that profit the majority at the

expense of the racial/ethnic-minority; thus, making it more difficult for reform to occur (Bell, 1980). Derrick Bell applied this principle of interest convergence to the *Brown V. Board of Education* decision. Bell (1980) questioned why after many years of the American legal system litigating school desegregation cases, usually losing, did the U.S. Supreme court give up everything they wanted and allowed the desegregation of schools. Bell hypothesized that at that time, in 1954, the world and domestic considerations precipitated this decision. Bell (1980) notes that this *Brown v. Board of Education* decision came at a time when the U.S. needed to soften its' approach toward domestic minorities in the best interest of the majority; reflecting a stance of supporting human rights in the best interests of the U.S.. Thus, the decision came about through the merging of the interest of Whites and Blacks. Bell (1980) asserts that racial justice is support by the White majority, to the extent that it will have positive benefit for them.

Social construction. Social construction views race as a product of social thoughts and relations. Race is viewed as historically and socially determined by how individuals are perceived in day-to-day life. Race is dynamic and ever changing. Social construction discounts race as primarily genetically based. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) acknowledge that people with common origins may have similar physical traits (e.g. skin color, physique, and hair texture); yet, this only reflect small components of these individual genetic endowment and are less related to higher-order traits (e.g. personality, intelligence, and moral behavior). Instead, social construction asserts that races are categories that society invents, alters, and retires when suitable. The values that are placed and ascribed to certain races within everyday life demonstrate racial inequalities.

Differential racialization. Differential racialization refers to the means by which the dominant society ascribes roles and privileges to varying racial/ethnic-minority groups, resulting in competition between the groups. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) discuss this in terms of how the "dominate society racializes different racial/ethnic-minority groups at different times, in response to shifting needs such as the labor market" (p.8). Closely related to this idea is the sub-idea of ***intersectionalit***y. Intersectionality refers to varying identities that individuals may have. Essentially, no individual has one single/unitary identity. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) provide the examples that "A White feminist may also be Jewish or working class or a single mother. A Black activist may be male or female, gay or straight" (p.9).With the multiple identities that individuals may hold, each individual has potentially conflicting overlapping identities and allegiances.

Legal storytelling. Last, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) discuss the final element of legal storytelling. CRT acknowledges the unique voice of color. The "voice of color" suggests that since individuals have varied histories and experiences with oppression (.e.g. Black, Indian, Asian, and Latino), these individuals may be able to communicate to their White counterparts in a way that they are unlikely to know. The "legal storytelling" movement encourages people of color to recount their experiences with inequities in the legal system, ascribing their own unique perspective.

CRT conclusion. When considering the development, framework, and tenets of CRT, it provides a means for framing and answering questions related to disproportionality in school discipline practices and special education. In examining race as it relates to laws and practices, it considers the idea that to rid society of racism will

result in equality for all. As Derrick Bell states in his 1991 influential article, entitled "Racism is Here to Stay: Now What"

> "Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary 'peaks of progress,' short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain White dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it and move on. Armed with a perspective on our society that I call: 'Racial Realism,' we can insulate ourselves from despair based on our subordinate status. We will then be free to imagine and implement racial strategies that can bring fulfillment and even triumph."

As CRT allows an examination of the presence of racism in varying facets of society and structure; it also provides a means for examining the marginalization of Black students, and other students of color, by which allowing for the development of means to address issues of inequities consistent with those of disproportionality in education.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODS

Disproportionality significantly affects Black students in school discipline practices, special education identification, and special education placement. Black students are overrepresented in the disability categories of intellectual disability and emotional disturbance (Skiba et al., 2002). Once identified with a disability, they are more likely to be educated in restrictive educational settings. Black students are less likely to receive a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, and when they do, it is typically later when compared to White peers. They are known to receive a diagnosis of Autism 18 to 24 months later, when compared to White children (ADDM, 2012). This negatively affects their ability to participate in early intervention services. Much of the research that has examined the differences in Autism identification for Black and White children has occurred in clinical settings. There is, to date, no known research to assess these differences in the context of educational evaluation practices. The purpose of this study was to examine differences in school psychological evaluation practices for Black and White students, found eligible for an educational disability of Autism (AU).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was the theoretical framework for this study, Ordinariness and Social Construction were the primary tenets of analytical application. CRT is commonly used to analyze issues in educational matters related to school discipline, curriculum, and assessment (Landson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Yosso (2006) notes that CRT in educational research provides a means to analyze disparate and discriminatory practices and understand how these practices directly and/or indirectly alter society and maintain the status quo.

Methodology

Methodology consists of practices, procedures, and rules applied by researchers in understanding and examining problems in a particular discipline. Qualitative research methods are frequently used in understanding individuals' common experiences related to particular social phenomenon (Berg, 2007). This study applied qualitative methods to better understand disproportionality. It utilized qualitative retrospective chart review.

Retrospective Chart Review: Retrospective chart review, also known as a clinical record review, is a research design wherein data that has been gathered for another purpose are subjected to qualitative and/or quantitative analysis for the purpose of drawing inferences and guiding future study (Gearing et al., 2006; Vassar & Holzmann, 2013). Retrospective chart review methods are utilized for varying purposes, including evaluating diagnostic decisions, identifying problems, planning treatment or intervention, and determining fidelity of program or treatment delivery when compared to program design (Sarkar & Seshadri, 2014). Retrospective chart review is advantageous in that it is a relatively inexpensive research approach to utilizing rich readily accessible existing data. It can provide understanding of conditions or processes when rarity of occurrence has hindered program evaluation, prognosis, or sequel (Gearing et al, 2006).

In order to provide guidelines for best practices in retrospective chart review, Gearing and colleagues (2006) provide a nine step approach described as follows: Conception, Literature review, Proposal development, Development of a data abstraction instrument, Development of protocols and coding guidelines, Development of data abstraction procedures, Define sampling methods, Ethics and Review Board Approval,

and Pilot study. These guidelines were critiqued by Vassar and Holzmann (2013) who provide methodological considerations and a comprehensive review of common pitfalls when employing the retrospective chart review methodology. For instance, Vassar and Holzmann (2013) discuss factors such as the importance of having a well-articulated research question, considering the need for inter-rater reliability, and playing close attention to confidentiality and ethical issues in chart reviews. Together, these scholars provide a detailed best practices guide to follow when conducting retrospective study of records.

Study Propositions and Research Questions

The questions for this research were based upon prior theoretical propositions, completed through literature review. Propositions are helpful in qualitative research (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2009). Propositions assist in focusing the research project and can increase the feasibility of completing a project. Propositions related to the research question(s) come from literature, personal/professional experiences, theories, and generalizations based on empirical data (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2009). The five propositions for this study developed in conception of the research focus and in literature review, they are as follow:

Proposition One: Black children are under-identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and identified later when compared to White children (Mandell et al., 2007).

Proposition Two: One such explanation for the under-identification of Black children with ASD has included differences in level of parental reporting of Autism symptomology (Cuccaro et al., 2007; Mandell et al., 2009).

Proposition Three: Differences in symptom identification, for Black children, has been connected to their under-identification with ASD. For example, Kharod Sell et al. (2012) found that White children with ASD had more documented *DSM-IV* criteria of restricted interests and repetitive/stereotyped behaviors, as well as greater symptoms of abnormal motor development and odd responses to sensory stimuli.

Proposition Four: Another such explanation for the under-identification of Black children with ASD has included greater clinical misdiagnosis of other conditions with similar features, such as ADHD and conduct disorder (Morrier & Hess, 2012).

Proposition Five: Power structures and systemic practices, in terms of ethnic/racial differences, contribute to the disproportionality of Black students in school discipline practices and special education eligibility and placement (Collins, 2009; Zion & Blanchett, 2011).

The following propositions guided the research questions for this study:

1. Are there differences in reported symptom expression among Black and White students with Educational Disability of Autism?
2. Are there differences in reported Autism traits by parents of Black and White students with Educational Disability of Autism?
3. Are there differences in behavioral and discipline reporting for Black and White students with Educational Disability of Autism?
4. Are there differences in how "Need for Special Education" is described for Black and White students with Educational Disability of Autism.

Sample and Data Source

This study applied convenience sampling. Merriam and Merriam (2009) define convenience sampling as a form of non-probability sampling, in which the sample is determined based on availability. The actual convenience sample for this study included 12 educational evaluation reports for students identified with an educational disability of Autism. These reports were obtained from a school district that provides special education services for students in kindergarten through 12th grade, in local public school districts within the state of Missouri. Specifically, the sample for this study was designed to include equal representation of Black and White students' evaluation reports. The age of the students and their district of origin were paired to reduce variance. All evaluation reports were initial evaluations conducted within the past four years. The districts of origin were limited to those who have been shown to have consistently been flagged for underrepresentation of Black students within their population of students identified as eligible for special education in the area of Autism. The sample for this study was limited to less than 15 cases. As such, the sample size may limit the statistical power and the generalizability of results and inferences. However, a secondary purpose of this study was to document and evaluate the utility of this methodology for future studies within the cooperating school district.

Data Collection/Procedures

The researcher worked collaboratively with a special education school district in the State of Missouri. This district has assembled a qualitative research team to explore issues of disproportionality within its' home district and across the counties in which it

serves. The researcher completed the study in conjunction with this research team, to explore the differences in evaluation practices for Black and White children identified with an educational disability of Autism. Twelve initial educational evaluation reports were identified. All reports were of students who received an educational disability of Autism, 6 reports comprised those of Black students and 6 reports comprised those of White students. The evaluation reports were retrieved from the database for the district in consultation with the data controller; this database stores all evaluations, IEPs, and other special education progress related supports for students. To protect the anonymity of the identified students within these reports, personal identifying information was redacted and the de-identified reports were uploaded onto ATLAS.ti for the primary researcher and the qualitative committee to prepare for qualitative coding and analysis.

In preparation for coding and analysis, an abstraction guide and coding procedure guide was developed (see. Appendix 1 and 2). Gearing et al. (2009) provides a general recommendation of having an abstraction guide and coding procedures for retrospective chart review. The codes within the abstraction guide were loosely based on the Standards and Indicators for identifying students with an educational disability of Autism, as set forth by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In preparation for coding, experts on identification of Autism were recruited from the disproportionality committee of the cooperating school district. These experts were determined based on profession and length of experience. A total of 7 coders were identified, upon which 4 were school psychologists and 3 were certified speech language pathologists. All coders had at least 4 years of experience in their position as school psychologist or speech

language pathologist. The principal researcher for this study was included in the count for school psychologists. The coders participated in training on coding. Next, coders were given a blind coding of a training report. Once consensus was reached through the blind coding, each coder was given 2 to 3 evaluation reports to code using the abstraction guide and abstraction procedures, such that each report was coded by two individuals to increase inter-rater reliability. Coders were given two weeks to complete the first round of coding. Thereafter, the coders met to complete a preliminary review of the assigned codes, and upon which additional codes were determined. Following, the coders returned for a second round of coding.

Upon the completion of coding, the qualitative results were compiled and analyzed using ATLAS.ti software.

Data Analysis

Following the final round of coding, the data were prepared in ATLAS.ti for analysis. An interpretive coding method was applied during coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During the coding process, coders were encouraged to include memos, as needed. Memos comprise components of the text in which the coder found relevant, but that did not fall into one of the original codes of the coding abstraction guide. Later, these memos were reviewed by the research team, and they were either assigned to one of the existing coding categories or a new code was developed. During the analysis process, as patterns began to emerge, pattern codes were assigned. These pattern codes were more explanatory and inferential. This type of pattern coding indicated emerging themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). All information was stored and analyzed using ATLAS.ti software.

Initially, the researcher applied a single-case analysis using ATLAS.ti to construct matrices from the data. For this particular study, each evaluation report was considered a case for analysis. The use of the single-case analysis of each evaluation report assisted with identifying specific areas of agreement and trends. After completion of the single case analysis, all evaluation reports underwent cross-case analysis, using ATLAS.ti software, in order to construct matrices to identify more clearly the areas of agreement, and in order to make conclusions. Miles and Huberman (1994) note that multiple case analyses are helpful in generating and testing explanations within a research study. Thus, analysis occurred at four levels:

1) Single case analysis of all 12 evaluation reports
2) Cross-case analysis for the 6 evaluation reports for Black students, in which similarities and differences within the group were evaluated.
3) Cross-case analysis for the 6 evaluation reports for White students, in which similarities and differences within the group were evaluated.
4) Cross case analysis between the 6 evaluation reports for Black students, as compared to the 6 evaluation report for White students.

During the analysis process, the propositions and initial research questions were referred to in making and drawing conclusions.

Rigor/Trustworthiness of Results

A qualitative study of this nature "must demonstrate its truth, value, provide a basis for applying it, and allow for external judgments to be made about the consistency of its

procedures and the neutrality of its findings or decisions" (Erlandson et. al., 1993, p.29). Several steps were followed to ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of this study.

Inter-rater reliability. In following the suggestions for retrospective chart review in the literature (Gearing, et al., 2006; Vassar & Holzmann, 2013), this researcher sought to ensure inter-rater reliability of all evaluation reports. For a study of this nature, inter-rater reliability is important in ensuring that coding is consistent within and between raters and identifying differences when they are present. For retrospective chart review, between 2 to 6 abstractors is the recommendation. For this study, each evaluation report was coded by at least 2 abstractors.

Peer reviews. Merriam and Tisdale (2015) define peer reviews as the process in which individuals knowledgeable about the study review the research and make recommendations. For this study, the researcher elicited feedback from colleagues. This included the full disproportionality committee of the cooperative school district. A second peer review meeting was held with the qualitative sub-committee of the larger group. This level of peer review was completed to encourage reflection, revision, and check the plausibility of the researcher's interpretation of the data.

Triangulation. Triangulation was applied to lend to the trustworthiness of this study. A research study can be strengthened by using multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2009). Through individual and cross-case analysis, the researcher sought specific areas of agreement; thus, increasing the validity of the findings within this study.

Ethical Considerations and Risk

Informed consent and confidentiality are important ethical considerations when conducting retrospective chart reviews. For this study, the researcher sought exemption from requirements for informed parental consent.

In order to ensure the ethical and legal precedence for this requests for exemption from informed parental consent, for the use of these educational records, this researcher considered guidelines set forth by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). According to the Family Policy Compliance Office (FPCO) in the U.S. Department of Education, there are two instances when personally identifiable information (PII) and educational records can be disclosed without parental consent: the studies exception and the audit/evaluation exception.

The studies exception (see 20 U.S.C. §1232g(b)(1)(F) and §99.31(a)(6)) allows for the disclosure of PII from education records without consent to organizations conducting studies for, or on behalf of, schools, school districts, or postsecondary institutions. Studies can be for the purpose of developing, validating, or administering predictive tests; administering student aid programs; or improving instruction.

The audit/evaluation exception (see 20 U.S.C. 1232g(b)(1)(C), (b)(3), and (b)(5) and §§99.31(a)(3) and 99.35) exception allows for the disclosure of PII from education records without consent to authorized representatives of the Comptroller General of the U.S., the Attorney General, the Secretary of Education, and State or local educational authorities (FERPA-permitted entities). Under this exception, PII from education records must be used to audit or evaluate a Federal- or State-supported education program, or to

enforce or comply with Federal legal requirements that relate to those education programs (audit, evaluation, or enforcement or compliance activity). The entity disclosing the PII from education records is specifically required to use reasonable methods to ensure to the greatest extent practicable that its designated authorized representative complies with FERPA and its regulations.

This researcher sought exemption under the rationale set forth in the studies exception. In addition, the researcher proposed a strict protocol for the redaction of all personally identifying information from the evaluation reports used for qualitative analysis. These de-identified reports were maintained securely during the study on password protected laptops of the cooperating school district. The reports themselves were also password protected. Data controllers and qualitative coders comprised the principal researcher and expert coders who were employed by the cooperating school district. All of the sampled evaluation reports first had identifying information removed by data controllers. In addition, all research team members adhered to a research specific confidentiality clause. Only the authorized members of the research team had access to the de-identified reports for the duration of data abstraction and analysis phases of study. Afterwards, the de-identified reports were securely archived by the Administrative Research Director of the cooperating district, if needed or deleted. Only the information required for answering the research questions proposed herein was utilized in this study.

Summary

This study sought to better understand the under-identification of Black children with Autism in an educational context. This study employed a retrospective chart review method and qualitatively the data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti. The initial study propositions and research questions helped to guide this process, and analysis occurred through a Critical Race Theory lens. An overview of the research methodology was provided. The data sources for the study, data analysis process, and how it will ensure rigor and trustworthiness were also presented.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter will discuss the findings: describe the sample, provide the analysis process, and include the emerging themes of the study.

Description of the Sample

The twelve evaluation reports, 6 white students and 6 black students, were drawn from three school districts located in the county of Saint Louis. Among the districts, there was diversity across type of district, percentage of students on free and reduced meals (FARM), and the overall demographics of each school's student population. The three school districts had disproportionate under-identification of Black students with Autism for the 2013 school year, as assessed by the risk index. This information was obtained from the Missouri Comprehensive Data System. These three districts are referred to as Districts A, B, and C. The prior mentioned demographic data on these three school districts can be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
District Demographics

District	Type	FARM	White	Black	Hispanic/ Latino	Asian	Multi-racial/ Other
District-A	Suburban	15.6	65.70	18.70	n.a.	10.9	n.a.
District-B	Suburban	29.1	82.4	8.40	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
District-C	Suburban	20.3	64.8	14.9	n.a	11.4	n.a

Note. FARM= free and reduced meals

It should be noted that the 12 reports were all initial educational evaluations, see Table 4.2 for student demographics, based on the reports.

Table 4.2.

Student Demographics

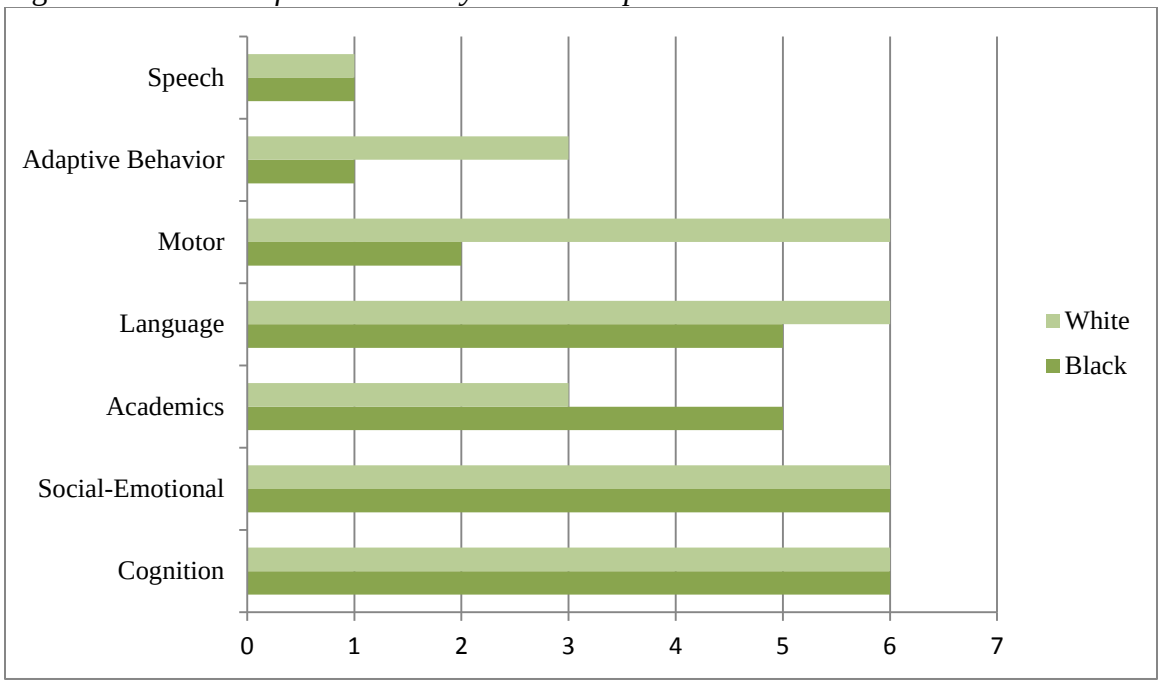
Race/ethnicity	Age	Grade
Black	11.6	6
Black	10.0	4
Black	10.0	4
Black	8.3	3
Black	7.4	2
Black	6.2	1
White	11.5	6
White	8.8	3
White	8.4	3
White	8.10	3
White	8.3	2
White	6.9	K

Note. Black or White; Age and Grade listed, represent at time of the initial evaluation. Average Age at time of evaluation for Black students= 9.02; Average Age at time of evaluation for White students=8.67.

There were differences observed between the 12 reports, six Black student reports and six White student reports. For all evaluations, a school psychologist and speech language pathologist were involved in the assessment methods. All reports

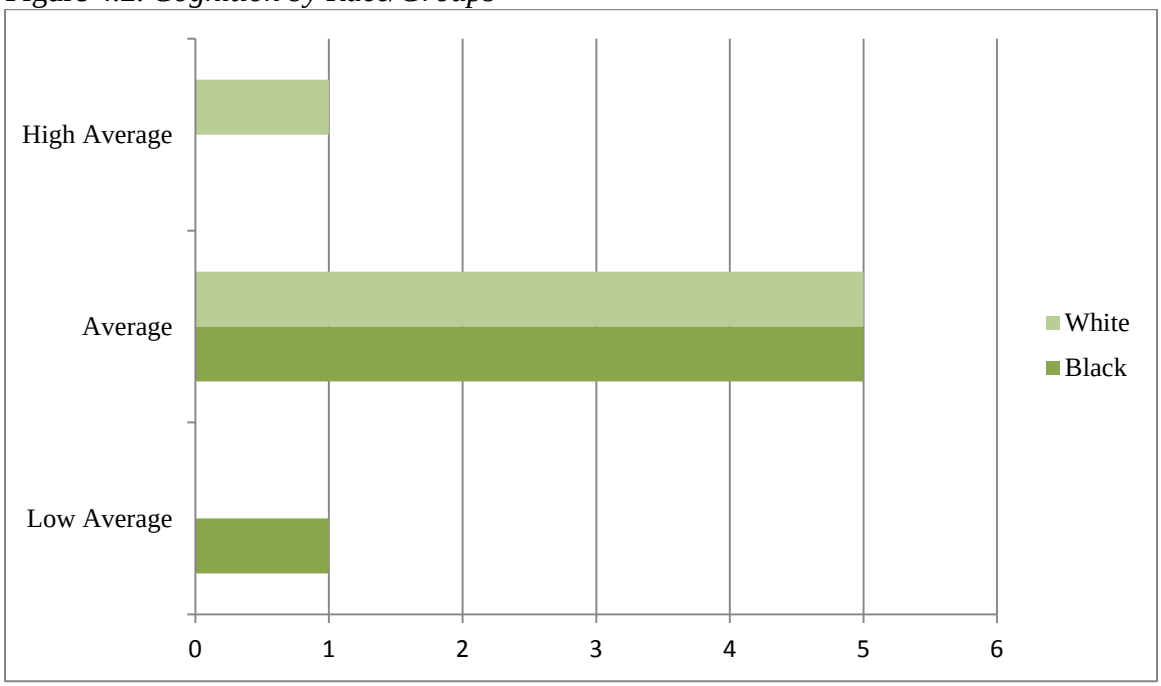
included the following evaluative components: Cognitive and Social/Emotional-Behavior Assessments. Four of the 12 reports included adaptive behavior assessment: three reports for White students and one for a Black student. All reports for White students and two of the six reports for Black students included motor assessment. All reports for White students and five reports for Black students included language assessment. Five of the six reports for Black students, and three of the six reports for White students included academic assessment. One of the six reports for White and Black students included speech assessment. Considering average as a mean of 100 and standard deviation of 15, the identified reports reflected cognitive abilities in the low average to high average range. Figure 4.1 and 4.2 illustrates these differences.

Figure 4.1.. *Areas of Assessment by Race/Groups*



Note. Indicates areas of assessment between the two groups of reports, total number of reports per group was six.

Figure 4.2. *Cognition by Race/Groups*



Note. Cognition by Race/Group whereby Average is 85 to 115, below average is 84 and lower and above average is 116 and higher.

The abstractors for coding analysis comprised seven individuals who were employed at the cooperating special school district. All abstractors had over four years of experience as either a Certified Speech Language Pathologist of Certified School Psychologist. Of the seven abstractors, four currently held administrative roles, but had prior clinical experience in one of the prior mentioned fields. Of the remaining three abstractors, all were school psychologists (See Table 4.3).

Table 4.3.
Abstractors

Abstractor	Clinical Practice	Current Position	Years of Experience
1	School Psychologist	Administrator	5 to 10 Years
2	School Psychologist	School Psychologist	Over 4 Years
3	School Psychologist	School Psychologist	5 to 10 Years
4	School Psychologist	School Psychologist	5 to 10 Years
5	Diagnostic Speech Language Pathologist	Administrator	Over 10 Years
6	Speech Language Pathologist	Administrator	Over 10 Years
7	Speech Language Pathologist	Administrator	Over 10 Years

Description of the Process and the Analysis of Evaluation Reports

All evaluation reports were abstracted by at least 2 abstractors, paired such that each was coded by a school psychologist and speech language pathologist. The abstraction guide (See. Appendix 1) was used to formalize the process and guide the coding of the abstractors. Coding took place after training and practice using the coding abstraction guide on a test file to assess level of agreement and usability of the coding manual. The evaluation reports were first analyzed using open coding in ATLAS.ti. Initial open coding of all 12 evaluation reports resulted in over 500 codes. During a subsequent round of coding, any memos developed were clarified and merged into an existing code category. When appropriate, new codes were developed for patterns of memos that consistently reemerged. Themes emerged from the codes and were broken down in accordance with the language of the initial research questions. Analysis occurred

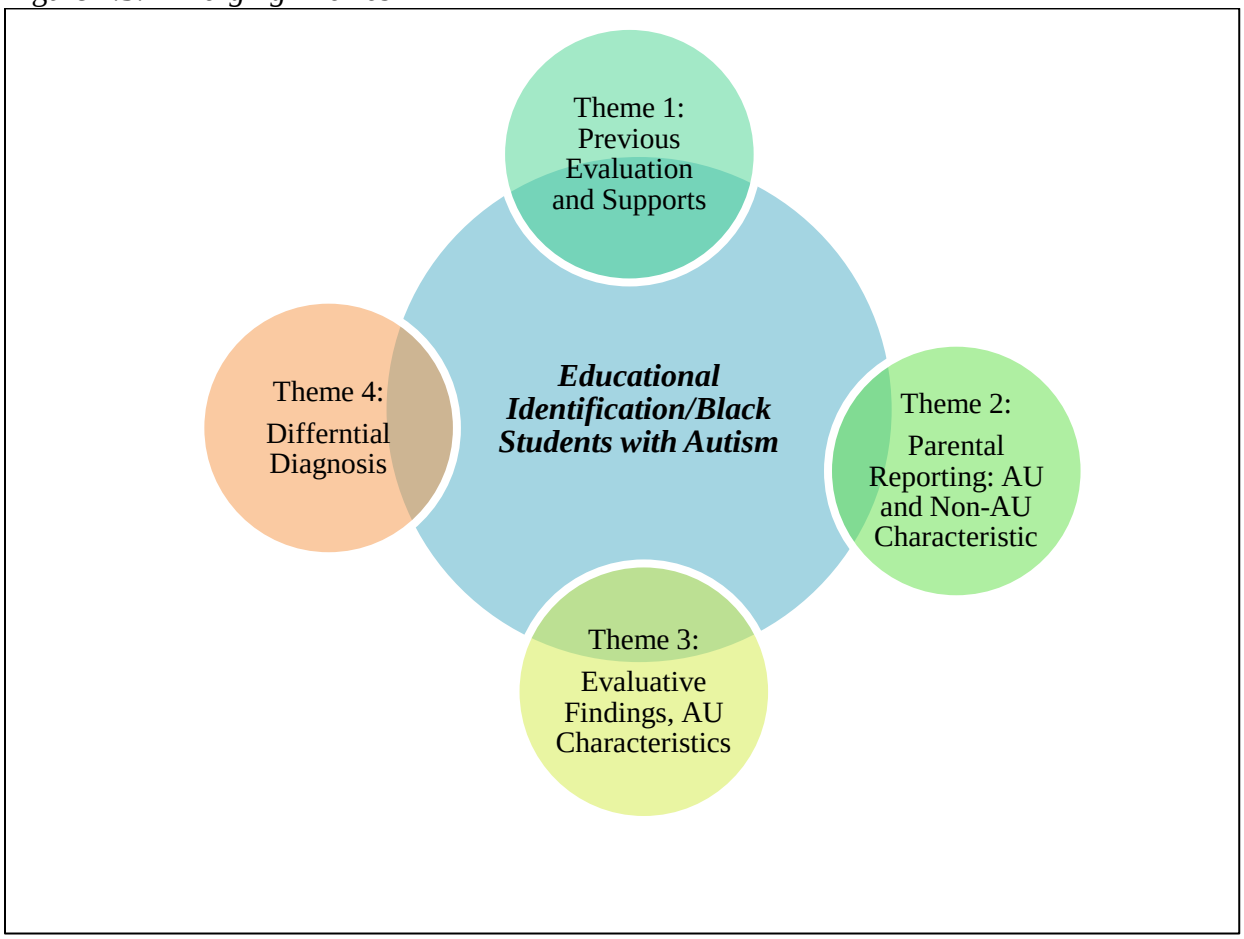
through the use of the Query Tool, Code-Primary Documents Table, and Code Cooccurence Table of ATLAS.ti. These analytic tools revealed relationships and patterns within the data, which led to these research findings. Analysis occurred within and between the various groups: Black students and White students.

Discussion of the Emerging Themes

Analysis of data to generate themes to answer the research questions occurred at several levels. Overall, themes included: (1) Previous Evaluations and Supports, (2) Parental Reporting: Autism and Non-Autism Characteristics, (3) Evaluative Findings: Autism Characteristics, and (4) Differential Diagnosis. Figure 4.3 illustrates these themes in relationship to the overall study.

These themes will be discussed within this section. Relationships and differences that exist within and between the code families, and the two groups of reports, which led to the findings will be provided. The existing themes will be applied to answer the research questions and inform the study propositions.

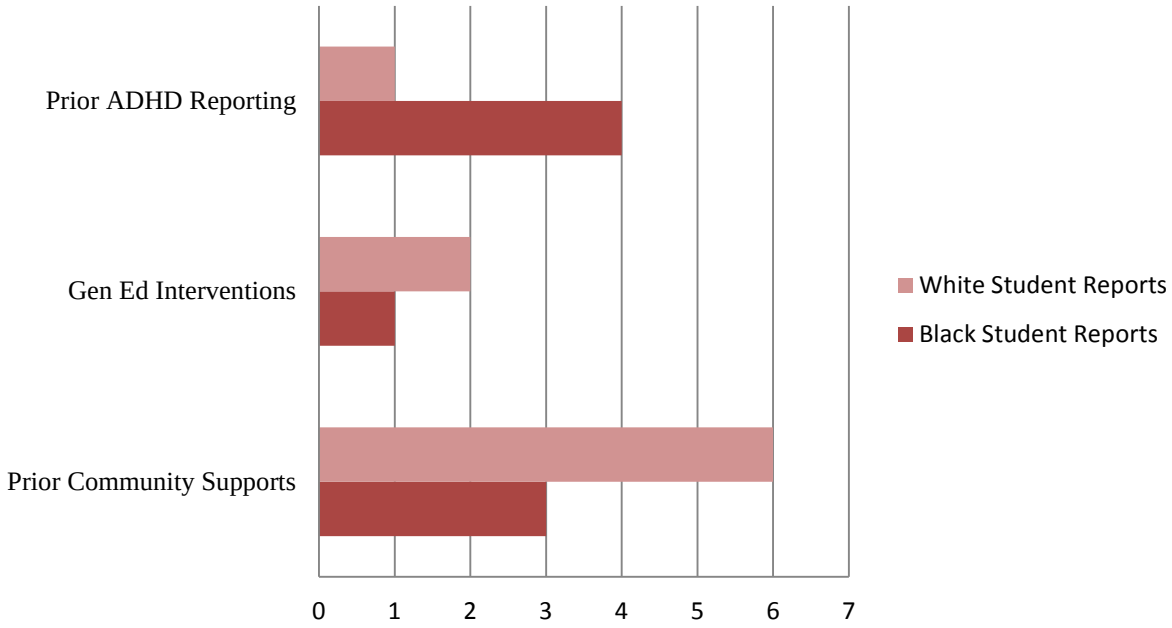
Figure 4.3. *Emerging Themes*



THEME ONE: Previous evaluations and supports. Previous evaluation and supports were considered in the context of prior interventions and accommodations. This included educational evaluation information that indicated prior attempts to address behavioral and/or academic concerns of students. Supports could have occurred in a community setting, or within the educational environment. This included medical information specific to prior diagnoses. Reporting on previous evaluations and supports was more frequently indicated by parents in terms of need for referral and within the

social history for students. Coding and analysis of Previous Evaluations and Supports resulted in three subthemes: (1) Prior Community Supports, (2) General Education Interventions, and (3) Prior ADHD Reporting. Figure 4.4 presents differences between Black and White student reports, as it relates to these subthemes.

Figure 4.4. *Level of Subthemes by Race/Groups*



Note. Figure 4.4 depicts the number of reports by race that indicates characteristics of subthemes. Total number of reports, 6 per group (Black and White Students).

Prior community supports. The data revealed that of the 12 evaluation reports, nine (six White and three Black) made mention of having received, pre-educational evaluation support for behavioral concerns through a community agency. Prior community supports was more frequently noted among White student reports. For example, the three Black reports discussed prior supports as Children's Division, an

agency that assist children and families at-risk for abuse, neglect, or challenging child behavior that can result in out-of-home placement, and provided brief mentioning of counseling, tutoring, and therapy. Prior Children's Divisions support was mentioned in two of six Black student reports and one White student report. As observed in one Black student report, it is stated, "[Student] has received math tutoring in second grade after school…Continues to have counseling supports." Within a second report for a Black student, "Has received services in applied behavior analysis, occupational therapy, physical therapy, developmental therapy, and speech and language therapy through [Community Agency]."

In comparison, among all six White student reports, there were consistently more statements of program based supports and behavioral interventions. These supports appeared to target specific school and/or parent concerns. For instance, it was noted, "[Student] has been seen at [Community Agency] for significant sensory seeking behaviors…"[Student] was participating in therapy in second grade due to behavioral concerns."

Within another White student reports, "Received after school speech and language therapy…. Receiving private occupational therapy services on a regular basis for the last two years…prior neurological evaluation at [hospital] for behavioral concerns." For a third student, "Previously participated in therapy with counselor…has received family counseling." For the fifth and sixth student respectively, "…received counseling through an in-home therapist and through a behavioral health program." And, "[Parent] reports that the Division of Family Services had once been involved."

Based on the data from this subtheme, Prior Community Supports, White students' reflected a greater likelihood of having received pre-educational evaluation community based interventions, as compared to those found in Black student reports.

General education interventions. Three of the 12 reports, one Black and two White, reflected pre-educational evaluation school interventions. Different from community supports, this intervention was specific to occurring only in the student's home school setting. This subtheme revealed more classroom-based interventions for White students. For example, in the one Black student report it is observed that the, "Student participates in weekly [Empowerment] groups with the building counselor…worked with a school counselor in Elementary for individual counseling. The goal of their counseling was to work on friendship skills."

In comparison, within the first White student report, school interventions included:

> The following sensory strategies have been attempted this school year, but have not been successful in changing [student's] sensory seeking behaviors: Air-filled seat cushion and weighted lap pad- [Student] tends to fling these objects around, rather than sitting on them or keeping them on [his/her] lap; fidget/squeeze toy- [Student] tends to throw these objects around the classroom; heavy-work jobs in the classroom including stacking chairs-this has been unsuccessful because the teacher needs to be one on one with [him/her] to complete the job. Unless [teacher] is right next to [him/her], [he/she] will not complete the job. Sensory-motor exercises-Unless the teacher is right next to [him/her], student is unable to complete this task alone without constant redirection back to task; Gum-[Student] was unable to keep the gum in [his/her] mouth.

For this same student, "wears weights on [his/her] wrist." For a second student:

> School interventions has involved reading partnership, sending writing home each night to complete anything not completed at school, teacher modeling of proper speech sounds, pairing with [student] having appropriate speech, and use of a timer to get started…[Student] has difficulty following classroom routines in the morning and again at the end of the day. Written checklists for both routines are taped inside [his/her] locker."

This subtheme of General Education Interventions reflected for White students more reported pre-educational referral classroom-based strategies attempted. These reported interventions targeted a more diverse set of concerns (i.e. motor, sensory, speech, homework difficulties, compliance, and rigidness/routines).The one Black student report indicated no teacher-implemented interventions; of those interventions reported, they appeared to be school counselor strategies.

Prior ADHD reporting. This final subtheme looked at differences in pre-educational evaluation diagnoses. Of all 12 reports, one Black and one White student reflected a pre-referral diagnosis of Autism. The most significant difference observed was in term of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) reporting. Analysis revealed that four of six Black student reports' made mention of a formal medical diagnosis of ADHD, prior to their educational evaluation; as compared to one of six White student reports.

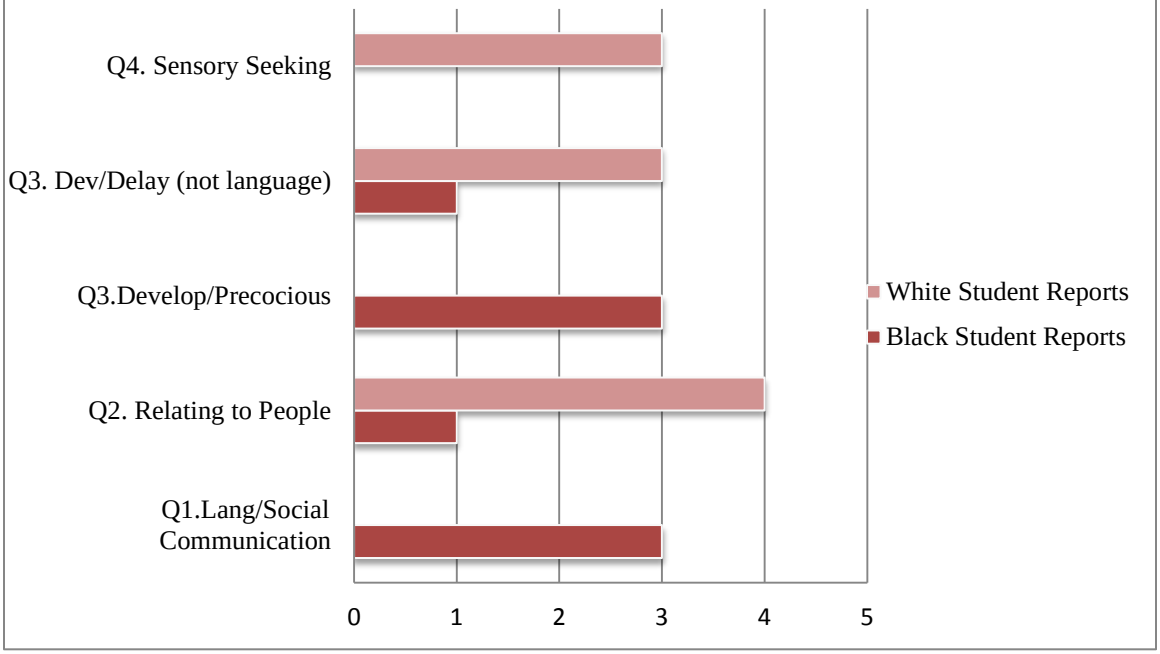
Overall, for the theme Previous Evaluation and Supports, Black students were more likely to have a documented prior diagnosis of ADHD, as compared to that reflected in White student reports. Black student evaluations indicated less pre-referral community-based interventions/supports, and no classroom based pre-referral interventions. White student reports had more frequent mentions of community-based and classroom based-interventions, prior to their educational evaluation for Autism.

THEME TWO: Parental reporting: Autism and non-Autism characteristic. In the context of examining family background/social history information, analysis of

parental reporting was completed. The two groups revealed differences. Among the 12 reports, two subthemes developed: (1) Parental Reporting: Autism Characteristics and (2) Parental Reporting: Non-Autism Characteristics.

Parental reporting: Autism characteristics: Initial observances considered the extent to which parental reporting on Autism related characteristics differed between Black and White student reports. Results indicated that, overall, Black student reports had less Autism symptomology. There were twice as many Autism related characteristics reported by parents of White students. In using the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education criteria for Educational Autism identification, differences were observed most frequently in the following areas: Q1: Language/Social Communication, Q2: Relating to People, Q3: Developmental Precocious and Developmental Delay, and Q4: Sensory Seeking. Figure 4.5 further illustrates these findings. Appendix 1 provides descriptors for all features of quadrants one through four.

Figure 4.5. *Parental Reporting: Autism Characteristics*



Note. Depicts level of Autism reporting by Quadrant (denoted by Q) and race/groups. The full quadrant descriptors can be found in Appendix 1.

Parents of Black students reported fewer Autism-related characteristics; they were coded two times less than White student reports. When coded, Black students' parent reporting's was most aligned with Q1: Language Social Communication, Q3: Developmental Precocious Behavior and Q3: Relating to People. Across the remaining quadrant features, Black parent reporting was limited or none.

For Q1: Language Social/Communication, observed in three reports, characteristics noted by parents of Black students included:

> …difficult for [student] to make eye contact… when [he/she] was a baby and toddler; parent reported that they would have to hold both sides of [his/her] head to get [student] to make eye contact…Mother reported that student will repeat questions constantly, until someone answers student.

For Q2: Relating to People, there was twice as many instances coded for White students. As compared, found in one Black student report, parent describes:

> [Student] displays a difficult time relating to same-age peers, and will often say things that are offensive without intention of doing so. When questioned about choices, [student] experiences difficulty recalling what occurred, accepting responsibility, and displaying empathy for others' emotions. Moreover, [student] experiences difficulty taking the perspective of others, which along with [student's] difficulty communicating clearly, impacts [his/her] ability to relate to others, especially peers. [Student] is often observed to play alone or will sometimes attempt to interact with others in [his/her] classroom…. [Parent] reports that [he/she] frequently received phone calls about [student's] behavior at their previous schools.

In comparison, across four White student evaluations, parent reports for Q2: Relating to People: "Does not have friends…From early on, [student] always seemed to be in [his/her] own world" but played well with others."

As found in a second report:

> [Student] typically avoids interacting with peers. But when [student] does, [he/she] often has difficulty awaiting [his/her] turn...."very literal in interpretation of instructions, lacks flexibility…lacks empathy to other's viewpoints, does not want to do group activities such as team sports/ summer camps, school clubs, does not want to participate in small talk.

And, in a third and fourth report:

> …had a difficult time making friends in preschool and only established one friendship during this time…Regarding FRIENDS, [parent] reports [student] has a couple, but that they are not ongoing….Asked to describe child as a follower or a leader, [parent] reports [student] as a follower with leader tendencies; [student] tries to take the lead, but doesn't think it through.

For Q3: Developmental Precocious Behavior, this indicated no parental reporting among White student evaluations. Comparatively, parental reporting for developmental precocious behavior was noted in three reports for Black students:

For instance, it was stated:

> [Student's] mother also reports that [he/she] has recently discovered that [he/she] can listen to any song and then play it on the piano from memory…[Student] reached all of [his/her] developmental milestones within the appropriate ages, if not early…[Student] speaking [his/her] first words between 4-5 months old. Currently, [he/she] is able to answer questions and most people can understand what [student] wants… [Student's] language use is mature for [his/her] age... [he/she] uses many words that others their age do not.

White students' parent reporting indicated two times as many Autism-related characteristic. White students' parent reporting's was most aligned with Q2: Relating to People, Q3: Deviance Delay (not language/communication), and Q4: Sensory Seeking/Aversion (see Figure 4.5 above).

For Q3: Deviance Delay (not language/communication), across three reports, White parent reporting noted:

> [Students] birth was not problematic and developmental milestones were reached within age appropriate expectations, with the exception of toilet training which was mastered at age 3½…met all developmental milestones within age appropriate expectations, except for delays in speech/language…toilet training was achieved late at 3.5 to 4 years old…doesn't want to take care of [his/her] personal needs or avoids these tasks until time runs out.

For Q4: Sensory Seeking/Aversion, across three reports, White parent reports indicated:

> [Student] is bothered by loud noises, such as a vacuum, and will cover ears. [Student] is a picky eater but [his/her] preferences are always changing…Self-stimulatory behaviors include touching self and sucking on [his/her] shirt. In school, [student] attempts to lick and bite other people…is a picky eater, but [his/her] preferences are always changing…Does not tolerate being rubbed through clothing, and does not like certain food textures.

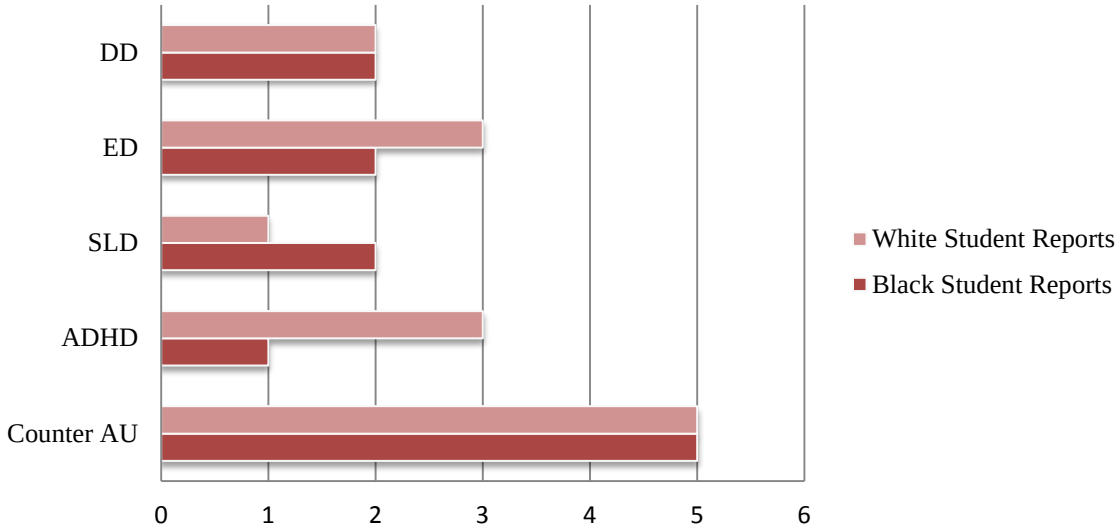
As noted, there was one instance of Q3: Deviance Delay and no instances of Q4: Sensory Seeking/Aversion noted in Black parent reporting.

In summary, for Parental Reporting: Autism Characteristics, White student reports were coded two times more than Black students. When coded, Black student

reports were most consistent with: Q1: Language Social Communication, Q2: Relating to People, and Q4: Development Precocious. In comparison, White student reports were most consistent with: Q2: Relating to People, Q3: Deviance/Delay, and Q4: Sensory Seeking/Aversion.

Parental reporting: non-Autism characteristics. Analysis of differential characteristics of parental reporting was assessed between Black and White student reports. This analysis considered information that directly countered Autism related features; it also considered differential diagnostic information that could have led to a different disability category. Defiance/Discipline, not a disability category was observed independently. Overall, both parental reporting groups were equally likely to provide information that would counter "typical" characteristics of Autism. When considering differential diagnosis, as it relates to special education disability categories, Black parent reports indicated more Specific Learning Disability (SLD) coding. White parent reports indicated more Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Emotional Disturbance (ED) coding. Both groups indicated equal Defiance/Discipline (DD) reporting. Figure 4.6 (below) further illustrates these differences.

Figure 4.6. *Parent Reporting: Non-Autism Characteristics*



Note. Depicts level of parental differential diagnostic reporting by race/group, across number of reports.

As seen in Figure 4.6, both groups were equally likely to provide information that would "Counter-AU." In relating to prior findings, as Black parental reporting indicated less AU specific traits, they also countered this information. As found in Black parental reporting, an example of Counter-AU included:

> [Student] did not have any feeding or sleeping problems, and looked at adults to get attention. [He/she] walked at 9-10 months, and knew how to count and knew colors at 18 months. [He/she] began Montessori preschool at 18 months, and reportedly, [student's] academic progress slowed quickly at that point. However, parent reports that [student] did not have any difficulties in preschool with social skills or with learning.

In a second report for a Black student, a parent recalls: "No concerns were reported relative to student's birth history, and [he/she] met all early motor, speech, and language developmental milestones within typical timelines." An example of Counter-AU in a White student report, a parent shared:

> [Mother] remembers [student] as an observant, happy, and curious infant and toddler. [His/her] early motor skills, such as sitting up, crawling, and learning to walk, developed normally. [Student's] early language development, such as first words, asking simple questions, and talking in sentences, seemed to be typical. [Parent] reported [he/she] spoke their first word at 11 months and first sentence at 22 months.

Counter-AU was found across 10 of 12 reports. These reports comprised five for Black students and five for White students.

When considering differential disability categories such as ADHD, SLD, ED, and concerns related to Defiance/Disciplines (DD), there was variability between the two groups. White student parent reports reflected more ADHD coding, found in three of six reports, as compared to one report for Black students. A parent of a White student recalled:

> Home/adaptive behaviors of concern (following noted as areas of weakness): adequate concentration skills, taking care of his/her personal belongings, become easily frustrated or angry, having friends, completing homework with minimal help and within a reasonable amount of time, and having and awareness of time.

For a second White student, a parent reports: "…insecure and hyperactive…. [Student] often fidgets with [his/her hands] or feet, or squirms. [Student] often seems to be "on the go" as if "driven by a motor." [Student] often talks excessively and has difficulty playing quietly." For a third student, "[Student] takes care of some personal possessions better than others, but leaves most things where they lay…doesn't think things through."

As prior findings indicated that four of six Black student reports reflected a pre-educational referral medical diagnosis of ADHD –parental reporting on the manifestation of these ADHD-related symptoms were limited. In the one evaluation report for a Black student, whereby parental reporting was observed, it is stated:

> [Student] has difficulties with memory skills…has difficulties fulfilling responsibilities without reminders… has difficulties at the middle school remembering what to bring home and to classes from [his/her] locker…[Student] does [his/her] homework in [his/her] room at home, but is distracted by everything including pencils and toys.

For SLD, parental reporting among Black student evaluations was slightly more when compared to White students; occurring in two of six reports for Black students and in one of six for White students.

A parent of a Black student noted: "Difficulties completing homework within a reasonable time frame and with minimal help…shows frustration when working on homework." A second parent of a Black student stated, "They would, "primarily like for [student] to do better in school." In the one White student report, the parent recalled that, '[Student] previously having had tutoring for reading." In general, there were minimal parental reports of SLD. For ADHD, much more parental reporting noticed in White student reports, despite Black students having a greater occurrence of pre-referral diagnosis of ADHD.

Analysis of ED and DD resulted in between-group differences. Observed in three of six reports, parents of White students indicated slightly more parental reporting of ED characteristics (See Figure 4.6 Above). Of these reports for White students, one parent stated, "Student appears anxious (overreacts)." A second parent recalls, "Low frustration tolerance level [for student] and has a low temper threshold which can go from a level 0 to a level 10 very quickly."

Within the third White student report, a parent stated:

> In order to get or do what [he/she] wants, [student] will act out or get loud. Asked to describe [his/her] temper, [parent] reports that [student] is ok until [he/she]

> doesn't like what is being told to [him/her]. [Student] gets in trouble and has outbursts. Parent adds that when [student] throws tantrums even if [his/her] behavior is ignored and that [parent] finds it is best to allow [student] to get [his/her] anger out and then take a nap.

The occurrences within the two Black student reports, one parent recalled: "Occasionally appears to be anxious about school… [Student] always feels tired and goes to bed around 11 every night, but can't sleep." For the second parent, "When [student] gets upset, [he/she] could cry for hours."

Analysis of DD revealed distinct variability in "type" of reporting. Although both groups, across number of reports, equally observed characteristics of DD, parent reports for Black students was more specific to school and parent reports for White students was more specific to home. For example, in a report for a Black student, the parent noted, "[Student] has had Out-of-School Suspension for insubordination, noncompliance, disruptive speech, and disruptive behavior. Another parent recalled, "…nine demerits in two classes for coming to class unprepared." On one occasion, specific to home, for a Black student, the parent reported: "Concerns were noted with [student's] willingness to comply with family rules, admit when [he/she] has done something wrong, and display adequate self-control. Difficulties with anger management and a low frustration threshold were also reported. "

For White students there were no school related disciplinary measures. Instead, home-based concerns reported by parents included: "[Parent] describes [student] as having, "uncooperative behavior (argues when told to do something.)" A second parent states, "…interacts as well as [he/she] can with family members, and [he/she] sometimes acts out." This same parent goes on to add:

> [Student] has trouble listening to rules… does not always follow rules at home; [Student] was cared for by a family member while mother worked during which time [he/she] became fond of getting [his/her] way. Mother adds that before she stopped working, there were few disciplinary measures engaged besides removing television as a consequence. Methods [parent] has found most effective for discipline include being firm when directions are not followed and using a mom voice. Asked who administers discipline and is it consistent, mother reports that since she is now home full time, discipline is consistent.

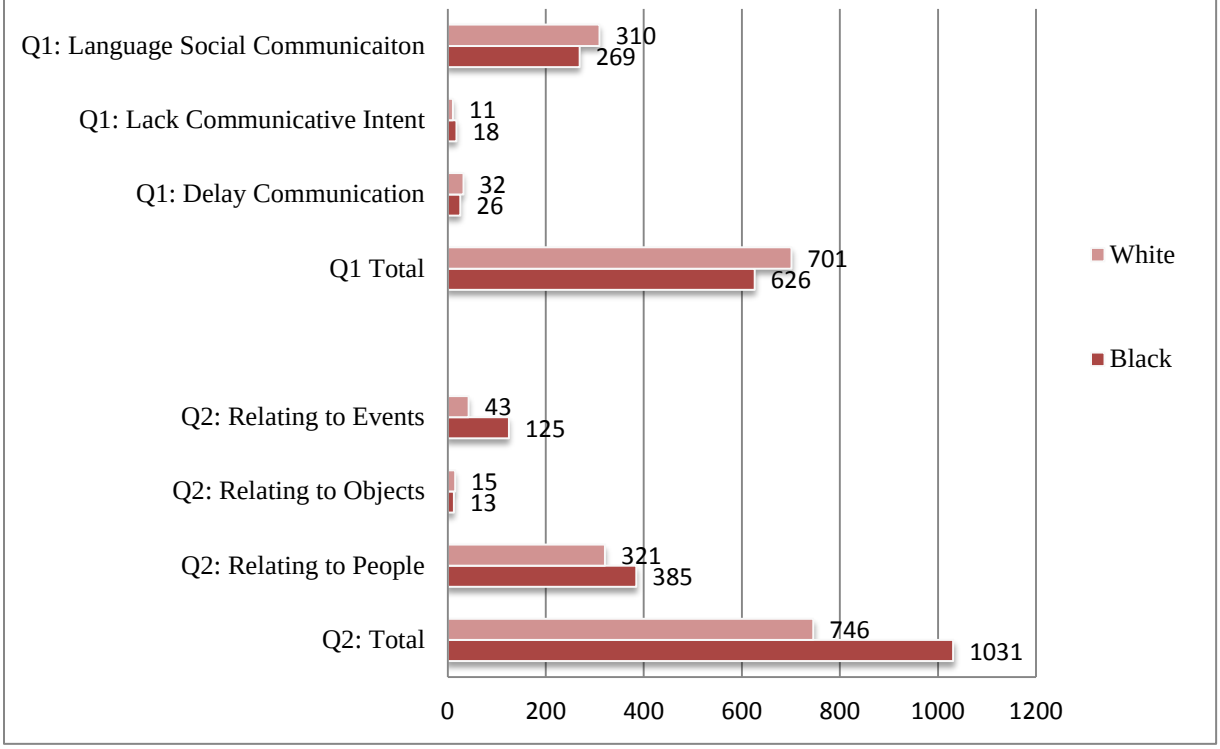
In summary for Parental Reporting: Non-Autism Characteristics, both groups were equally likely to provide information to counter AU. It was found that White parents reported more ADHD and ED related characteristics. Black parents reported more SLD characteristics, but across both groups this was limited. For DD, equally represented in both groups, but variances observed in type of reporting. White students parental reporting for DD was more specific to home, and Black parent reporting was more specific to school. When considering DD across all evaluation reports, four indicated prior school disciplinary measures; and of these four, they were all of Black student. Such disciplinary measures included prior school referrals, in-school and/or out-of-school suspensions.

THEME THREE: Evaluative findings: Autism characteristics. The previous sections presented findings specific to pre-referral community supports/interventions and parental reporting of au and non-au characteristics. In analysis, a third theme, Evaluative Findings: Autism Characteristics developed. In assessing information obtained through the full educational evaluation process, across various assessment measures, and making comparisons between home and school, two subthemes came about: (1) Evaluative Findings: Quadrants' One and Two (2) Evaluative Findings: Quadrants' Three and Four.

Analysis of all 12 evaluation reports revealed differences between the groups along quadrants one through four. Analysis included evaluative components from home, school, and directly obtained from the student in formal and informal assessment measures. For an educational identification of Autism, quadrants' one and two hold relative importance, as they are the only required level of quadrant specific traits for special education eligibility. Quadrants' three and four are considered optional levels of eligibility. Differences observed, as it related to these quadrants, are presented in this section. Defining features of quadrants' one through four can be found in Appendix 1.

Evaluative findings: quadrants' one and two. Across the evaluations and in assessing frequency of codes used, findings revealed that White student reports reflected greater characteristics consistent with Quadrant One, as compared to Black student reports that reflected greater characteristics of Quadrant Two. Figure 4.7 illustrates the differences between the groups in terms of frequency of coding across quadrant one and quadrant two.

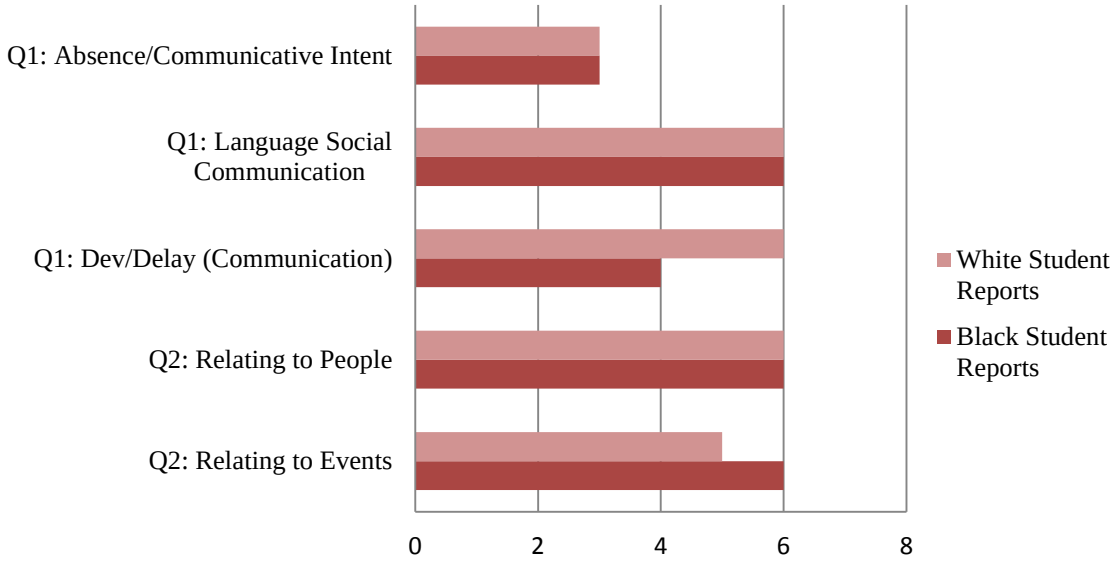
Figure 4.7. *Evaluation Findings: Frequency Q1 and Q2*



Note. Depicts frequency of coding per quadrants' one and two characteristics, across race/group.

Analysis revealed that an understanding of frequency of codes used across number of reports was beneficial in determining relevant patterns of agreement and disagreement between the groups. Therefore, Figure 4.8 illustrates number observed characteristics of quadrants' one and two, across number of reports; it denotes only those areas in which the greatest variability between the two groups was observed.

Figure 4.8. *Evaluative Findings: Q1-Q2, Across Reports*



Note. Depicts Q1 and Q2 traits with greatest areas of variability, across all reports by race/group.

Evaluation findings revealed more Q1: Deviance/Delay (speech, language, communication) and Q1: Language Social Communication descriptors for White students.

All White student reports reflected evidence of deviance/delay in terms of language, speech and/or communication; reported features also included overly developed language. Four of six Black student evaluations' reported deviance/delay (communication) traits. Such findings revealed evidence of delays in terms of speech, unusual vocal quality and robotic speech production, unusual word/phrase repetition, early childhood delays in language, delays in social language, and overly formal language. Among the six reports for White students, some of the evaluative findings for deviance/delay communication included:

> Regarding [his/her] communication skills, [his/her] 2nd grade teacher reported that [he/she] would sometimes repeat questions again to reassure [him/herself] that [he/she] was doing the correct thing (e.g. Am I supposed to take this home") …for this same student, it was reported, vocal quality is unique and often times [he/she] sounds robotic when talking.

During a Language Assessment, the following was within a White student report:

> [His/her] verbal responses tended to be rather formal and included the occasional use of pedantic and/or stereotyped phrases (e.g., "I actually don't know but I always wanted to find out") and answers prefaced by drawn out utterances such as "in fact" or "well.")

For another student, during a Speech Assessment:

> Based upon an evaluation that includes a single word test, sentence/phrase repetition, and a connected speech sample, [Student] demonstrates a delay in the correct production of the following sounds: sh, s and s blends, z, and voiced and voiceless th. Normative data indicates the age level at which these errors require therapy as: s, sh, voiced th, and z - at seven years of age, voiceless th- at eight years of age. Errors were consistent.

And, as stated in another report:

> Spontaneous language contained unusual words and phrases, which called attention to [his/her] speech. These included scripted (repeated, memorized) phrases such as "In fact, for crying out loud, Unlike the other, Trust me," and "laughing stock"; and repetitive phrases like "Well?" and "I know -- right?" [He/she] sounded formal when [he/she] used utterances like "You have a fear of spiders, don't you?" Some sentences which sounded unusual were unique to [Student], such as "AKA [his/her] mom and dad" when describing [his/her] grandparents, and "small but deadly" when describing hail.

Similar findings, primarily in language assessments, were observed in the four of six

Black student reports. For example:

> [Student's] use of intonation to convey emotions varied. [Student's] use of intonation did not consistently match [his/her] message, which has also been a main source of concern in the classroom. For example, [student] will sound angry and annoyed in excess of what would be appropriate in the circumstance. For the most part, however, [student's] use of tone during the assessment was flat even when [he/she] appeared to be lighthearted.

In a second Black student report, it was noted: “Moreover, [his/her] reasoning with social situations was atypical. [He/she] experienced difficulty completing a task that required [him/her] to sequence social situations in pictures, often offering a bizarre progression to cast [his/her] storyline.” And, in a third Black student report:

> Although [he/she] occasionally used exaggerated intonation or an immature "tone" when excited or silly. Stereotyped and idiosyncratic words and phrases were observed throughout testing, such as pedantic (overly sophisticated) phrases ("For some reason..., Don't even get me started, How do I say it?"), repetitive phrases ("Right?"), and overuse of expressions like "usually, literally, technically, basically.""

And, in a fourth report:

> [His/her] language use drew attention at times when it was overly formal for [his/her] age and included advanced vocabulary such as "meditate" and phrases such as, ". . . until they had difficulties…[His/her] speech/language skills were delayed. In addition, [student] regressed and lost acquired speech sounds around 18 months.

When considering Q1: Language Social Communication, Figure 4.8 (above) illustrated that this was present in all 12 reports. However, as also observed in Figure 4.7 (above), White student reports were coded more for language/social communication concerns. Some examples of these concerns in a White student report included:

> [He/she] was able to sequentially report familiar events or routines. [Student] did not appear interested in the examiner's comments and conversational leads. [He/she] did not ask the assessor any questions about herself. Overall, the reciprocal conversation was somewhat comfortable and maintained, however one sided. …In the area of Reciprocal Social Interaction, [student] used [his/her] eye contact minimally and on [his/her] own terms. [He/she] often looked around when [he/she] spoke. When [he/she] initiated a topic or felt comfortable with the topic [his/her] eye contact was slightly better. Student typically had a flat affect with an occasional and appropriate smile or smirk, which appeared appropriate for the assessment.

In another report, during a classroom observation, the following was reported:

> [Student] was observed on [date] in the classroom. [He/she] appeared to be listening to instructions and following along with the class. While working at [his/her] seat [he/she] was observed staring off into space. The teacher stopped to ask [him/her] if [he/she] needed help and [he/she] shook [his/her] head no. [Student] appeared to be stuck on the assignment but did not ask for help. In the hallway on the way to the computer lab the class stopped to use the restroom. When [student] came out of the restroom [he/she] could not find their colored pencils under a pile of other colored pencils. [He/she] turned to face the teacher without speaking. Looked at her briefly then turned away again. [He/she] looked at the pile again and then back at the teacher. Finally, [he/she] looked through the pile and found [his/her] pencils. [Student] seemed unable to orally ask for help from the teacher.

Similar findings in Black student reports included:

> [Student] required rephrasing of test questions as [he/she] was confused easily by some tasks. [Student] required much re-teaching to understand expectations of novel tasks, but after additional adult support, [he/she] was independent with each activity. Moreover, [student's] reasoning with social situations was atypical. [He/she] experienced difficulty completing a task that required [him/her] to sequence social situations in pictures, often offering a bizarre progression to cast [his/her] storyline.

> [Student] frequently revises [his/her] sentences as [he/she] speaks and does not provide their listener enough information. There is a sense of story in [his/her] narratives, i.e. it has characters, a setting, problem, and concluding phrase. Both stories lacked a clear ending/problem solution. [He/she] frequently confused [his/her] pronouns, which also made the story difficult to follow.

For another Black student, it was reported, "[Student] experienced difficulty expressing [him/herself], especially when responding to open-ended questions; repeated phrases, revisions, pauses and false starts were observed." For this same student, during a pragmatic language assessment:

> When required to "fill-in" another's "thought" or "feelings" based on a photograph, [Student's] performance fell in the lower limits of the average range but, when asked to support [his/her] response by answering "How do you know that's what he's thinking," [his/her] performance fell significantly below the average range. This was due to [his/her] difficulty interpreting nonverbal cues such as facial expression, posture and gestures. Informally, [he/she] had difficulty providing accurate feeling vocabulary that matched the person and situation, and

> interpreted "feeling" in a literal manner. For example, when asked how a character might feel, [he/she] stated "hurt" and "pain." In addition, [he/she] labeled an angry face as "disappointed," and a "surprised" face as "devastated."

Evaluative findings for Q1: Lacking Communication was observed equally between the two groups, three Black student reports and three White student reports. Characteristics reported in both groups indicated lacking communicative intent, versus total absence of language. For instance, a teacher reports for a White student, “One time, [he/she] approached two boys and postured like a ninja, and made remarks, but no sustained interaction took place.” As reported in second White student report.

> Many of these concerns (including failure to provide background information, not commenting on the partner's topic, returning to [his/her] own topic, monologues on [his/her] own topics, assuming a listener knows [his/her] information), were related to poor perspective-taking abilities (i.e., "theory of mind"), the ability to recognize the other person's feelings, needs or ideas.

For a Black student, an observation reflected:

> Made comments, but did not look at or call a person's name to gain their attention, and as a result, often appeared to be talking to [him/herself]…During whole group instruction in the general education classroom, [student] frequently was looking around the room, daydreaming, and staring at the ceiling. [He/she] occasionally shouted out without raising [his/her] hand. [He/she] also talked to [him/herself].

In summary for Quadrant One, deviant/delay communication and language/social communication, White student reports had more frequent coding in this area (Refer to Figure 4.7 above). Lacking Communicative Intent was equal between the two groups; a total absence of language was unfounded among the 12 reports.

For Quadrant Two, Black students were represented in more characteristics of Q2: Relating to Events and Q2: Relating to People. For Relating to Events, observances of these characteristics among Black students were identified three times more than within

White student evaluations (Refer to Figure 4.7 above). Specifically, found in all but one report for a Black student and coded three times more for Black students, there were characteristics of one needing to seek consistency in environmental events including, rigidity in thinking and behavior. For example:

> During conversation with [student], the participant feels like topics change abruptly but not vastly. To the listener, this leads to feeling like no topic is ever closed or ended naturally. For example, during the description of a picture task, the examiner commented how delicious the food on the table looked, pointing to the cake specifically. [Student] then remarked, "I keep having it every day and it's coldest ice cream and its plain." It seemed [he/she] was talking about eating birthday cake after school, but without an explanation...A teacher reports, inflexible and has a hard time changing his/her mind; doesn't understand cause and effect or generalize events the way other children do.

Within a second Black student report::

> ...[he/she] is overly perfectionistic, and likes for things to be perfect when [he/she] is doing a project or completing something independently. Has difficulties transitioning from one activity to another... became upset when [he/she] was asked to stop reading after 3 minutes; [he/she] insisted on finishing the page… sometimes can't get [his/her] mind off something once [he/she] starts thinking about it.

Compared, findings within a White student report revealed:

> [He/she] appeared fixated on a specific situation that had occurred where [he/she] was told not to play in the dirt with sticks at recess. [He/she] seemed unsure whether it was a rule or not and was unsure if [he/she] should tell the assessor because [he/she] may have broken the rule. [He/she] did comment that, that was the only way the kids would play with [him/her].

A second example in a report for a White student:

> [He/she] then went up to the teacher to explain that [he/she] was in the bathroom during specials when the class was getting into trouble and therefore did not know what to write as a goal because [he/she] had done nothing wrong. … [student is reported to] never" adjusts well to changes in routine.

For Q2: Relating to People, this was noted across all reports, but coded more frequently in Black student reports. Such deficits in relating to people suggest particular difficulties in student's ability to form relationships with others. Some of the evaluative findings for Black students for Q2: Relating to People included:

> Concerns were also present with [student's] ability to relate to peers, noting that [he/she] was "mean" to peers, engaged in inappropriate conversations, and experienced difficulty communicating effectively in social situations… [Student] did not ask follow-up questions and appeared uninterested, and often turned the conversation back to topics of interest to [him/her]. [Student] was observed with a flat affect, though smiling very rarely… difficulty with matching facial expressions and reactions of the examiner; [he/she] did not often laugh at jokes or return smiles, and often smiled and laughed at random times when nothing was said.

Within another Black student report:

> Classroom observations confirm the results of standardized testing. [Student] was unable to demonstrate proficiency in grade level expected skills, including identifying the interpersonal skills necessary to build quality relationships, and identifying the personal characteristics needed to contribute to the classroom.

And, within a third report:

> [Student] appeared to want to interact however [he/she] did not have the fine-tuned skills to initiate, reciprocate and maintain an appropriate conversation. [He/she] also did not augment [his/her] communicative interactions beyond using some gesture… [he/she] demonstrated a tendency to get "stuck" and perseverate on [his/her] perspective…some deficiencies in social behavior that are clinically significant…and at times had severe effect on [his/her] daily social interactions both at home and within the school setting.

Among White student reports, some examples of Q1: Relating to People included:

> [He/she] is never able to resolve peer conflict without teacher intervention, [he/she] handles frustration with outbursts and aggressive behavior, tends to stay stuck on[his/her] own preferred topic rather than that of peers and shows difficulty entering into play with peers and maintaining friendships… tends to stare intensely at people or objects…poorly modulated eye contact.

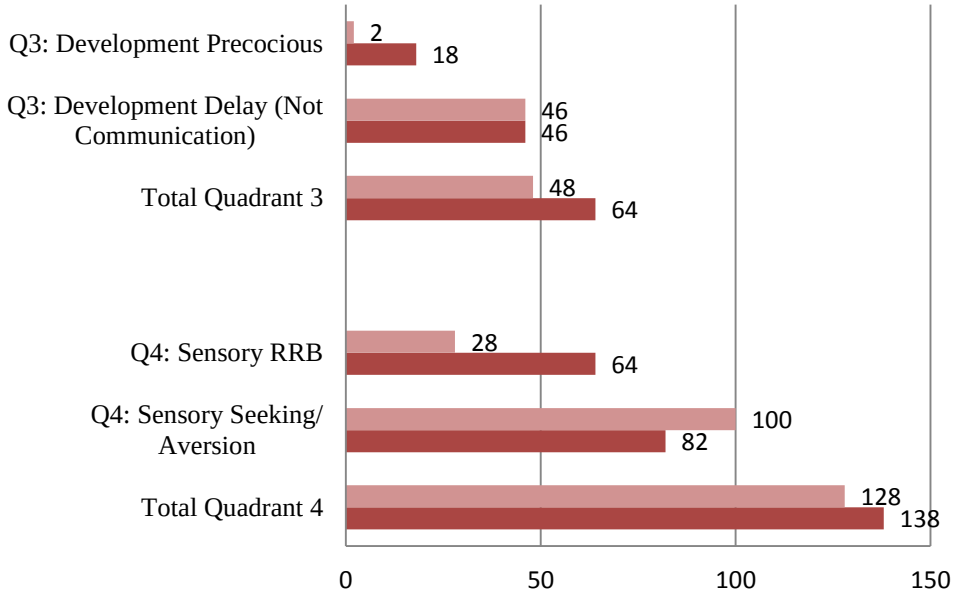
And, within another report:

> The teacher gave a directive for everyone to come to the carpet. [Student] remained at [his/her] desk until the teacher personally told [him/her] to come to the carpet. [Student] joined [his/her] classmates, but sat with [his/her] back turned to the teachers. [He/she] appeared distracted and did not participate. [He/she] was observed to touch other children, lay across the carpet with [his/her] legs in the air, and roll around the carpet. [His/her] shoes were half on [his/her] feet. Student seemed to be unaware that [his/her] body movements were different than [his/her] peers.

For Q2: Relating to Events and Q2: Relating to People, Black student reports were coded more. Specifically, for relating to events coded in five of six Black student reports and all White student report, African America students' evaluations were coded three times more. In comparison, for Quadrant One, White students' reports received more frequent coding.

Evaluation findings: quadrants' three and four. Quadrants three and four represent optional areas of identification for an educational eligibility of Autism. When considering all evaluative findings across home, school, and the identified students, differences were observed across these quadrants. In terms of frequency of codes used, Black students were coded more for Q3: Developmental Precocious and Q4: Sensory Restricted/Repetitive Behaviors. White student reports received more frequent coding for Q4: Sensory Seeking/Aversion. Both groups received equal frequency of coding for Q3: Developmental Delay/Not Communication. These differences are illustrated in Figure 4.9.

Figure 4.9. *Evaluation Findings: Frequency Q3 and Q4*



Note. Depicts frequency of coding per quadrants' three and four characteristics, across race/group.

As with quadrants' one and two, analysis revealed that an understanding of frequency of codes used across number of reports was beneficial in determining relevant patterns of agreement and disagreement between the groups. Therefore, Figure 4.10 illustrates number of observed characteristics of quadrants' three and four, across number of reports.

Figure 4.10. *Evaluative Findings: Q3-Q4, Across Reports*

Note. Depicts Q3 and Q4 traits across reports by race/groups.

As observed in Figures 4.9 and 4.10 above, Black students' evaluative measures revealed more characteristics along Quadrant Three, specific to developmental precocious behaviors; such was observed in five Black student reports, as compared to two White student reports. In terms of frequency of codes used among the groups, Black students were coded more for Developmental Precocious behaviors across evaluative findings.

Developmental precocious behaviors related to instances in which a student's typical developmental milestones were found to be accelerated. For example, in one Black student report: "… [student] has an excellent memory for facts about cars, comics, and video games." For another Black student, it was reported, "[He/she] can listen to any song and then play it on the piano from memory." And for a third Black student, it is stated, "reached developmental milestones early; such as, speaking first words between 4 and 5 months." It should be noted for full evaluative findings, reporting of Q3:

Developmental Precocious behaviors were more specific to home reports for Black students.

When considering White student evaluations, Q3: Developmental Precocious Behaviors were more specific to school reporting. For example, in a White student report:

> The Performance Composite is based on information from the Block Design, Matrix Reasoning, and Picture Concepts subtests. [Student] performance ranged from the average to high average range. These subtests measure a child's ability to analyze and synthesize abstract visual stimuli. It also involves nonverbal concept formation, visual perception, organization, visual-motor coordination, and categorical reasoning ability. This composite is considered to be an area of relative strength.

And, within the second White student report, it is stated "[He/she] seems to learn things more easily and sooner than other children."

For Q3: Deviance/Delay, concerns were equally reported across both groups and found in all 12 evaluation reports. Deviance/delay along quadrant three does not include aspects of language/communication. Instead, these observed delays were more specific to historical developmental milestones (e.g. motor skills, social emotional), academics, cognitive, and related to adaptive behaviors. Both groups appeared to reflect some degree of these perceived delays.

As seen in Figures 4.9 and 4.10 above, differences were observed along quadrant four between the groups. Findings in Black student reports were more aligned with Q4: Sensory/ Restricted Repetitive Behavior (SRRB) and for White student reports, findings were more aligned with Q4: Sensory Seeking/Aversion (SSA). All but one White student report was coded for Q4: SRRB. Overall, Black student reports were coded 2.5 times more for Q4: SSRB. In one Black student report, it is stated, "[He/she] was observed to

occasionally pick at [his/ her] lips, especially when attempting items that appeared difficult." Within a second Black student report, it was noted:

> [He/she] began to play with [his/her] pencil (pulled eraser off, tried to poke pieces together, tapped pencil repeatedly on table)… was more comfortable upon [his/her] return trip to work with the examiner, and immediately asked where a certain toy "car" was and why the examiner had not brought it this time. [He/she] returned to this topic frequently throughout the assessment.

For a third student, it was observed, "[Student] demonstrates repetitive movements often during testing, such as rocking [his/her] body, tapping [his/her] head with [his/her] palm, swinging [his/her] legs, and pushing on the table repeatedly." Similar Q4: SRRB findings were observed among White student reports, but to a lesser degree.

Quadrant 4: Sensory Seeking/Aversion (SSA) was observed in all reports, but findings revealed more characteristics among White student evaluations. Sensory seeking/aversion included specific sensory concerns that might be olfactory, auditory, gustatory, visual, tactile, vestibular, and proprioceptive etc. Among White student evaluations, some occurrences included:

> [Student] frequently tends to lean into the desk or rest [his/her] head on [his/her] hand, floor or desk table appearing to seek out sensory input…tends to seek out deep pressure input…It was noted to that [he/she] was constantly on the move during testing, walking around the therapy room touching and looking at various objects…always touches classmates inappropriately during class and when standing in line, seeks hot or cold temperatures by touching windows and other surfaces and frequently does not respond to another's touch.

Within a second White student report, it was noted "…inappropriate but nonaggressive behavior (touches him/herself constantly)." And, for a third student:

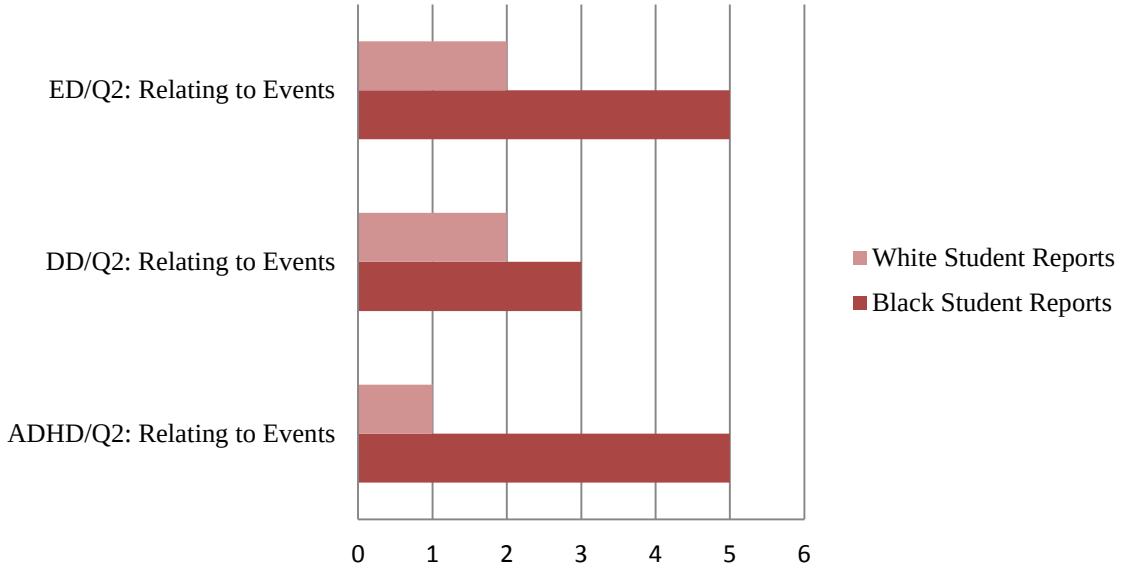
> …always distracted by visual stimuli such as pictures, charts on the wall or in the classroom… In the classroom, [he/she] always runs [his/her] hands along the wall, wraps legs around chair legs, fidgets, rocks; leans on furniture, walls or other people for support.

In summary, for Theme Three, Evaluative Findings/ Autism Characteristics, White student reports reflected more Autism characteristics along Q1. Black student reports were coded more for Autism characteristics along Q2. Q3: developmental delays (not-language) were found equally between the groups, with Black student concerns for deviance delay being primarily determined by school. For Q4, Black student reports were coded more for SSRB and White student reports were coded more for SSA.

THEME FOUR: Differential diagnosis. In addition to analysis of between-groups differences on quadrant specific traits, overlap between the quadrants and other disability characteristics from full evaluative findings were considered. Such analysis proved valuable in answering the research questions, as differential diagnoses and incongruence in Autism symptom reporting could likely be connected to eligibility or ineligibility for educational Autism. Although the direct goal of this research could not make that determination, analysis in these areas provided insight into whether this might be a plausible hypothesis for future research. Theme four's analyses revealed some differentiating characteristics of Autism with other educational disability categories and behavioral concerns, such as ADHD/Executive Functioning (ADHD), Discipline/Defiance (DD), Emotional Disturbance (ED), and Specific Learning Disability (SLD). "Need for Special Education," which often supports the decision to identify a student with an educational disability of Autism, revealed between-group differences. Two subthemes developed, included: (1) Disability Overlap and (2) Need for Special Education.

Disability overlap. All evaluation reports revealed overlap between characteristics of ADHD/ Executive Functioning and Q1: Language Social Communication, Q2: Relating to People, and Q4: Sensory Seeking /Aversion. When assessing between group differences of ADHD and the quadrants, no unique findings were determined in White student reports. However, Black student reports revealed overlap between ADHD and Q2: Relating to Events; this overlap was observed in five of six Black student reports, as compared to one White student report. Similar, there was greater overlap with DD and ED, with Q1: Relating to Events found among Black student reports. This overlap was determined by cross coding of the differential diagnostic characteristics and quadrant traits. Figure 4.11 illustrates these differences.

Figure 4.11. *Disability Overlap with Q2: Relating to Events*



Note. Depicts between group overlap, by number of reports, of ADHD, DD, ED to quadrant two, relating to events.

When considering this overlap for a Black student, coded both for ADHD and Q2: Relating to events, it was noted:

> Difficulties with having an awareness of time and adapting to change or new environments…has difficulties transitioning between activities…Even with encouragement and reinforcement…[student's] attention and effort is questionable…. able to understand and follow directives to complete preferred activities and routines, but has trouble following instructions during non-preferred activities and sometimes requires longer time to process information.

For DD, both groups indicated some level of overlap in the area of Q2: Relating to People. Comparatively, DD and Q2: Relating to Events was coded across three Black and two White student reports. In terms of frequency of codes used, this overlap in coding occurred four times more in Black student reports. As found in a Black student report:

> [He/she] often stopped during the reading fluency task to either argue or rationalize the statements [he/she] was reading (such as saying "Technically yes, but?", "That doesn't make sense", and "It depends if there is no normal"). [Student] also became upset when [he/she] was asked to stop reading after 3 minutes; [he/she] insisted on finishing the page.

A teacher described for this same Black student:

> [He/she] heard that breakfast was over, and that students needed to return to their classrooms, [Student] became angry to the point of crying, shouting and buckling [his/her] legs in [his/her] refusal to move…[Student] almost always lose [his/her] temper too easily, and argue when denied [his/her] own way."

Moreover, as found in a White student repot for DD and Q2: Relating to Events, "Throws temper tantrums approximately three times a week. They often do not last long and [he/she] will go outside or to [his/her] room to cool off." Within a second White student report, "Struggles to age appropriately modulate [his/her] emotions and behavior to follow rules and respond age appropriately to social conventions.

ED and Q2: Relating to Events revealed greater overlap within Black student reports, found in three White as compared to five Black student reports. Further, coding overlap occurred twice as much in Black student reports. For a Black student, it was noted:

> [Student] cries easily. [Student] is sometimes negative about things, often says that nobody likes [him/her], and was reported to often change [his/her] moods quickly. Student's classroom teacher noted that [he/she] often seems lonely…almost always lose [his/her] temper too easily, and argue when denied [his/her] own way….almost always easily upset, and cries easily.

For a second Black student, it was reported: "Often worries about things that cannot be changed, often worries about what other children think...almost always easily upset and cries easily." Within a third Black student report, "[Student] has difficulty with transitions during [his/her] school day. [He/she] struggles with emotional control and regulation and often becomes very upset when [he/she] is frustrated. [Student's] emotions escalate quickly and result in tantrums and meltdowns."

Within a fourth Black student report: "Became angry to the point of crying, shouting and buckling [his/her] legs in [his/her] refusal to move. [Student] demonstrated a limited awareness and understanding of [his/her] choices, and a constant lack of ownership and acceptance of responsibility."

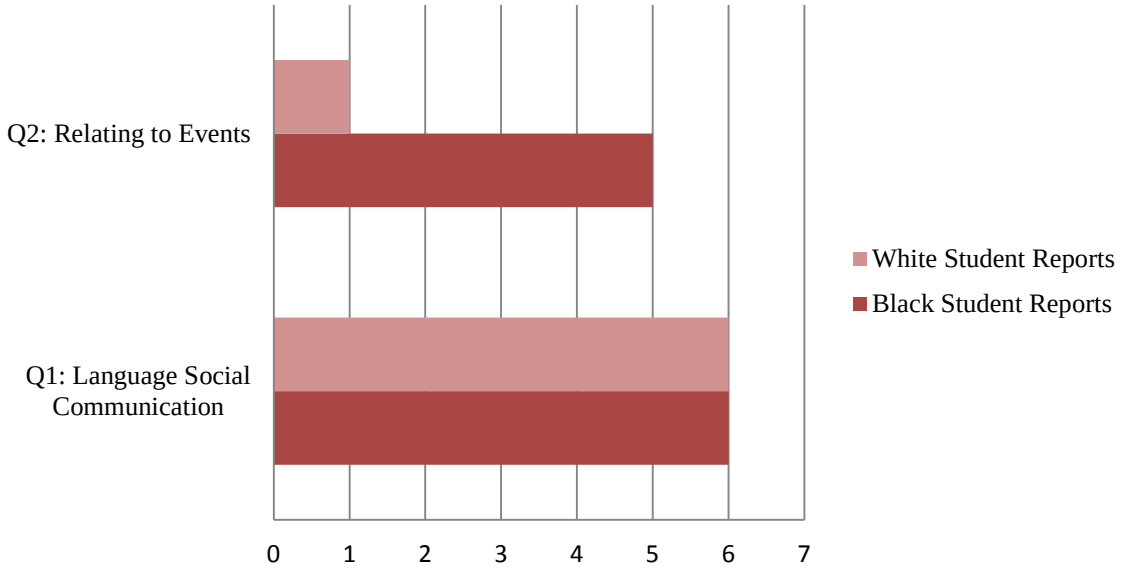
As found in one of the two White student reports, for ED and Q2: Relating to Events overlap:

> [Student] is fearful, says 'I get nervous during tests' or 'tests make me nervous', does strange things, acts confused, calls other children names, seems lonely, says' nobody likes me', is negative about things, is sad, cries easily, has trouble staying seated acts without thinking, interrupts others when they are speaking, visits the school nurse, gets sick refuses to join group activities, and is chosen last by other children for games.

In summary, for disability overlap, a level of co-occurrence in coding was observed in Black student reports, specifically as it related to Q2: Relating to Events. This overlap was coded across more reports and more frequent with ADHD, DD, and ED for Black students. A tendency to describe White student's behavioral characteristics in a way that it could be identified as ADHD, ED, or DD was observed to a lesser degree.

Need for special education. The final component for theme four was considering the overall implications of the evaluation findings that led to need for special education. When comparing reports for Black and White students, based on Missouri-DESE required Quadrants, both revealed a higher level of need for special education. When breaking this criterion apart, "need for special education" was more consistent with Q1: Language Social Communication for White student and Q2: Relating to Events for Black students. This was determined by assessing coding in the 12 reports' special education eligibility statements. Figure 4.12 further illustrates these findings.

Figure 4.12. *Need for Special Education*



Note. Depicts the need for special education by quadrant characteristic, across number of reports.

Q1: Language Social Communication, as it related to need for special education was observed across all reports. However, it was coded twice as much in White student reports. Some of the indicated findings for White students included:

> As noted during the language assessments for a student: Concerns in this area include lack of eye contact, introducing a topic (ex. getting listener's attention, provides sufficient background information), comprehending material containing abstract or figurative language, understanding the meaning of simple similes, metaphors and idioms, does not make comments during conversation, demonstrates a lack of perspective taking, use of non-specific terms, understanding what causes people to not like [him/her], recognizing when [he/she] is arguing, use of egocentric conversations (only wants to have conversations that [he/she] wants to talk about), knowing when to talk and when to listen obeying classroom rules for behavior, maintaining a topic or keeping a topic going, expressing feelings (sadness, happiness, empathy, frustration), use of odd intonation/prosody when speaking (ex. over-pronounces sounds in words), using appropriate nonverbal behaviors to communicate (ex. gestures), participating in verbal games or other verbal exchanges with peers, adjusting conversation style depending on conversation partner (ex. teacher vs. friend) following verbal directions and recognizing the nonverbal cues of others. The [student's] language functioning adversely affects educational performance in the

> following ways: classroom participation, peer interactions, communication in social situations, requesting assistance and working in small groups.

Within a second White student report, it is stated:

> In the school setting, mild to moderate concerns were indicated in social awareness (e.g. ability to pick up on social cues), social communication (e.g. expressive social communication), and social motivation (e.g. motivation to engage in social-interpersonal behavior). [Teacher] indicated severe concerns in the areas of autistic mannerisms (e.g. stereotypical behaviors or highly restricted interests). The SRS also provides an overall score which fell in the mild to moderate range. Scores in this range indicate that [Student's] social skills likely interfere in everyday social interactions in the school setting. In the home setting, mild to moderate concerns were indicated in social awareness (e.g. ability to pick up on social cues) and social cognition (e.g. being able to interpret social cues). [Teacher], indicated severe concerns in the areas of social communication (e.g. expressive social communication), social motivation (e.g. motivation to engage in social-interpersonal behavior), and autistic mannerisms (e.g. stereotypical behaviors or highly restricted interests). The SRS also provides an overall score which fell in the severe range. Scores in this range indicate that [student's] social skills likely interfere in everyday social interactions in the home setting.

Within a third White student evaluation, it is noted, "This impedes [his/her] ability to accurately interpret and use language to problem solve social situations and to communicate effectively with others across environments."

> For Q1: Language/ Social Communication, within a Black student report:
>
> The documented language and pragmatic weaknesses adversely affect Student's educational performance and indicate the need for special education. District curriculum and State guidelines indicate students are expected to be able to identify mood and emotion of both verbal and nonverbal communication, and show appropriate body language and facial expression to indicate agreement or confusion. Formal and informal assessment documented [student's] difficulty in interpreting and expressing meaning through nonverbal means.

Overall, for language social communication and need for special education; this was considered in all 12 reports, but coded more among eligibility statements of White students.

Q2: Relating to People was coded equally in the groups. Q2: Relating to Events was coded more in Black students' need for special education. Five of six reports for Black students indicated Q2: Relating to Events as a "need for special education," this was observed in one of six White student reports. Further, there was more frequent coding among Black student reports. In a report for a Black student,

> Disturbances in the capacity to relate appropriately to people, objects, or events: …[Student] is able to adjust to changes in routine or schedule, but seeks a verbal explanation as to why [his/her] schedule is changing. [His/her] facial expressions are generally overly serious, and along with [his/her] inflection, typically do not match the emotion [he/she] is attempting to convey. [Student] generally focuses on small details of objects or information, and struggles to interpret the "big picture." [He/she] can be overwhelmed in a situation with a lot going on, and when under stress displays rigid or inflexible patterns that seem off.

For another student, it is reported:

> The documented behaviors adversely affect [Student's] educational performance and indicate the need for special education. [Student] has difficulty independently following directions and instructions. [He/she] is rigid and does not respond appropriately to changes. [Student] also struggles to appropriately interact with [his/her] peers. Throughout the year, [he/she] has had several instances of aggression, refusals, tantrums, and shutdowns. [He/she] also has a history of eloping from the classroom. When [he/she] is unable to control [him/herself] in the classroom and must be removed, [he/she] misses out on instructional time. [He/she] struggles to independently problem solving and requires assistance with conflict resolution.

Comparatively, an instance in which this was reported in a White student evaluation was in regards to a state expectation. For example, "Students are expected to apply effective problem-solving and decision-making skills with peers, utilize coping skills to help manage changes in routine or events, and apply study skills and test taking strategies to improve academic achievement." It goes on to report for this student, "[His/her]

interactions with events are characterized by literal interpretations of rules and by exaggerated fear of certain events (Halloween)."

The subtheme of, 'need for special education', reveled between group differences as it related to eligibility determination and the quadrants. Q1: Language Social/ Communication was observed more as a need for special education among White student reports. Q2: Relating to Events was observed more as a need for special education among Black student reports

Results Summary

This chapter presented findings on differences in Black and White students' evaluation reports, which were found eligible for an educational disability of Autism. Similarities and differences were observed between the two groups, and four major themes emerged from the data: (1) Previous Evaluations and Supports, (2) Parental Reporting: Autism and Non-Autism Characteristics, (3) Evaluative Findings: Autism Characteristics, and (4) Differential Diagnosis. In summary of results from the data, and in making comparisons within and between the two groups, the following was suggested:

- White student reports reflected a greater likelihood to have received pre-referral non-educational community supports.
- White student reports revealed more general education classroom based pre-referral interventions and accommodations.
- Black students were more likely to have a pre-educational referral diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

- Parents of Black students were less likely to report Autism-related characteristics about their student during the evaluation process. When they did report concerns, they were more specific to Language/Social Communication, Developmental Precocious Behaviors, and Relating to People.
- Parents of White students reported more Autism related characteristics for their student during the evaluation process, and their concerns most closely characterized Relating to People, Deviance Delay, and Sensory Seeking and Aversion.
- Parents of White and Black students were equally likely to provide information that countered typical characteristics of Autism.
- Parents of White and Black students were equally unlikely to report academic deficits.
- White parents were more likely to report additional behaviors of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; this is despite Black students being more likely to have a pre-referral diagnosis of ADHD.
- Both groups were equally likely to report characteristics of Defiance/Discipline for their student; but concerns reported by parents of White students were more specific to home, and concerns of Black parents were more specific to school. For instance, Black parents reported a higher instance of prior in-school/out-school suspensions and disciplinary referrals.
- Full evaluative findings indicated that Black students' reports reflected greater Autism characteristics in the areas of Relating to Events, Relating to People, and Sensory Restricted /Repetitive Behaviors.

- Full evaluative findings indicated that White students' reports reflected greater Autism characteristics in the areas of Language Social/Communication, Deviance/Delay, and Sensory Seeking Aversion.
- Full evaluative findings indicated that Black students' reports reflected behavioral characteristics of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Defiance Discipline, and Emotional Disturbance. Further, these greatly overlapped Autism Q3: Relating to Events.
- Q1: Language Social Communication was observed more in White student's need for special education.
- Black student's need for special education was most closely based on concerns in the area of Q3: Relating to Events.

As such, application from these 12 evaluations indicated that White students are possibly receiving more community support and pre-referral classroom-based interventions. Parents of White students are also demonstrating an increased likelihood to describe their student's behavior to reflect Autism-related concerns. Black parents are not describing their student in this same manner, though also countering the information they do provide in school evaluations that might indicate Autism related concerns.

Black students consistently are being described in such a manner to indicate other diagnostic categories; for instance, Emotional Disturbance and ADHD. They have a higher indication of exclusionary school disciplinary measures. Moreover, they are continuing to be identified with a different diagnosis, before formal identification with Autism, such as ADHD. Last, variance was observed in determining need for special

education. The following chapter will apply these findings, as they relate to the initial research questions and study propositions. It will provide implications for educators and school evaluators, and it will provide future recommendations for areas of needed research.

CHAPTER V: INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction and Review of Limitations

This research reviewed the educational evaluation practices for Black and White students. Specifically, it examined differences in educational evaluations for students who were identified with Autism. Through qualitative file review analysis, four themes developed (1) Previous Evaluation and Supports, (2) Parenting Reporting of Autism and Non-Autism Characteristics, (3) Full Evaluative Findings of Autism Related Characteristics, and (4) Differential Diagnosis.

There were some limitations to this study. First, information examined was primarily from the 12 reviewed evaluation reports. Therefore, although reports provided some indicators of what led to a disability determination of educational Autism, the research team was not privy to information that could have been present but not included in the evaluation summaries. Next, this research only examined disproportionality in districts in which disproportionality was a concern. Evaluative findings from districts in which disproportionality is not a concern represent an area of future needed research. Last, the goal of this study was to examine those evaluations in which students were found eligible for Autism. An extension study that would enhance these findings would be examination of differences between those Black student evaluations' found ineligible, or in which a different special education disability was determined. Despite these limitation, and areas of future needed research, there are many practical implications from this study that can increase understanding of those educational evaluation practices

for Black students suspected of an educational disability of Autism. This section will provide a discussion of those findings. It will conclude with implications and recommendations.

Discussion

The theoretical framework for this study was Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory (CRT), applied as a theoretical/interpretive framework, increases understanding in analyzing the realities of racial inequities in education (Closson, 2010). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) define CRT in education as "a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogies that seek to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education (p.25)." Critical race theory considers many of the same concerns out of conventional civil rights; however, it places it in a more broad perspective that encompasses economics, history, context, group, feelings, and the unconscious (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006). Specific to the tenets of CRT, Ordinariness and Social Constructionism were applied to increase understanding of the present differences between Black and White student reports.

Delgado and Stefancic (2006) suggests that racism is typical "not aberrational," a normal science. It characterizes the typical way society does business, the common day-to-day experiences of most people of color in this country. The idea of "whiteness over color" serves purposes that are physic and material. Ordinariness, as the first tenet of CRT, draws from this prior perspective in stating that racism is difficult to address and cure. Ordinariness presents the ideas of a "color-blind" or "formal" notion of impartiality, which are expressed in rules that insist in treatment that is the same across the board and

results in discrimination among individuals of color. From this same perspective, it is suggested that great majorities deny that race matters or that it exists. This is despite racism being deeply and methodically embedded in our day-to-day life. Tate (1997) recalls this "color-blind thinking" in universal practices that has been ascribed to all individuals, without acknowledgement of variations that exist within a diverse population. There is a failure in recognizing this variance in race, gender, class, and language; as such, it is argued that this continues to perpetuate inequities (Tate, 1997). Thus, in addressing inequities in education for students of color, this color-blind mentality must be acknowledged and addressed (Tate, 1997; Zion & Blanchett, 2011). Relating of this tenant to the research results was to determine instance in which "color-blind" thinking and practices might have resulted in differences between Black and White student reports.

Social construction views race as a product of social thoughts and relations. Race is viewed as historically and socially determined by how individuals are perceived in day-to-day life. Race is dynamic and ever changing. Social construction discounts race as primarily genetically based. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) acknowledge that people with common origins may have similar physical traits (e.g. skin color, physique, and hair texture); yet, this only reflect small components of these individual genetic endowment and are less related to higher-order traits (e.g. personality, intelligence, and moral behavior). Instead, social construction asserts that races are categories that society invents, alters, and retires when suitable. The values that are placed and ascribed to certain races within everyday life demonstrate racial inequalities. This research posed

four questions. In interpretation of the findings, these four questions will be revisited to inform future practices and provide recommendations within the Critical Race Theory Framework.

Research question ONE asked, *"Are there differences observed in terms of symptoms expression among Black students and White students' evaluation reports?"* This question addresses ascertains in prior research, which states that differences exist in regards to symptoms expression of Autism characteristics for Black students, which could lead to potential diagnostic bias. Specifically, Kharod Sell et al. (2012) found that White children with ASD had more documented DSM-IV criteria of restricted interests and repetitive/stereotyped behaviors, as well as greater symptoms of abnormal motor developmental and odd responses to sensory stimuli. Further, explanatory factors for under-identification of Autism among Black children was hypothesized to be related to clinical misdiagnosis, such as ADHD and conduct disorder (Mandell et al., 2007).

Findings from this research observed present differences in terms of the full evaluative findings between the two groups, as it related to Autism traits. First, consistent with Kharod Snell et al. (2010), White students' evaluative findings presented with more sensory seeking/aversion behaviors and developmental delays, with additional concerns related to motor development. In fact, among the assessment practices all evaluations for White students included motor assessment, whereas three of six of the Black student evaluations included motor assessment. Comparatively, differences were observed from Kharod Snell et al., (2010) research in that Black students presented with more noted restricted interests and repetitive/stereotyped behaviors, when compared to White

students. This was also observed in this research, as along Theme Three: Evaluative Findings: Autism Characteristics, Black student reports were coded 2.5 times more for Sensory Restricted/Repetitive Behaviors (SRRB) and White student reports were coded more for Sensory Seeking/Aversion (SSA). For example, as noted in a Black student report for SRRB:

> [He/she] began to play with [his/her] pencil (pulled eraser off, tried to poke pieces together, tapped pencil repeatedly on table)… was more comfortable upon [his/her] return trip to work with the examiner, and immediately asked where a certain toy "car" was and why the examiner had not brought it this time. [He/she] returned to this topic frequently throughout the assessment.

Comparatively, within a White student report for SSA:

> [Student] frequently tends to lean into the desk or rest [his/her] head on [his/her] hand, floor or desk table appearing to seek out sensory input…tends to seek out deep pressure input…It was noted to that [he/she] was constantly on the move during testing, walking around the therapy room touching and looking at various objects…always touches classmates inappropriately during class and when standing in line, seeks hot or cold temperatures by touching windows and other surfaces and frequently does not respond to another's touch.

Outside of prior literature review findings, this research also observed between group differences among several of the other quadrants. White students were coded more along Q1: Language Social Communication and Black student reports were coded more along Q2: Relating to Events and Q3: Development (Precocious, more specific to home). For Q3: Developmental Delay (not communication), both groups were coded equally, but Black developmental delays were primarily school reports. For all Autism symptom reporting, this research found that White student reports reflected much more Autism characteristics than Black student reports.

In addition to Autism characteristic reporting, there were greater concerns with differential diagnosis within Black student evaluations. Black students were more likely to have had a prior diagnosis of ADHD before beginning the educational evaluation process. Moreover, overlap in the Autism quadrants with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Defiance/Discipline (ADHD), and Emotional Disturbance (ED) was observed for Black students. These characteristic closely overlapped with Q2: Relating to Events." These differences were observed to occur two times more among Black student reports. These observed differences in terms of symptom reporting, and ways in which it was assessed, could support a prior hypothesis from Kharod Sell et al. (2012) of attribute predilection in the Autism assessment practices for students within this current study.

In this case, it is possible that the social construction of race has regarded the pre-determination of some attributes for children of color, as compared to their white peers. Thus, operating in the assessment practice to identify and describe such behavior in a way that confirms one's own pre-existing ideas of race, as it relates to the interpretation of student behavior. For instance, Skiba et al. (2006) findings revealed that teachers, administrators, and other educational staff members viewed disproportionate referral for special education of low SES racial/ethnic-minority students as an area of concern. Reasons for special education referrals generally stemmed from behavioral concerns of which the teachers viewed they could not handle in the class setting. As it was noted, teachers viewed Black students' behaviors as different. Specifically, it was stated by teachers that Black students seemed to "talk louder, be more active, and seemed disrespectful (p.1434)." Similarly, findings from Skiba et al. (2006), revealed that

teachers and administrators admitted that Black students were over-referred for special education because of behaviors—possible explanations for this included "a cultural mismatch" or "insufficient training" among staff and teachers.

In addition to social construction, the CRT tenet of ordinariness is considered in understanding these differences. Just as one might misunderstand student behavior, as a result of the social construction of their race, it can be equally misunderstood by attempting to understand student behavior from a "color blind" perspective that ignores cultural differences. Thus, providing increased understanding of how cultural mismatch between student and teacher might regard some behaviors of students of color in a different manner. As with this research, though eventually identified with Autism, Black students' evaluations revealed many more characteristic that could have possibly led to a more judgmental disability label of Emotional Disturbance, in which students are known to receive less access to the general education setting and in which Black boys are currently disproportionally represented.

Research question TWO, *"Are there differences in reported Autism traits by parents of Black and White students with Educational Disability of Autism?"* This research found that parents within White student evaluations were more likely to report Autism-related characteristics for their student. Further, when reported, there were differences noted in terms of types of symptoms reported among parents within the two groups. Both group parental reporting's included Q3: Deviance/Delay (not language) and Q2: Relating People, but this was observed more among White student reports. When considering the groups separately, Q1: Language Social Communication and Q3:

Developmental Precocious Behaviors were most commonly observed among Black parental reporting, and Q4: Sensory Seeking was most commonly observed among White parental reporting. For countering characteristics of Autism, the parental reporting between the two groups was equal.

Prior research has demonstrated that one such explanation for the under-identification of Black children with ASD has included differences in level of parental concerns of Autism symptomology (Cuccaro et al., 2007; Mandell et al., 2009). This research supported this finding in that Black parents reported fewer symptoms, and different symptoms (i.e. developmental precocious behavior), which along would not indicate an educational disability of Autism. Review of literature suggests prior explanations for difference in parental reporting on Autism, such as lack of parental knowledge and access to services. For example, Gardin (2008) suggested that poverty rates are typically higher among monitories and thus, this can limit their access to education and quality health care. Related Fountain, King, and Bearman (2010) found that parental education and SES was positively correlated with earlier Autism identification; thus, supporting the idea of ascertainment bias and Autism identification.

From another perspective, cultural differences have been linked to variances in parental reporting of Autism symptomology. Tek and Landa (2012) suggests that cultural barriers may indirectly influence Autism identification for minority children by affecting the way individuals think, behave, and interact with others. Children from minority groups hold practices, value systems, and expectations that can be different from the dominant culture. One example pointed out by Tek and Landa (2012) is familial cultural

differences in perceiving and understanding their child's developmental milestones. Thus, such cultural difference might affect information that is shared by parents about deviant development, just as in how monitory children's behavior might be interpreted differently by the dominant group. This differential interpretation by the dominate group is even more understandable if we refer again to the idea of ordinariness and color-blind system of thinking of race and cultural differences. Thus, application from this study suggest that educators must continue to have an increased awareness in knowing that some parents for minority children may lack knowledge and understanding when discussing their child's behavior, and in specifically pointing out Autism related concerns. Further, in drawing from Delgado and Stefancic (2006) educators must move away from a color-blind mentality in working with diverse groups. It is balance of understanding racial differences, and concurrently challenging poorly socially constructed thinking of students from diverse backgrounds.

Research question THREE, "*Are there differences in behavioral and discipline reporting for Black and White students found eligible for an Educational Disability of Autism?"* This research found obvious differences in descriptors of behaviors as it relates to defiance discipline for Black students. Further, differences were observed in discipline reporting. White student evaluations were absent of any reports of school discipline referrals and/or suspensions. Comparatively, this was not the case within Black student evaluations, as four of the six reports noted prior school referral and/or suspension. Further, when reported, White student reports reflect concerns with Defiance/Discipline (DD) in the home setting and these mentioning's were few. For

Black students, reporting of DD was more specific to the school setting. For example, in a Black student report it is stated: "[Student] has had Out-of-School Suspension for insubordination, noncompliance, disruptive speech, and disruptive behavior. Another parent recalled, "…nine demerits in two classes for coming to class unprepared."

Research has indicated that Black students have consistently been overrepresented in school discipline practice; this research continued to support this observation. The US Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection (2014) investigated school discipline practices for the 2011-2012 school year. Data was collected from all public school districts in the nation that serves students for at least 50% of the school day. Results indicated that in terms of school discipline practices, disproportionality was high in terms of suspension and expulsion for students of color. Specifically, the data revealed that Black students are expelled at a rate three times more than that of White students. On average, 5% of White students are suspended, compared to 16% of Black students. Further, Black students represented 16% of the student population for the CRDC (2014) data, but were 32-42% of students suspended or expelled.

Piquero (2008) suggest that these differences in referral practices and punishment for Black are connected to Differential Processing and Differential Selection. Differential Processing states that racial bias occurs in the correctional system, and results in disproportional arrest and incarcerations for minorities. Such is the same in school, whereby a discrepancy in sanctions and addressing student behavior is present. This results in Black students receiving harsher punishments for less serious offenses. When

considering differential selection, Piquero (2008) suggests that minorities have a greater chance of arrest, as a byproduct of being more likely to be picked out for wrongdoings. In the school setting, despite similar infractions, Black, Latino, and Native American students are more likely to receive disciplinary consequences for behaviors that often begin at the classroom level; likely a result of societal stereotypes, cultural mismatch, connected with a color-blind mentality; much of which coincides with the CRT tenets of ordinariness and social construction.

This idea of social construction continues to help us understand how interpretation of student behavior can be culturally situated in that it can lead to these disparities, as observed in the current study. Just as Black student evaluations were the only to report prior disciplinary referrals and suspensions, these evaluations also reflected more behaviors associated with defiance/discipline and emotional disturbance that could lead to office referrals and suspensions, and/or could have led to different disability identification. Take for example, subtheme disability overlap revealed increased co-coding for quadrant specific traits with DD and ED among Black student reports. Take for example, in one Black student report, coded for Q2: Relating to Events and DD:

> [He/she] often stopped during the reading fluency task to either argue or rationalize the statements [he/she] was reading (such as saying "Technically yes, but?", "That doesn't make sense", and "It depends if there is no normal"). [Student] also became upset when [he/she] was asked to stop reading after 3 minutes; [he/she] insisted on finishing the page.

A teacher described for this same Black student:

> [He/she] heard that breakfast was over, and that students needed to return to their classrooms, [Student] became angry to the point of crying, shouting and buckling [his/her] legs in [his/her] refusal to move…[Student] almost always lose [his/her] temper too easily, and argue when denied [his/her] own way."

Consistently, as observed within a Black student report for Q2: Relating to Events and ED:

> [Student] cries easily. [Student] is sometimes negative about things, often says that nobody likes [him/her], and was reported to often change [his/her] moods quickly. [Student's] classroom teacher noted that [he/she] often seems lonely…almost always lose [his/her] temper too easily, and argue when denied [his/her] own way…. almost always easily upset, and cries easily.

Thus, overall, this study continues to shed light on disparities in discipline as a current and pressing concern for schools, even during the educational evaluation process.

Question FOUR asked, "*Are there differences in how need for special education is described for Black and White students with an Educational Disability of Autism?"* The concluding component of this study examined what led to the identification of Autism for both groups. Observed differences revealed greater alignment with Q1: Language Social Communication difficulties for White students and Q2: Relating to Events for Black students. This finding suggested a need to examine cultural differences that may be present when interpreting and understanding language development for minority children. Take for example Cuccaro et al. (2007), who hypothesized that Black children marked language delays were overlooked in Autism identification. Within this current study, language social communication was identified in the need for special education more in terms of frequency and across more reports for White students. Therefore, those areas in which language was observed to a lesser degree for Black students, this could have resulted in missed identification or different disability identification.

Further, this research revealed that the context in which Black students received their eligibility for Autism, aligned with externalizing behaviors of DD and ED. This further questions how educators are interpreting students' of color behaviors. This is considering that, "relating to events", which was the primary area of overlap with these characteristics, refers to a social context of understanding student behavior based largely on the dominant class. Such suggest the continued need in supporting culturally responsive practices in understanding student behaviors.

Conclusion and Implications

Disproportionality remains a concern and there has been research to examine it. Despite, issues continues to loom in the heart of educators who attempt to understand differences as it relates to special education identification and placement. Much of the research concludes that issues of disproportionality begin before the evaluation process. It has been suggested that disproportionality begins in the classroom, prior to the special education referral process (Skiba et al., 2006).

An area less explored, this research examined the evaluation process that can have serious outcomes when it comes to labeling and identifying a student with a disability. This research found that the CRT Tenets of Ordinariness and Social Construction can assist in understanding how and why differences might be present when examining the behavior of children of color. This research also highlighted differences in evaluative findings for Autism identification. This study provides the following implications/recommendation in guiding the work of school psychologists, educators and others who are part of the special education evaluation process.

- As with prior research that has described cultural mismatch as a necessary acknowledgment in educators' work with students of color, this remains important in the school psychological evaluation process. School psychologist and others must remain aware of the social construction of race, the present need to do away with color-blind thinking, and that in which cultural mismatch can impact their understanding when working with Black students and other students of color. A more cultural responsive pedagogy that seeks to understand student's educational concerns in a more comprehensive manner is needed. School psychologist and examiners must self-assess their own understanding of race and challenge any personal bias that could unintendedly impact the assessment process. This begins with increased training on culturally responsive assessment practices within higher education teacher and school psychological evaluation preparation programs. Additionally, tools like the *Self-Assessment Checklist for Personnel Providing Services and Supports to Children and their Families*, developed by Goode (2002) has been suggested as effective in assisting evaluators and educators in identifying biases they may unintendedly hold, and increasing their personal self-awareness around issues of cultural diversity.
- Black parental reporting was limited, and research has suggested a reason for this might be related to parental lack of understanding, knowledge and means to describe their student's behavior. Additionally, cultural differences and parental reporting of Autism characteristics was suggested. Thus, increasing parental knowledge of behaviors that are not typical through resources might prove to be

beneficial. Further, comprehensive evaluations and best practice use of social history background can continue to assist school psychologist in ensuring that they are asking the right, and many questions. This includes a need to draw from culturally sensitive interview practices and identifying where cultural mismatch might occur in that process. For instance, identifying differences in development, as it relates to cultural differences. The National Association of School Psychologist recommend the use of culturally appropriate interviews that focus on sensitivity in how one probes parents for information, connecting parental responses to cultural history and family strengths/assets, and integrating cultural content into psychoeducational assessment by means of enhancing the comprehensive social/cultural history background on the student. Integrating these recommendations into higher education preparation programs can better prepare educators and evaluators in working with students from diverse backgrounds.

- Just as there is a need for comprehensive evaluation practices, educators should continue to maintain personal awareness in understanding their own social construction of race. Blanchett (2009) suggest that in order to address disproportionality in education, “color-blind” thinking must be done away with and such is the same as it applies to the school educational evaluation process. Educators must be careful to avoid misinterpretation of student behavior and attribute predilection, prior to, and during the school evaluation process.
- Research has indicated that one of the obvious differences in, and between, Black

and White students' Autism symptom expression is the acquisition of and expression of social language. Within this research, it was indicated that social language was uncommonly observed as an area of concern by parents and minimally observed among educators for Black students. This is of great concern in that a probable cause of disproportionality, as it relates to an identification of Educational Autism, is that Black students might be overlooked because of "perceived" less marked language difficulties. Educators and school evaluators should attend closely to language difficulties that are present and how they might manifest differently between cultural groups. Continued professional development on language differences between cultural groups, and professional development on acquisition of developmental milestone, based on culture, can increase educators' competence in working with students from diverse backgrounds.

- A primary focus of this research was in understanding those Black students found eligible for an educational disability of Autism. Although this researcher cannot definitively conclude that all assessment practices used in these evaluations led to these students' identification, an observation is that all 12 reports utilized a best practice model of Autism Identification such as the Autism Diagnostic Observation System. The ADOS (now ADOS-2) has consistently been researched and found as an informative and reliable measure for Autism. Though verifying this specifically for Black students would be an area of future needed research, this study does suggest the continued use of such best practices measures, like the ADOS-2, for Black students and other students of color.

In conclusion, this research has provided evidence of present differences in educational evaluations among Black and White students. Social Construction and Ordinariness, from the Critical Race Theory Framework has provided insight in explaining some of these differences. This research revealed that when considering under-identification, as it relates to disproportionality in special education identification, many of the factors suggested for the over-identification of Black students in judgmental disability categories, like Emotional Disturbance, might be connected to under-identification in Autism. Findings from this research can be used to continue to inform the research field of disproportionality in education, and inform future research to lend to the understanding of disproportionality in Autism and across other disability categories.

Appendix 1: ABSTRACTION GUIDE

Accommodation/504

Accommodations or a level of support indicative of having a 504 Plan

Example:

Teacher reports student needs preferential seating
Student has a 504 plan in place with the following accommodations....

Agency

Community Agency or Private Services

Student/family is receiving or has previously received support from a community agency or receiving some kind of service (therapy, counseling, DJO, etc.) through an outside agency.

Examples:

Receiving counseling from Dr. Who
In home family therapy was provided by Agency when child was age 3-4.
Participated in First Steps or Parents as Teachers
ABA therapy provided when age 1
Academic tutoring provided by Tutors-R-Us
Speech Therapy provided by private SLP service

EvalED

Previous educational evaluations

Please highlight the entire summary of a previous evaluation report findings.

EvalPRIVATE

Previous private evaluations (medical, psychological, neurological, etc.)

Please highlight the entire summary of a previous evaluation report findings.

Family/Background

Family/Background

Family information, family medical history, presence of other children in home, exclusionary criteria, and other information related to the child's family or the child's background that seems relevant to educational eligibility.

NEED for SpEd

Need for Special Education Instruction or Modifications to Curriculum

If something strikes you as being particularly indicative of a need for special education, please code it here. This refers to a direct impact of disability on the child's access to the general education curriculum.

Example: Student is unable to participate in group activities without a meltdown.

O: ADHD/ExecFun

Other disability: OTHER HEALTH IMPAIRMENT FOR ADHD/EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

Suspicion of/Evidence of ADHD or Executive Function deficits

Examples:
Organization
Keeping track of belongings
Needs reminders for personal responsibilities/personal care
Time management
Self-monitoring
Task initiation/completion
Hyperactivity
Inattention/focus
Impulsivity
Emotional Self-Control/Frustration tolerance

O: Defiance/Discipline

Data referring to defiance or discipline problems. (social maladjustment)

Examples:

Does not respond to discipline at home
Suspensions/Expulsions
Teacher reports refusals or defiance
Observation data includes instance of defiance/refusal
Medical diagnosis of ODD/Conduct Disorder

O: ED

Other Disability: EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE

Suspicion of/Evidence of potential ED classification

Examples:
Evidence of hallucinations, delusions, etc.
Evidence of significant anxiety, physical symptoms of anxiety
Evidence of pervasive depression

O: SLD

Other disability: SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY

Suspicion or Evidence of significant Academic deficits incongruent with cognitive ability

Examples:
Difficulty with homework
Low academic scores on benchmarks or evaluation measures

QUADRANT 1: LANGUAGE/COMMUNICATION

Q1: DelayCom

Deviance and Delay (in language/communication/speech)

Examples:
May have overly formal or idiosyncratic language
May have very advanced vocabulary
May have delays in speech

Q1: LackCom

Absence of Communicative Language or if present Lacks Communicative Intent

Examples:
Pulls or pushes on another person to get what he/she wants
Does not speak at all
Uses another person's hand as a tool
May talk about a topic but without communicative intent or without intention to convey something to another person (may talk to self or echolalia)

Q1: LangSocCom

Deficits in Capacity to Use Language for Social Communication (receptive/expressive/pragmatics)

Examples:
Lack of "chit chat"
Few/poor reciprocal exchanges
Social interactions limited to own interests
Repetitive phrases
Primarily object oriented communication
Scripted language
Pragmatic Language deficits (eye contact, gestures, unusual social responses or interpretations)
Expressive/Receptive language concerns

QUADRANT 2: RELATING TO EVENTS, PEOPLE, OBJECTS

Q2: Events

Seeks consistency in environmental events to the point of exhibiting rigidity in routines

Examples:
Upset with changes in routine (inflexibility, rigidity)
Difficulty with transitions
Unaware of common dangers
Rule-bound, overly concerned with dangers/safety/literal interpretation of rules

---

Q2: Objects

Use objects in an age appropriate or functional manner are absent , arrested or delayed

(This code may overlap with Q4 codes)

Examples:
Inflexible in play
Plays with objects in ways that object was not intended (spinning car wheels, flicking doll eyes, visual inspection, licking/mouthing objects)
Poor play skills with toys or objects

Q2: People

Deficits in Capacity to Form Relationships with People

Examples:
Does not appear to notice others
Looks away when spoken to
Does not pick up on social cues
Plays rough with others
Inappropriate greetings
Inappropriate physical engagement (hugging people inappropriately, pinch others)
Does not maintain relationships
Theory of Mind weaknesses (difficulty understanding others' perspectives others' emotions)
Lack of social reciprocity
Poor eye contact/facial expressions/lack of gestures

QUADRANT 3: DEVELOPMENTAL RATES/SEQUENCES

Q3: DevDelay

Deviance and Delay in an area that is not Speech/Language/Communication (which are better coded above in Q1: Delay Comm)

Examples:
Developmental delays (historical and current) such as fine motor, gross motor, social-emotional
Academic deviance and/or delays (Ex: only displays reading ability when reading technical manuals)
Cognitive deviance and/or delays (Ex: excellent long-term memory)

Q3: DevPrecocious

Developmental Rates and Sequences: precocious/accelerated development

May have gifted profile
May have been hyperlexic, learned to read very young
Strong specific skill in one or two particular areas (music, topic of interest)
Met milestones early

QUADRANT 4: REPETITIVE BEHAVIORS & SENSORY

Q4: Sensory RRB

Sensory Stimuli: Restricted and Repetitive Behaviors

Example:
Putting woodchips over their head repeatedly on playground
Staring at a fan spinning
Obsessiveness/Repeatedly engaging in same task
Only plays with one activity/aspect of the playground (only swings for instance)
Tapping, drumming on table
Repetitive body movements (flapping, clearing throat sounds)
Repetitively picking at skin or pulling out hair/eyelashes
Head banging

Q4: Sensory S/A

Sensory Stimuli: Sensory Seeking/Aversions (olfactory, gustatory, visual, etc.)

Examples:
Smells objects
Licks/mouths objects, puts non-edible objects in mouth
Rubs objects on face
Does not like loud sounds, covers ears, avoids bright lights
Seeks loud sounds
Reacts strongly to sensory input (more so than the average response)
High pain tolerance

Appendix 2: ABSTRACTION PROCEDURES

1. USER MANAGEMENT: Sign in as your name so that your work is credited to you. Go to Tools > User management > Switch users…
2. Make sure you are coding the specific documents assigned to you.
3. Remember to save your work continuously as you code.

Suggested approach:

a. First, read through the report and add a few codes for obvious things as you go, but mostly read for an overall understanding of what is in this report.
b. Then do a close reading with much coding activity, add free quotes when unable to code something immediately.
c. Go back and read through free quotes and see if they might be able to fit into a specific code. If not, write a memo.
d. Complete your coding with your Overall impression reflection/rating Memo to be tagged onto the EVALUATION REPORT title. Don't forget to do this while your thoughts are fresh about this report. There is no limit to this memo.
    i. Numerical rating: 1-10 with 1 representing a bare bones report that does not seem sufficiently comprehensive and 10 representing a very comprehensive report that has strong evidence for eligibility AND utility for the IEP team in making programming decisions.
e. Move on to next primary document assigned to you and repeat above steps.
f. Feel free to go back to a previously coded document and add/change codes or memos, sometimes a later evaluation report will inspire a thought that applies to
g. a previously coded report. This is an important component of qualitative coding

REFERENCES

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Pub. L. No. 101-336, § 2, 104 Stat. 328 (1991).

American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (Lead Author). (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools" An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American Psychologist*, 63, 852-862.

Arica, E. (2006). Achievement and enrollment status of suspended students. Outcomes in a large, multicultural school district. *Education and Urban Society*, 38, 359-369.

Artiles, A. J., & Trent, S. C. (1994). Overrepresentation of minority students in special education: A continuing debate. *The Journal of Special Education*, 27, 410–437.

Ayers, W., Ladson-Billings, G., Michie, G., & Noguera, G. (2008). City Kids, City Schools: More Reports from the Front Row. The New Press: New York

Bahr, M. W., Fuchs, D., Stecker, P. M., & Fuchs, L. S. (1991). Are teachers perceptions of difficult-to-teach students racially biased? *School Psychology Review,* 20, 599–608.

Baker, J. & Zigmond, N. (1995). The meaning and practice of inclusion for students with learning disabilities: Themes and implications from the five cases. *Journal of Special Education*, 29 (2), 163-180.

Barco, M. (2007). *The relationship between high school general education teachers' self-efficacy and attitudes as they relate to teaching learning-students' with disabilities in the inclusive setting* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA.

Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and

Implementation for Novice Researchers . *The Qualitative Report, 13*(4), 544-559. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol13/iss4/2

Bell, D. *(1980a).* Brown v. board of education and the interest convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review, 93, 518–533.*

Bell, D. (1992). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. New York: Basic Books

Berg, B. L. (2007). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences: 6th edition*. San Francisco: Pearson Education Inc.

Bettelheim, Bruno. (1967). *The empty fortress: Infantile Autism and the birth of the self. The Free Press.* Retrieved from http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=xxF25jFLt4wC&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=bettelheim&ots=FZSF8yDy9x&sig=sjlzwMcUE_WV8lb3uHALkUyfO78#v=onepage&q&f=false

Blanchett, W. J. (2006). *Disproportionate representation of Black students in special education: Acknowledging the role of White privilege and racism. Educational Researcher,* 35(6), 24-28.

Blanchett, W. J. (2009). A retrospective examination of urban education: From Brown to the resegregation of Blacks in special education — It is time to "go for broke." *Urban Education*, 44(4), 370-388.

Blanchett, W. J., Klingner, J. K., & Harry, B. (2009). The intersection of race, culture, language, and disability: Implications for urban education. *Urban Education*, 44, 389-409.

Blanchett, W. J., Mumford, V. & Beachum, F. (2005). Urban school failure & disproportionality in a post-brown era: Benign neglect of students of Color's constitutional rights. *Remedial and Special Education*, 26(2), 70-81.

Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

Bryan J. B., Day-Vines N. L., Griffin D., & Moore-Thomas C. (2012). The disproportionality dilemma: Patterns of teacher referrals to school counselors for disruptive behavior. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 90, 177–190.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014). Prevalence of Autism spectrum disorder among children aged 8 years - Autism and developmental disabilities monitoring network, 11 sites, United States, 2010. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, *63*(2), 1-22.

Chinn, P.C., & Hughes, S. (1987). Representation of minority students in special education classes. *Remedial and Special Education*, 8, 41-46.

Closson, R.B. (2010). Critical race theory and adult education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 60(3), 261-283.

Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. L.(1992). Interrogating cultural diversity: Inquiry and action. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(2), 104-115.

Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd Ed). London: Routledge.

Connecticut State Department of Education. (July, 2005). *Guidelines for identification and education of children and youth with Autism.*

Corsello, C. M., Akshoomoff, N., & Stahmer, A. C. (2013). Diagnosis of Autism spectrum disorders in 2-year-olds: a study of community practice. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry (54: 2)*, 178-185.

Coutinho, M.J. & Oswald, D.P. (2000). Disproportionate representation in special education: A synthesis and recommendations. Journal of Child and Family Studies, 9, 135-156.

Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.). (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement.* New York: New Press.

Cuccaro, M.L., Brinkley J., Abramson, R.K., Hall, A., Wright, H.H., Hussman, J.P,.… Pericak-Vance, M.A. (2007). Autism in Black families: Clinical-phenotypic findings. *American Journal of Medical Genetics B (Neuropsychiatric Genetics), 144B*, 1022-1026.

Cuccaro, M. L., Wright, H. H., Rownd, C. V., & Abramson, R. K. (1996). Brief Report: Professional perceptions of children with developmental difficulties: The influence of race and socioeconomic status. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 26*(4), 461-469.

Daniels, A. M., & Mandell, D. S. (2014). Explaining differences in age at Autism spectrum disorder diagnosis: A critical review. *Autism, 18*(5).

Decuir, J., & Dixson, A. (2004). So when it comes out, they aren't that surprised that it is there: Using critical race theory as a tool of analysis of race and racism in education. *Educational Researcher*, 33, 26-31.

Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory, an introduction (2nd Ed).* NYU Press

Donovan, M. S. & Cross, C. T. (Eds.). (2002). *Minority students in special and gifted education.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Dunn, L. M. (1968). Special education for the mildly retarded: Is much of it justifiable? *Exceptional Children*, 23, 5–21.

Durkin, M. S., Maenner, M. J., Meaney, F. J., et al. (2010). Socioeconomic inequality in the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder: Evidence from a U.S. cross-sectional study. *PLoS ONE 5*(7): e11551. Doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0011551

Erlandson, D. A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B. L., & Allen, S. D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Florida State University Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy (2002).Retrieved from www.cpeip.fsu.edu/.../resourceFile_18.pdf on April 1st, 2014.

Fogt, J. B., Miller, D. N., & Zirkel, P. A. (2003). Defining Autism: professional best practices and published case law. *Journal of School Psychology, 41,* 201-216.

Gearing, R.E., Mian, I.A., Barber, J., & Ickowicz, A. (2006). A methodology for conducting retrospective chart review research in child and adolescent psychiatry. *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 15,* 126–134.

Giangreco, M. F. (2006). Foundational concepts and practices for educating students with severe disabilities. In M.E. Snell & F. Brown (Eds.), *Instruction of students with*

severe disabilities (6th ed., pp. 1-27). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education/Prentice-Hall.

Goode, T.D., - Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development-University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research & Service. Adapted from - *Promoting Cultural Competence and Cultural Diversity in Early Intervention and Early Childhood Settings* - June 1989. Revised 1993, 1996, 1999, 2000 and 2002

Gottlieb, J. M., Gottlieb, B. W., & Trongone, S. (1991). Parent and teacher referrals for a psychoeducational evaluation. *Journal of Special Education*, 25(2), 155-167.

Gravois, T.A., & Rosenfield, S. A. (2006). Impact of instructional consultation teams on the disproportionate referral and placement of minority students in special

Gregory, A., Skiba, R., & Noguera, P. (2010). The achievement gap and the discipline gap: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational Researcher*, 39, 59-68.

education. *Journal of Remedial and Special Education, 27*(1), 42-52.

Gregory, A., Skiba, R., & Noguera, P. (2010). The achievement gap and the discipline gap: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational Researcher*, 39, 59-68.

Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, 20 U.S.C. §§ 7151 et seq.

Hallahan, D.P., Kauffman, J.M., and Pullen, P.C. (2009). Learners with Autism spectrum sisorders. In *Exceptional Learners: An introduction to special education (11th ed.).* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Harry, B. (1992). *Cultural diversity, families, and the special education system*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Harry, B. (1994). The disproportionate representation of minority students in special education: Theories and recommendations (Project FORUM, Final Report). Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 374 637

Harris, J. J., III, Brown, E. L., Ford, D. Y., & Richardson, J. W. (2004). African Americans and multicultural education: A proposed remedy for disproportionate special education placement and underinclusion in gifted education. *Education and Urban Society,* 36(3), 304-341.

Hosp, J. L., & Reschly, D. J. (2002). Predictors of restrictiveness of placement for African-American and White students with learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children,* 68, 225–238

Hosp, J. L., & Reschly, D. J. (2003). Referral rates for intervention or assessment: A meta-analysis of racial differences. *The Journal of Special Education, 37,* 67-80.

Hosp, J. L., & Reschly, D. J. (2004). Disproportionate representation of minority students in special education: Academic, economic, and demographic predictors. *Exceptional Children*, 70, 185–200.

Idol, L. (2006). Toward inclusion of special education students in general education. *Remedial and Special Education,* 27, 77-94.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004)

Kauffman, J.M. & Hallahan, D.P. (Eds) (2005). *The illusion of full inclusion. A comprehensive critique of a current special education bandwagon (2nd ed*). Austin, Tx: Pro-Ed

Kaufman, J., Hallahan, D., & Ford, D. Y. (Eds.). (1998). Disproportional representation of minority students in special education [Special section]. *The Journal of Special Education*, 32, 3–61.

Kharod, N. S., Giarelli, E., Blum, N., Hanlong, A. L., & Levy, S. E. (2012). A comparison of Autism spectrum disorder criteria and associated features among Black and White children in Philadelphia County. *Disability and Health Journal, 5* (9-17).

Klose, L. M., Plotts, C., Kozeneski, N., & Skinner-Foster, J. (2012). A review of assessment tools for diagnosis of Autism spectrum disorders: Implications for school practice. *Assessment for Effective Interventions, 37 (4)*, 236-242.

Knappman, E.W. (2001). *Great American Trials, 2nd Edition*. Visible Ink Press

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W . F. (1995). Toward a critical l race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97, 47-68.

Lewis, C.W., Butler, B.R., Bonner, I.I., & Joubert, M. (2010). Black male discipline patterns and school district responses resulting impact on academic achievement: Implications for urban educators and policy makers. *Journal of Black Males in Education*, 1(1), 7-25.

Lord, C., Rutter, M., DiLavore, P.C., & Risi, S. (2001). *Autism diagnostic observation schedule*. Los Angeles: Western Psychological Services.

Losen, D. J. & Orfield, G. (2002). *Racial inequity in special education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Mandell, D. S., Ittenbach, R. F., Levy, S. E., & Pinto-Martin, J. A. (2007). Disparities in

diagnoses received prior to a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 37*, 1795-1802.

Mandell, D. & Novak, M. (2005). The role of culture in families' treatment decisions for children with Autism spectrum disorders. *Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews,* 11, 110-115.

Mandell, D. S., Wiggins, L. D., Carpenter, L. A., Daniels, J., DiGuiseppi, C., Durkin, M. S., et al. (2009). Racial/ethnic disparities in the identification of children with Autism spectrum disorders. *American Journal of Public Health,* 99, 493–498.

Marable, M. (2002). *The great wells of democracy: The meaning of race in American life*. New York: Basic Books.

Marks, S. U., Lemley, C. K., & Wood, G. K. (2010). The persistent issue of disproportionality in special education and why it still hasn't gone away. *Power Play: A Journal of Educational Justice*, 1, 4-19.

Mercer, J. R. (1973). *Labeling the mentally retarded.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Merriam, S.B. (2009) *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, MB. & Huberman, AM. (1994). Qualitative data analysis (2nd Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Milner, H.R. (2008). Critical race theory and interest convergence as analytic tools in teacher education policies and practices. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(4), 332-346.

Milner, R.H. (2013). Why are students of color (still) punished more severely and frequently than white students? *Urban Education*, 48(4), 483-489.

Morrier, M. J., & Hess, K. L. (2012). Ethnic differences in Autism eligibility in the United States public schools. *The Journal of Special Education, 46*(1), 49-63.

Missouri Autism Guidelines Initiative. (2010). Autism spectrum disorders: Missouri best practice guidelines for screening, diagnosis, and assessment. Retrieved from http://Autismguidelines.dmh.mo.gov/pdf/Guidelines.pdf.

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2014*). Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.* Retrieved from http://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/moprofile_0.pdf

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2013). *Missouri state plan for special education: Regulations implementing part b of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Missouri: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Moore, J. L., III, & Lewis, C. W. (Eds.). (2012). *Black students in urban schools: Critical issues and solutions for achievement*. New York: Peter Lang.

National Institute for Urban School Improvement (nd). *Improving education. The promise of inclusive schooling.* Retrieved from http://www.edc.org/urban/publicat.htm.on April 1st, 2014

Office for Civil Rights (2012). *The transformed civil rights data collection*. United States Department of Education, Washington, DC.

Orfield, G. (2001). *Schools more separate: Consequences of a decade of resegregation*. The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Orfield G., Frankenberg E., Ee J., Kuscera J. (2014, May 15). *Brown at 60: Great progress, a long retreat and an uncertain future*. Los Angeles, CA: The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles.

Ortiz, A.A., & Wilkinson, C.Y. (1991). *Aim for the best assessment and intervention model for the exceptional bilingual student*. Austin, TX: University of Texas, Austin.

Osgood, R. L. (2008). *The history of special education: A struggle for equality in American public schools*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publisher

Osher, D., Bear, G.G.,& Sprague, J.R., & Doyle, W. (2010). How can we improve school discipline? *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 48-58.

Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972)." Equity in Education Legal Database. v0.1. Undated

Piquero, A.R. (2008). Disproportionate minority contact. *Future of Children*, 18, 59-79.

Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896)

Raines, T.C., Dever, B.V., Kamphaus, R.W., & Roach, A.T. (2012). Universal screening for behavioral and emotional risk: A promising method for reducing disproportionate placement in special education. *Journal of Negro Education*, 81, 283-296.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, (Pub.L. 93–112, 87 Stat. 355, enacted September 26, 1973).

Rutter, M., Le Couteur, A., & Lord, C. (2003). *ADI-R. Autism diagnostic interview-revised. WPS edition*. Los Angeles: Western Psychological Services.

Sarkar, S., & Seshadri, D. (2014). Conducting record review studies in clinical practice. *Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research , 8*(9).

Scott, T.M., Hirn, R.G., & Barber, H. (2012). Affecting disproportionality outcomes by ethnicity and grade level: Using discipline data to guide practices in high school. *Preventing School Failure*, 56(2), 110-120.

Shippen, M.E., Curtis, R.,& Miller, A. (2009). A qualitative analysis of teachers' and counselors perceptions of overrepresentation of Blacks in special education: A preliminary study. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 32(3). 226-238.

Skiba, R.J.(2014). The failure of zero tolerance. *Reclaiming Journal*, 22(4), 27-33.

Skiba, R. J. (2013). Reaching a critical juncture for our kids: The need to reassess school-justice practices. *Family Court Review: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 51, 380-387.

Skiba, R. J., Michael, R. S., Nardo, A. C., & Peterson, R.(2002). The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *Urban Review*, 34, 317–342.

Skiba, R. J., Peterson, R. L., & Williams, T. (1997). Office referrals and suspension: Disciplinary intervention in middle schools. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 20(3), 295–316.

Skiba, R. J., Poloni-Staudinger. L., Simmons, A. B., Feggins, L. R., Chung, C. G. (2005). Unproven links: Can poverty explain ethnic disproportionality in special Education. *Journal of Special Education,* 39, 130-144.

Skiba, R., Poloni-Staudinger, L., & Gallini, S. (2006). Disparate access: The disproportionality of Black students with disabilities across educational environments. *Exceptional Children*, 72(4), 411–424.

Skiba, R. J., & Rausch, M. K. (2006). Zero tolerance, suspension, and expulsion: Questions of equity and effectiveness. In C. M. Evertson & C. S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook for classroom management: Research, practice, and contemporary issues* (pp. 1063–1089). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Skiba, R., Simmons, A., Ritter, S., Kohler, K., Henderson, M., & Wu, T. (2006). The context of disproportionality: Practitioner perspectives on special education referral. *Teacher College Record*, 108(7), 1424-1459.

Skiba, R. J., Simmons, A. D., Ritter, S., Gibb, A., Rausch, M. K., Cuadrado, J., Chung, C. G. (2008). Achieving equity in special education: History, status, and current challenges. *Exceptional Children*, 74, 264-288.

Smith, A., & Kozleski, E. B. (2005). Witnessing Brown: Pursuit of an equity agenda in American education. *Remedial and Special Education*, 26(5), 270-280.

Solórzano, D., & Yosso, T (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry,* 8, 23-44.

Sun X, Allison C, Auyeung B, Baron-Cohen S, Brayne C. (2014). Parental concerns, socioeconomic status, and the risk of Autism spectrum conditions in a population-

based study. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*. 2014; 35: 3678–3688.

Tate, W.F. (1997). Critical Race Theory and education: History, theory, and implications. *Review of Research in Education*, 22, 195–247.

Tek, S. & Landa, R. J. (2012) Differences in Autism symptoms between minority and non-minority toddlers. *Journal of Autism Developmental Disabilities*, 42, 1967–1973

Tincani, M., Travers, J., & Boutot, A. (2009). Race, culture, and Autism Spectrum Disorder: Understanding the role of diversity in successful educational interventions. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 34(3-4), 81-90.

Travers, J. C., Tincani, M., & Krezmien, M. P. (2011). A multiyear national profile of racial disparity in Autism identification. *The Journal of Special Education*, 47(1), 41-49.

U. S. Department of Education. (2010). IDEA 2004. Retrieved from http://idea.ed.gov/

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs, 35th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2013, Washington, D.C. 2014.

Vassar, M., & Holzmann, M. (2013). The retrospective chart review: important methodological considerations. *Journal of Educational Evaluation for Health Professions*, *10*(12).

Vavrus, F., & Cole, K.. (2002). “I didn’t do nothin’ ”: The discursive construction of

school suspension. *The Urban Review*, *34*, 87–111.

Volker, M. A., & Lopata, C. (2008). Autism: A review of biological bases, assessment, and intervention. *School Psychology Quarterly,* 23 (2), 258-270.

Wallace, J., Goodkind, S., Wallace, C. M., & Bachman, J. G. (2008). Racial, ethnic, and gender differences in school discipline among U.S. high school students: 1991-2005. *Negro Educational Review*, *59*(1/2), 47-62.

Williams, M. E., Atkins, M., & Soles, T. (2009). Assessment of Autism in community settings: Discrepancies in classification. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 39, 660-669.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods (4th Ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zion, S. & Blanchett, W.J. (2011). [Re] Conceptualizing inclusion: Can critical race theory and interest convergence be utilized to achieve inclusion and equity for Black Students? *Teachers College Record*, 113(10), 2186-2205.