

African-American Male Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders:
A Study of the Effects of Ethnic Identity on Preference for School Counselors

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Abstract

This study explored African-American adolescent males with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD) preferences for a school counselor in terms of gender and ethnicity. Participants were administered the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) to assess their ethnic identity levels, and the School Counselor Preference Inventory (SCPI) to assess their counselor preferences. Using a 4x2 Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA), results of the study indicated that individuals with higher levels of ethnic identity had stronger preferences for ethnically similar school counselors. When counseling involved personal issues, the participants preferred ethnically similar school counselors regardless of gender. A lack of preference towards White male school counselors resulted when counseling involved career issues.

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In recent years school counselors have experienced roles in the counseling of special populations (Fitch, Newby, Ballestero, & Marshall, 2001). In particular, the latest reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, known as PL 105-17 or IDEA 97 has changed the way school counselors service children with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD) (Yell, 1998). While prior special education legislation focused on issues involving the exclusion of students (Underwood, 1996; Yell, Cline, & Bradley, 1995), educators interpret PL 105-17 as a directive for the use of counseling as an alternative to more intrusive measures such as suspension or exclusion (Maag & Katsiyannis, 1998).

The U.S. Department of Education (2003) estimated that approximately 500,000 children with EBD were provided services during the 2000-2001 school year. Empirical studies found that approximately 85% of all students diagnosed with EBD are male (Callahan, 1994; Wehby & Symons, 1995) and that African-Americans were more likely identified as having EBD when compared to non-African-American students (Oswald, Coutino, & Best, 1999; Serwatka, Deering, & Grant, 1995). Students with EBD are defined in this article as individuals who are identified by federal legislation as eligible for mandated services (National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 2003).

When assessing counselor effectiveness toward African-American students with EBD, a significant area of concern is cultural mistrust (Sue & Sue, 1999). Cultural mistrust refers to African-Americans' mistrust of White Americans and traditional

American systems, such as educational and training settings, work and business settings, and interpersonal and social settings (Terrell & Terrell, 1981). Other theorists claimed that the needs of African-American students were not met because White counselors used traditional interventions that conflicted with the child's cultural values and beliefs (Parker, 1998; Sue & Sue, 1999). This belief led to the philosophy that all counselors become "multiculturally competent" (Pedersen, 1996) which meant that these types of professionals acquire skills training, an open mind and attitude, and a better understanding of one's own ethnicity (Arrendondo & McDavis, 1992).

The relationship between attitudes towards a person's own group and other groups evolves itself through one's identity (DeVos, 1982; Tajfel, 1981). Adolescence is a crucial time for change in one's identity development (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980). Researchers term ethnic identity as the social construct for measuring individuals' attitudes towards other groups (Phinney, Ferguson, & Tate, 1997). The importance of ethnic identity to self-concept has been well documented for African-Americans and other ethnic groups (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1990; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997; Phinney, Ferguson, & Tate, 1997).

Phinney (1989) developed a three-stage identity model applicable to minority adolescents, which provided the theoretical basis for this study. In stage one, known as the "unexamined ethnic identity" stage, adolescents are not concerned with ethnic issues, but commit to the values of the dominant culture. In stage two, known as the "ethnic identity search" stage, the minority individual experiences an identity crisis, but begins to understand cultural differences. In stage three, the minority individual reaches

"identity achievement." Adolescents with achieved ethnic identity are comfortable with their ethnic heritage and the culture of others.

Studies support the notion that counselor preference among African-American males is a function of their identity development (Atkinson & Lowe, 1995b; Helms & Carter, 1991; Phinney & Kohatsu, 1998). When exploring counselor preference, much research claimed that under equal conditions ethnically minority participants preferred ethnically similar counselors to ethnically dissimilar counselors (Leong, Wagner, & Tata, 1995; Thompson & Carter, 1997). When exploring the preferences of African-American males for same-sex counselors, researchers found that males displayed a stronger preference for same-sex counselors when it involved personal issues (Feingold, 1994). However, when concerns involved counseling for career problems or issues considered "non-personal," preferences based on counselor gender were not significant (Barbee & Cunningham, 1993). Helms and Carter (1991) added to the research on this topic by applying identity theory to their study. As part of their investigation, Helms and Carter (1991) found that the preference for same-sex counselors by African-American clients was determined by the participant's gender only when the individual reached the level of "ethnic identity achievement."

The purpose of this study was to look at the extent to which African-American adolescent males with EBD prefer male or female school counselors from their own ethnic group or male or female White school counselors based on their ethnic identity attitudes. The ultimate goal of this investigation was to see if an understanding of an individual's ethnic identity and the type of counseling issue would aid in developing an effective match between the school counselor and student and whether the target

group's ethnic identity attitudes impacted preferences in the same manner as it has for other types of populations. While previous studies examined the identity attitudes of African-American males as they associate to issues related to counselor preference, there have been no documented studies involving special education students in this area.

The following questions served as the foundation for the study.

- 1) At what stages of their ethnic identity development will African-American adolescent males with EBD have a higher preference for male or female school counselors from their own ethnic group or male or female White school counselors?
- 2) What are the strongest preferences among African-American adolescent males with EBD, who are in the "unexamined ethnic identity" stage, when choosing between male or female school counselors from their own ethnic group or male or female White school counselors?
- 3) What are the strongest preferences among African-American adolescent males with EBD, who are in the "ethnic identity search" stage, when choosing between male or female school counselors from their own ethnic group or male or female White school counselors?
- 4) Does the purpose for seeking counseling affect the school counselor preferences (in terms of gender and ethnicity) of African-American adolescent males with EBD?

Method

Participants

The principal investigator collected data from a cluster, non-random sample of all 84 African-American adolescent males diagnosed with mild or moderate EBD, who were currently enrolled in three urban high schools in the southeastern United States. In addition to the population under investigation, the three-targeted high schools contained general education students. All participants in the study spent a portion of their time in a self-contained setting and were mainstreamed into regular education courses at least half of the school day. The researcher chose the three schools in this study because of district and parent access, teacher cooperation, availability of participants in terms of attendance. Most importantly, these three facilities offered respondents which matched the special education population under investigation in terms of gender, ethnicity (race) and socioeconomic status.

The ages of the participants ranged from 14.50 to 18.83 ($M = 16.58$, $SD = 1.33$). The yearly attendance rates of the participants ranged from 65% to 98% ($M = 84.73\%$, $SD = 3.78\%$). Using a 4.0 scale, the grade point averages (GPA) of the participants ranged from .60 to 3.4 ($M = 2.12$, $SD = .595$). Within this sample, approximately 40% of the GPAs were below the participant's state high school graduation minimum of 2.0. All participants were classified as eligible for a federally free or reduced lunch.

Instruments

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). The researcher selected the MEIM (Phinney, 1992) to assess the ethnic identity stages for each participant in the study. Several other psychometric instruments were reviewed. Most of these instruments that

purported to measure ethnic identity were either too specific to a culture not involved in the study or inappropriate for the developmental level of the specific group under investigation.

The MEIM was previously used in numerous studies including adolescents from diverse groups such as the acculturation of Haitian-American adolescents (Bachay, 1998); self-esteem of African-American and Latino adolescents (Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997); and the identity of African-American and Latino Adolescents (Roberts, Phinney, Masse, & Roberts 1999). The original version of the scale was developed to assess ethnic commitment, and focused on individuals who represented Asian-American, Black, and Mexican-American ethnic groups and a comparison White group. Phinney and Tarver (1988) conducted interviews with adolescents to learn about the concerns that this group of children had regarding ethnicity and the way in which people communicated with one another. These findings, along with Phinney's extensive review of research on ethnic identity, led to the item additions designed to assess ethnic behaviors and attitudes and is the instrument used in this study.

The MEIM consisted of 20 items. Fourteen of the items directly assess three dimensions of ethnic identity, which are affirmation and belonging (five items), ethnic identity (seven items), and ethnic behaviors (two items). The other six items derive the subscale, "attitude towards other groups." Although "attitudes towards other groups" is not considered part of ethnic identity, it is known to interact as a factor with one's social identity within the larger society (Phinney, 1992).

The researcher scored the instrument using a 4-point Likert scale. The scores on each question ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). An average

total score between 1 and 2 implied that the participant was functioning at the lowest level (unexamined ethnic identity). A score between 2 and 3 suggested that the adolescent was operating at the middle level (ethnic identity search). A score between 3 and 4 indicated that the participant was functioning in the highest level (ethnic identity achievement).

In this context, the overall reliability for the MEIM was .81. The reliability coefficient for the affirmation/belonging subscale was .81. Phinney (1992) defined affirmation/belonging as one's attitude toward one's own ethnic group. The reliability coefficient for the ethnic identity subscale was .80. Phinney defined ethnic identity as how one related his ethnic group to other ethnic groups. The reliability coefficient for the ethnic behaviors subscale was .74. Phinney defined ethnic behaviors as how one felt about participating in cultural practices from one's own group.

School Counselor Preference Inventory (SCPI). The SCPI is an instrument adapted by the researcher from the previously designed Counselor Preference Inventory (CPI), used by Helms and Carter (1991). The CPI derives four strength of preference subscales. These are the individual's preference for a Black male counselor, Black female counselor, White male counselor, and White female counselor. Reliability coefficients for the CPI preference subscales of Black male counselors, Black female counselors, White male counselors, and White female counselors had reliability coefficients of .83, .86, .77, and .74, respectively (Helms and Carter, 1991).

To adapt the instrument, the researcher interviewed 19 school counselors who assisted children with EBD, as well as general education students, in order to provide the researcher with data on the types of issues or problems which would warrant

counselor assistance. After explaining the purpose of the study, the principal investigator asked each counselor two questions:

- 1) “Do you work with any students labeled with an emotional or behavioral disorder?”
- 2) “What types of issues and problems are brought to you by your students who are labeled with an emotional or behavioral disorder?”

Comparable with the number of questions in the CPI, the researcher used the responses derived by the interviewed school counselors along with the conceptual findings of Hitchner and Hitchner (1997) to serve as an initial guideline for establishing the adapted instrument and the development of the ten most common school counseling problems or issues which affect the target population. To fit the perspective of the student (client), these issues were then rephrased into “I” statements, which are listed below.

- 1) “I have a problem with one of my teachers.”
- 2) “I have a problem with another student.”
- 3) “I have a personal problem at home.”
- 4) “I have concerns about my future.”
- 5) “I have a personal problem at school.”
- 6) “I need help in choosing a career direction.”
- 7) “I feel depressed.”
- 8) “I wonder if I should stay in school.”
- 9) “I am really angry.”
- 10) “I have a problem with my work or study habits.”

For analysis purposes, consistent with the same framework used with the CPI and other preference studies (e.g., Abreu & Gabarain, 2000; Helms & Carter, 1991; McGoldrick, 1996; Pedersen, 1996) the researcher collapsed the instrument into two categories, which were personal and career. The SCPI followed the same four preference stems (subscales) from the CPI, which are “I would prefer a male counselor from my own racial/ethnic group.” “I would prefer a female counselor from my own racial/ethnic group.” “I would prefer a White male counselor.” and “I would prefer a White female counselor.” Although the target population in this study labeled themselves as “African-American,” the researcher used the term “Black” interchangeably when that term was used by a particular source mentioned in this project.

For each preference stem, respondents replied to a 5-point Likert scale, which offers the respondent to choose among strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), uncertain (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). From the 40 preference stems (10 issues x 4 preference stems), the participants’ responses indicated their strength of preference for each of the four subscales. To further confirm the suitability of the SCPI as an adapted measure of the CPI, the researcher determined the interrater reliability, by assessing how closely the Counselor Preference Scale matched the modified version (SCPI) on each question in terms of order, personal-career categorization and accuracy. Using the same panel of 19 counselors on each individual question, the proportion of agreement scores ranged from .95 ($p < .01$) to .81 ($p < .01$).

Personal Data Sheet. The Personal Data Sheet held and organized descriptive data gathered by the researcher as well as served as one measure for reconfirming the

validity of the SCPI. The first set of data, which was directly applied to the results of the study, included the child's exceptionality, eligibility for free or reduced lunch, grade level, attendance, grade point average (academics), and age. The second set of descriptive data was the child's effort and conduct grades and suspension history.

Procedures

The researcher gathered the descriptive data maintained in the Personal Data Sheet through the Integrated Student Information System (ISIS). This database system is used by the school district where this study occurred and provided all relevant educational information about each target participant. For matching purposes, and to ensure confidentiality, the participants ISIS numbers were used in place of their names on all test instruments and Personal Data Sheets. The ISIS number consisted of seven-digits and otherwise served as a student identification tool for the school district. The ISIS number is not used for social security or alien identification purposes and would only be useful to the student as long as he or she was enrolled in the school district.

The researcher administered the MEIM and the SCPI to all participants on the same day within the natural setting of the classroom. The researcher explained orally how to complete each questionnaire as well as provided detailed explanations of specific terms used in each instrument. Furthermore, because students with EBD tend to have short attention spans, the principal investigator encouraged the respondents to take test breaks when necessary. Respondents for the study were first given the MEIM to assess their perspective stages of ethnic identity. Including the explanation of directions, test completion, test breaks, and retrieval of instruments, the average student completed the MEIM in 25 minutes. The participants were then administered

the SCPI to assess their preference for a particular type of counselor ethnicity and gender. The same procedures provided by the MEIM were also provided in the SCPI. The average student completed the SCPI in 20 minutes.

The researcher used cronbach alpha measures to assess the level of internal consistency on the MEIM and SCPI, and found reliability scorers of .78 and .75 respectively. The respondents' preference scores from the SCPI were then matched with their ethnic identity attitude scores obtained from the MEIM to form differences, which the researcher investigated and analyzed.

Results

Results from the MEIM found that the respondents scored into either the unexamined ethnic identity (unexamined identity) stage ($n = 41$, $M = 1.74$, $SD = .21$), or the ethnic identity search (identity search) stage ($n = 43$, $M = 2.33$, $SD = .21$). None of the participants scored in the most advanced, ethnic identity achievement (identity achievement) stage.

Independent t-tests were performed to explore whether the two stage groups (unexamined identity and identity search) differed in age, attendance, and GPA. The groups did differ with respect to attendance (unexamined identity: $M = 86.41\%$, identity search: $M = 83.12\%$; $t(82) = 2.28$, $p < .05$) and GPA (unexamined identity: $M = 1.97$, identity search: $M = 2.29$; $t(82) = 2.55$, $p < .05$).

Preferences Between Ethnic Identity Stages

The first research question investigated the differences in counselor preferences between the two stages. Table 1 contains the preference means and standard deviations for the criterion and predictor variables. Using a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with Wilks's lambda criteria, the results revealed that significant

differences were found between the school counselor preferences of the members in the unexamined identity group and the school counselor preferences of the members in the identity search group, $F(3,79) = 3.42, p < .05$. Follow-up univariate analysis, indicated that participants in the identity search stage had a significantly stronger preference for school counselors who were Black males, $F(1,83) = 4.82, p < .05$, and Black females, $F(1,83) = 8.17, p < .01$, than those in the unexamined identity stage. These results showed no statistical difference between the two stage groups in the respondents' preferences for White school counselors.

Preferences Within Ethnic Identity Stages

The second and third research questions explored the differences in preference that the respondents within the unexamined and identity search stages had towards male or female school counselors from their own ethnic group and White school counselors. Multivariate analysis found that no significant differences existed within the unexamined stage among the four counselor preference choices (Black male, Black female, White male, White female), $F(3, 38) = 2.62, p > .05$. This result was confirmed through a (1x4) analysis of variance (ANOVA) (unexamined stage x preference) with repeated measures, using the Bonferroni multiple comparisons test, as shown in Table 2.

Conversely, multivariate analysis found that significant differences existed within the identity search stage group among the four counselor preference choices, $F(3, 40) = 7.42, p < .01$. This analysis was also followed by a (1x4) ANOVA (identity search stage x preference) with repeated measures, using the Bonferroni multiple comparisons test, as shown in Table 2. Participants in this stage group preferred Black male school

counselors compared with White male school counselors, $t(41) = 4.88$, $p < .001$. In addition, participants preferred Black female school counselors compared with White male school counselors, $t(41) = 5.89$, $p < .001$, and White female school counselors, $t(41) = 4.17$, $p < .001$. These findings demonstrated this stage group's strong preference for Black female school counselors when compared with White school counselors regardless of gender and the group's significantly lower preference for White male school counselors compared with ethnically similar school counselors in this study.

Preferences Based on Personal and Career Issues

The last research question explored the differences in preference that the participants had towards male or female school counselors from their own ethnic group and White school counselors, based on the counseling issue, i.e., personal or career. Since ethnic identity was not considered in this part of the analysis, participants were not divided by stage group. When examining the respondents' preferences based on personal issues, multivariate analysis found that significant differences existed within the four preference choices, $F(3, 81) = 9.84$, $p < .001$. As with the previous two research questions, these results were further explored through a (1x4) ANOVA with repeated measures using the Bonferroni multiple comparisons test, as shown in Table 3.

When dealing with personal issues, participants preferred Black male school counselors compared with White male school counselors, $t(82) = 4.91$, $p < .001$, and White female school counselors, $t(82) = 2.21$, $p < .05$, as well as Black female school counselors compared with White male school counselors, $t(82) = 6.72$, $p < .001$, and White female school counselors, $t(82) = 3.89$, $p < .001$. There were no significant

differences in preference when comparing White male school counselors and White female school counselors.

When examining the respondents' preferences based on career issues, a multivariate analysis found that significant differences existed within the four preference choices, $F(3, 81) = 6.18, p < .001$. These results were further explored through a 1x4 ANOVA with repeated measures, using the Bonferroni multiple comparisons test, as shown in Table 3. When it involved career issues compared with White male school counselors, respondents greatly preferred Black male school counselors, $t(82) = 2.75, p < .01$, and Black female school counselors, $t(82) = 4.01, p < .001$. There were no significant differences between Black school counselors of either gender and White female school counselors.

Discussion

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study indicated that African-American adolescent males with EBD preferred ethnically similar school counselors as they progressed in their ethnic identity development. The results on ethnic and gender preferences between the two stage groups supported the ethnic identity model established by Phinney (1989), and extended her findings to African-American adolescents with emotional and behavioral disorders. Phinney established that minority adolescents who had gained awareness of their ethnic identity displayed stronger preferences towards members of their own racial/ethnic group compared with individuals who had not yet made a resolution towards their ethnic values. This finding was also consistent with Ponterotto's (1996)

research which found that African-Americans' preferences for ethnically similar counselors was attributed to their "commitment" towards their own culture.

This study found that African-American adolescent males with EBD, who were in the identity search stage, differed from individuals in the unexamined identity stage, by having lower attendance rates and achievement levels (GPA). This may be partly explained by this group's lack of trust towards the dominant culture (Terrell & Terrell, 1981).

Unlike the results found by Helms and Carter (1991) and Morten and Atkinson (1993), this study found that African-American males with EBD who were concerned about their ethnic identities had the same preferences towards White counselors compared with African-Americans who were not concerned with their ethnic identities. In terms of preferences only, this finding was unique because it paralleled past results using general adult participants, who had reached the most mature stage of ethnic identity (identity achievement).

As with non-EBD populations, this study also found that race superseded gender preferences between individuals at both ethnic commitment levels, which is supported by Atkinson and Lowe (1995b). These researchers found that individuals exhibited more positive attitudes toward people who appeared more genetically similar. This finding was also consistent with Leong, Wagner, and Tata (1995), who found that under equal conditions, minority participants preferred ethnically similar counselors to ethnically dissimilar counselors.

This study examined the ethnic and gender preference differences of individuals who were found at the lowest stage (unexamined) of ethnic identity. The results of this

study also indicated that individuals with unexplored ethnic identities had equal preferences for all types of counselors regardless of ethnicity and gender. This contradicts numerous studies resulting from general populations (e.g., Parham and Helms, 1985; Parker, 1998; Thompson, Worthington, & Atkinson, 1994) which evolved from the same theoretical framework used in this study.

The differing results may be attributed to the participant's exceptionality instead of culture (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). This may support the contention that the ethnic identity development of children with EBD may filter more closely through the lens of their disability, rather than ethnicity or culture, as it does with children who suffer with mental retardation or physical impairments (Anderson & Grace, 1991). This may be further exemplified by the fact that students with EBD, who may develop their identities differently from the general education population, may view racism and mistrust differently as well (Ford, Harris, & Schuerger, 1993). Consequently, this finding may help to explain why this group exhibited such a low level of preference towards White male counselors in this study (Alston & Bell, 1996).

This study examined the ethnic and gender preference differences of individuals who were found at the middle stage (identity search) of their ethnic identity. This study's results were similar to research involving general populations, and was consistent with the empirical findings of Ponterotto and other researchers (1997), who found that African-American males who had made some commitment towards their ethnic identities preferred counselors from the same racial/ethnic group. These findings were also consistent with the results of other studies (e.g., Morten & Atkinson, 1993; Richardson & Helms, 1994; Thompson & Carter, 1997). Additionally, these results

paralleled the findings of the identity search component of Helms and Carter (1991), which found that African-American males had a particularly strong preference for ethnically similar females, and a significantly weak preference for White males.

The results which focused on preferences based on personal issues were based on items that include the counselor assisting a student who has a problem at home, with a teacher, another student, with school in general, as well as, helping a student deal with feelings of anger or depression. This part of the study found that African-American males with EBD preferred ethnically similar counselors, which was consistent with the findings of other research studies using general populations (e.g., Abreu & Gabarain, 2000; Allen, 1993; Helms & Carter, 1991; McGoldrick, 1996; Pedersen, 1996). However, the target group's lack of preference for White male counselors conflicted with other studies, which used general populations and found that gender superseded race when it involved personal issues (Barbee & Cunningham, 1993; Sue & Sue, 1999).

The results which focused on preferences based on career issues were based on items where a counselor may assist a student with his or her concerns about the future, help choose a career direction, consult with stay-in-school dilemmas, and assist with problems involving work or study habits. The results from this part of the study were similar to the preference results of other research studies using general populations, when it involved the target group's preferences for ethnically similar counselors (male and female), as well as, White female counselors (e.g., Atkinson & Lowe, 1995b; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1993; Dean, 1984; Helms & Carter, 1991; Pedersen, 1996).

Unlike the above findings, this study found that African-American adolescent males with EBD had a weaker preference for White male counselors compared with any

of the ethnically similar choices. The lack of regard for White male counselors, which permeated throughout the study, may be attributed to cultural mistrust (Terrell & Terrell, 1981).

Conclusion

This research provided information relative to the field of ethnic identity development of African-American adolescent males with EBD and its impact on counselor preference. As expected, the results suggested that ethnic identity levels affect the preferences that this population had towards their own ethnic group (Helms & Carter, 1991), but did not change their preferences towards White counselors. Consistent with this study's results, as African-American adolescents proceed into active exploration of their identities, they begin to question their relationship with the dominant culture, which affects how they respond to the environment (e.g., Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1990; Ford, Harris, & Schuerger, 1993). This feeling often leads to a belief of inferiority, which induces an anti-White perspective (e.g., Parham & Williams, 1993; Thompson, Worthington, & Atkinson, 1994; Watkins et. al., 1989).

The results regarding two of the four preference choices were theoretically inconsistent with Phinney's (1989) Model. The results indicating that African-American adolescent males with EBD had a stronger preference for ethnically similar female counselors, greatly differed from previous studies that used different populations. One reason for this phenomenon might be explained by the personal backgrounds of the (Gorman et. al., 1998).

The results indicating the sample's weak preference for White male counselors may be best explained by cultural mistrust. Cultural mistrust has often led these types

of adolescents to display feelings of belligerence and animosity toward their White male counterparts (Terrell & Terrell, 1981). When cultural mistrust is high, multicultural counseling may be deemed to be as ineffective as traditional counseling. This study helps provide information which will aid in enhancing the counselor-client relationship between White male counselors and students of the target population. In particular, this study supported the contention that effective counseling is impacted by the client's ethnic identity values.

The results indicating the sample's lack of preference for White male counselors, regardless of the type of counseling issue, further demonstrates that this population's purposes for seeking counseling affects client preference towards White male counselors and White female counselors differently. This population's higher tolerance for White counselors when it involved career issues as compared to personal issues may support this group's commitment to employment (Gysbers & Henderson, 1995). Understanding the individual's willingness to see the counselor will help provide the forum which will enable the counselor to deal more effectively with EBD students. This is critical, since students with EBD have a historically high dropout rate from school, which is a precursor to high unemployment levels among this group (Kauffman, 1999).

Knowledge about attitudes and ethnic identity is valuable for any counselor who wishes to understand African-American people, particularly African-American people with EBD. Greater understanding about the psyche of ethnic identity development for this group will likely lead to less counselor-client conflict and enhance service success. An African-American's level of ethnic identity may be influenced by socio-cultural (e.g., family, peers) (Parham & Williams, 1993), psychological (e.g., self-concept) (Resnicow

& Ross-Gaddy, 1997), personal (e.g., coping style) (Thompson, Worthington, & Atkinson, 1994), physical (e.g., skin color) (Powell-Thompson & Hopson, 1992), and systemic forces (racial discrimination) (Watkins et. al., 1989). Thus, through an analysis of ethnic identity, counselors will have a better understanding of preference which may help explain the reasons behind effective interventions.

Limitations

This study had a few limitations. First, although cronbach alphas were performed on the SCPI, it is an adapted instrument that was not rigorously field tested in the same manner as Helms and Carter's (1991) CPI. At the time of this study, there were no available counselor preference studies which suitably matched the issues involved with the population under investigation. Second, while this descriptive study attempts to predict how the research results will respond to a particular theoretical base, it will not be able to determine cause and effect.

Third, randomization of the sample was impossible because the available population was so minute. The number of participants was further limited due to the lack of permission by the school district and parental consent at certain sites, demographic restrictions and poor attendance. Fourth, since all participants originated from three schools, eligible participants from other areas were excluded from the study which may have impacted the data. It is also unclear what effect each school had on the respondents' experience since it was unlikely that the schools in this study had a uniform policy on how to service students with mild or moderate EBD.

Fifth, this study did not account for the impact that attendance and GPA may have had on the results of the two stage groups. This is significant since these two

variables are significantly different with EBD students compared with general education students. Last, while IQ was used as a variable in most other ethnic identity preference studies (Richardson & Helms, 1994; Thompson & Carter, 1997; Thompson, Worthington, & Atkinson 1994), it was not considered in this study. This was due to the large dispersion of time that had occurred since each participant was administered an IQ test.

Recommendations for Future Research

One logical step in studying counselor preference is to replicate this study with other cultural groups. For example, as with African-Americans, Latinos are also over-represented in EBD settings (Kauffman, 1999; Kirk & Gallagher & Anastasiow 2003). Using another cultural group will help determine if these types of individuals identify more with their disability or ethnicity. While this study focused on adolescents with mild or moderate EBD, future research should be geared to assess preferences of minority adolescents who are in different special education categories. While there have been preference studies which involved African-Americans with physical impairments, there is still a need for more research on adolescents with learning disabilities in this area. The preferences of adolescents with learning disabilities are an important untapped area, since members with this condition represent most of the special education population.

Furthermore, while there may be a limit to the number of female students with EBD, there is still enough to justify scholarly research. This is significant, since research has shown that males and females with EBD differ greatly in behavior depending on their developmental stages (Cairns & Cairns, 1994). In this study none of the participants reached the highest stage (identity achievement) of ethnic identity

development. Future research could be conducted in the form of a longitudinal study which could assess if any of the target participants attain identity achievement when they reach early adulthood. This study also found that age did not affect ethnic identity, which contradicted other research (Phinney & Chavira, 1992). Another interesting study may be to explore whether age affects ethnic identity among other special education populations.

With the exception of the unexamined identity group, the lack of preference towards White male school counselors was found throughout every other aspect of this study. Future research should be geared to explore the relationship between ethnic identity and cultural mistrust. This can be done with the added administration of the Cultural Mistrust Inventory (Terrell & Terrell, 1981).

Another issue to explore is what type of interventions will be effective with the target population? Research should focus on cases where students are assigned to specific school counselors and are not given a choice. In this circumstance, a critical research question might be what interventions will be effective when the gender or ethnicity of the counselor is of low preference to the client or student?

While this study placed heavy emphasis on ethnic identity to determine preferences, the MEIM may require modifications relative to its use with general education students. It may be imperative to develop an ethnic identity measure that is tailored to special education populations. In addition, while the MEIM assesses the ethnic identity levels of minority adolescents, it may be more prudent to develop an ethnic identity measure which is culture-specific. Furthermore, while African-Americans

as a Black racial population become more segmented, research will have to focus on a wider range of groups.

Implications for School Counselors

This study re-emphasized the importance of understanding ethnic identity formation in the school counseling arena. The preference findings in this study can serve as a basis for an understanding of the importance of developing more adequate multicultural counseling training in the counseling of students with disabilities. One way to address the gap between African-American adolescent males with EBD and their preference for White male school counselors is through group formats that provide affective support, nurture interpersonal skill building, and embrace the commonality of all human development.

The difference in findings when it regarded personal vs. career type issues suggested that schools become more specialized in their delivery of services. For example, it may be more prudent to assign each student to a school counselor for career issues and to a different school counselor for personal issues. Another suggestion may be to assist White school counselors in becoming more adept in addressing the personal issues of students with EBD and other special populations.

Furthermore, counselors can help educate teachers and students in an inclusive environment regarding the process by which adolescents acquire an understanding of their own ethnic identities. The Phinney (1989) model can be helpful in dispelling fears about ethnic groups meeting together. The assimilation process can be understood through group counseling sessions, by simulating experiences that the dominant culture experiences with minority individuals.

This study provides information that may increase a professional's skill in effectively counseling a student with EBD, by utilizing the pupil's ethnic identity attitude in facilitating a healthy counseling experience for the school counselor and client. It is apparent that African-American males with EBD may feel a higher level of distrust towards White males. Thus, the results suggest that White male school counselors should attend to these types of students' emotional reactions when discussing race-related problems. Although professionals continue to encourage school counselors to seek extensive training in this area, if the foregoing is true, then developing an understanding of the framework behind ethnic identity may be all that is necessary for developing culturally competent school counselors.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Respondent's Preferences by Stage

Preferences for Counselor	Unexamined Identity (n = 41)	Identity Search (n = 43)	Preferences for Counselor	Unexamined Identity (n = 41)	Identity Search (n = 43)
Black Male			White Male		
<u>M</u>	3.41	3.84	<u>M</u>	3.06	3.15
<u>SD</u>	.98	.82	<u>SD</u>	.88	.90
Black Female			White Female		
<u>M</u>	3.45	3.94	<u>M</u>	3.37	3.42
<u>SD</u>	.87	.67	<u>SD</u>	.79	.71

Table 2

Bonferroni Multiple Comparisons Test for

Unexamined Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Identity Search Stages

		<u>Unexamined Ethnic Identity</u>			<u>Ethnic Identity Search</u>		
		Mean Difference	df	p	Mean Difference	df	p
Black male	Black female	-.058	39	.997	-.100	41	.817
	White male	.351	39	.128	.691 ***	41	.001
	White female	.003	39	.999	.415	41	.075
Black female	Black male	.058	39	.997	.100	41	.817
	White male	.410	39	.177	.791 ***	41	.001
	White female	.095	39	.999	.515 ***	41	.001
White male	Black male	-.351	39	.128	-.691 ***	41	.001
	Black female	-.410	39	.177	-.791 ***	41	.001
	White female	-.314	39	.239	-.276	41	.082
White female	Black male	-.037	39	.999	-.415	41	.075
	Black female	-.095	39	.999	-.515 ***	41	.001
	White male	.314	39	.239	.276	41	.082

*** p < .001

Table 3

Bonferroni Multiple Comparisons Test for Preferences

Based on Personal and Career Issues

		<u>Personal Issues</u>			<u>Career Issues</u>		
		Mean Difference	df	p	Mean Difference	df	p
Black male	Black female	-.060	82	.999	-.143	82	.999
	White male	.570 ***	82	.001	.411 **	82	.009
	White female	.388 *	82	.031	.158	82	.999
Black female	Black male	.060	82	.999	.143	82	.999
	White male	.630 ***	82	.001	.554 ***	82	.001
	White female	.448 **	82	.004	.301	82	.086
White male	Black male	-.570 ***	82	.001	-.411 **	82	.009
	Black female	-.630 ***	82	.001	-.554 ***	82	.001
	White female	-.182	82	.567	-.253	82	.076
White female	Black male	-.388 *	82	.031	-.158	82	.999
	Black female	-.448 **	82	.004	-.301	82	.086
	White male	.182	82	.567	.253	82	.076

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

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Dr. Adam Kosnitzky is an Assistant Professor in the Ph.D. and M.Ed. programs at Lynn University (Boca Raton, FL.). He also serves as a licensed school counselor in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (FL.) and as a clinical educator for student service personnel seeking state certification. He has experience counseling diverse student populations in early childhood, elementary, middle, senior, adult and higher education settings. His areas of interest and expertise involve counseling ethnically diverse and special education populations.

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