

# The Effects of African American Movement Styles on Teachers' Perceptions and Reactions

**La Vonne I. Neal**, *Southwestern University*

**Audrey Davis McCray**, *The University of Texas at Austin*

**Gwendolyn Webb-Johnson**, *The University of Texas at Austin*

**Scott T. Bridgest**, *Southwestern University*

This study examined teachers' perceptions of African American males' aggression and achievement and the need for special education services based on African American students' cultural movement styles (i.e., walking). The participants, 136 middle school teachers, viewed a videotape and completed a questionnaire. To study interaction effects between student ethnicity and student movement and teachers' ratings of student achievement, aggression, and need for special education, a completely randomized factorial analysis of variance was employed. The results indicated that the teachers perceived students with African American culture-related movement styles as lower in achievement, higher in aggression, and more likely to need special education services than students with standard movement styles. Implications for research are discussed.

Cultural identity makes life secure and meaningful (Boykin, 1983; Tatum, 1997), and knowledge of culture provides a sense of power (Delpit, 1995). Not only does culture allow us to maintain our sense of identity and how we perceive ourselves, it also represents the lens through which we view and evaluate the behaviors of others. Teachers' perceptions of culture-related identities and their manifestations in the classroom are especially relevant to school achievement by students. African American students, for example, have been found to benefit from a culturally responsive pedagogy that is theoretically grounded in teaching-effectiveness research (Gay, 2000; Irvine & Armento, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001). African American students' chances of school achievement increase when they, like their non-African American schoolmates, experience education with teachers who understand their sociocultural knowledge and take into account cultural factors when designing, implementing, and evaluating instruction (e.g., Boykin & Bailey, 2000; Ellison, Boykin, Towns, & Stokes, 2000). Such teachers maintain high standards and expectations for students' social, behavioral, and academic competence, and they create caring and supportive learning environments that promote students' cultural identities and encourage high academic performance.

Teachers' misunderstandings of and reactions to students' culturally conditioned behaviors can lead to school and social failure, however. Researchers have indicated that teachers' perceptions and lack of cultural responsiveness can result in student psychological discomfort and low achievement (Hilliard, 1976; Obiakor, 1999) and in social and academic failure (Banks & Banks, 1993; Gay, 1994, 1997; Payne, 1995; Pol-

lack, 1998). Ladson-Billings (2001) argued, "Students of color may become alienated from the schooling process because schooling often asks children to be something or someone other than who they really are. . . . It asks them to dismiss their community and cultural knowledge. It erases things that the students hold dear" (p. xiv). Moreover, notwithstanding the implications for poor achievement outcomes when teachers fail to connect students' culture and schooling, the risk for teacher referral for special education services increases (see, e.g., Hilliard, 1992; Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999; Patton, 1998; Valles, 1998) and should be examined more closely. As Bahr, Fuchs, Stecker, and Fuchs (1991) noted in their study of racial bias in teacher practices, the research literature on teacher referral practices indicates the presence of bias in simulated studies but an absence of bias in more naturalistic studies. More recent studies have presented similar and conflicting results, that is, an absence of teacher bias in naturalistic studies (MacMillan, Gresham, Lopez, & Bocian, 1996; MacMillan & Reschley, 1998; e.g., MacMillan, Gresham, & Bocian, 1997) and an equally compelling knowledge base indicating the presence of teacher bias in referral practices when simulations are conducted (Bahr et al., 1991; Glenn, 1996; Presswood, 1998). There is a need, therefore, to further examine teachers' perceptions of cultural influences on student behavior and achievement and the teachers' beliefs regarding whether a student needs special education services. In our simulated study, we attempted to shed light on the issue of teachers' perceptions and beliefs about African American students' achievement, aggression, and need for special education services.

Boykin (1983) identified nine dimensions of African American culture that encompass the essence of African American experiences and interactions: spirituality, harmony, movement, verve, affect, communalism, expressive individualism, oral tradition, and social time perspectives of ecological interactions. They are consistent with a traditional West African cultural ethos (Boykin, 1994; Boykin & Ellison, 1993; Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hilliard, 1976; Holliday, 1985; Kunjufu, 1984; Ogbu, 1985; Scott, 1985; Shade & Edwards, 1987; Smitherman, 1977, 1985). In regards to the continued development of African American culture, Boykin and Toms suggested that it is transmitted through a tacit cultural process. Individuals acquire modes, sequences, and styles of behavior through their daily encounters with significant others. Movement, in particular, has been an integral part of the African American experience in the United States.

Stylized movements have been characteristic of African American development. A cultural emphasis on the interweaving of movement, rhythm, percussion, music, and dance has been central to the psychological health of African Americans (Boykin, 1983). One example of stylized movement is often referred to as the "cool pose," considered characteristic of many African American males. According to Majors and Mancini Billson (1992), the cool pose is "a ritualized form of masculinity that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength, and control" (p. 4). Neal (1997) characterized walking styles as *standard* or *nonstandard*. A standard walking style, used primarily among European American adolescents, was defined as an erect posture with leg and arm swing synchronized with posture and pace, a steady stride, and a straight head. A nonstandard walking style (also referred to as a "stroll"), which is used by some African American adolescents, was characterized as a deliberately swaggered or bent posture, with the head held slightly tilted to the side, one foot dragging, and an exaggerated knee bend (dip). For the purposes of this study, we used the term *stroll* to refer to the walking style of African American males.

One of the dominant stereotypes concerning African American males that European Americans tend to hold is that they are hostile, angry, and prone to violence (Carby, 1998; Fujiooka, 1999; Sue & Sue, 1990). The motion picture industry and the news media shape much of how European Americans perceive African American male adolescents. For example, the motion picture industry and the news media have taken the movement styles of African American male adolescents, such as their walking styles, and presented them in a manner that invokes fear in the majority population (Carby, 1998). The danger of stereotypes is that they are not based on logic or experience (Steele, 1997; Sue & Sue, 1990), yet they may affect teachers' expectations of students (Obiakor, 1999).

The extent to which teacher expectations relate to the school failure of African American students is uncertain. Teacher expectations have been defined as "inferences that teachers make about the future behavior or academic achieve-

ment of their students, based on what they currently know about these students" (Good, 1987, p. 32). Some researchers (Cecil, 1988; Crano and Mellon, 1978; Ishii-Jordan, 2000; Leacock, 1969; Oswald et al., 1999; Persell, 1977; Rist, 1970) have suggested that ethnicity and social class are characteristics that frequently create negative expectations, which in turn lead to differential treatment of students from low-SES and minority groups. Delpit noted, for example, that teachers lowered their expectations of the academic abilities of African American students who spoke in African American English. By contrast, teachers raised their expectations concerning the academic abilities of African American students who used standardized English. Furthermore, teachers have been noted to view behaviors that are culturally appropriate in students' families, among their peers, and in their communities as overly aggressive, inappropriate, negative, rude, intimidating, and threatening (Foster, 1986; Majors & Mancini Billson, 1992). Teachers also might perceive the walking styles of African American adolescents as inappropriate behavior that compromises their success in the general education classroom (Brophy & Good, 1970). Irvine and Armento (2001) noted that as diverse students become more tenacious in their efforts to maintain their cultural identity, teachers who are unfamiliar and inexperienced with student diversity often overreact and impose unenforceable rules, expectations, and prohibitors.

This study explored teachers' perceptions regarding African American males' aggression, achievement, and need for special education assistance based on their cultural movements (i.e., stroll). In particular, we attempted to answer three questions related to African American movement styles and teacher perceptions:

1. Does the stroll of African American adolescent males affect teachers' perceptions of their achievement?
2. Does the stroll of African American male adolescents affect teachers' perceptions of their aggression?
3. Do teachers expect students who stroll to need special education assistance?

Providing answers to such questions should assist teachers of African American learners in particular, and students generally, in identifying and distinguishing between culturally informed behaviors and disability, thus rendering a more accurate judgment of students' academic achievement and the need for special education services.

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants for this study were 136 middle school teachers in a suburban school district in a southwestern state. We iden-

TABLE 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	Video group assignment							
	AA stroll		EA stroll		AA standard		EA standard	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender <sup>a</sup>								
Male	10	29.4	6	18.2	5	15.2	7	22.2
Female	24	70.6	27	81.8	28	84.2	27	78.8
Ethnicity <sup>b</sup>								
African American	1	2.9	0	0	2	6.1	1	2.9
Asian American	1	2.9	0	0	1	3.0	1	2.9
European American	30	88.4	32	94.2	29	87.9	30	88.3
Hispanic American	1	2.9	1	2.9	0	0	3	5.9
Other	1	2.9	1	2.9	1	3.0	0	0
Childhood residence <sup>c</sup>								
Rural	10	30.3	7	20.6	16	36.4	6	18.2
Suburban	15	45.5	20	58.8	15	45.5	20	60.6
Urban	8	24.2	7	20.6	6	18.1	7	21.2
Certification <sup>a</sup>								
General education	29	87.9	26	78.8	27	79.4	28	82.4
Special education	4	12.1	7	21.2	7	20.6	6	17.6
Teaching experience (# of yrs)								
<i>M</i>	11.24		9.0		11.75		9.11	
<i>SD</i>	8.18		6.88		9.41		6.69	

Note. AA = African American; EA = European American.

<sup>a</sup>*n* = 134. <sup>b</sup>*n* = 135. <sup>c</sup>*n* = 133.

tified three campuses in the aforementioned district that were racially, ethnically, and economically representative of the six middle schools in the district. We chose campuses with diverse student populations because the primary focus of the study was teachers' perceptions of student aggression and achievement based on the ethnicity and movement styles of their students.

We contacted the middle school administrators to request permission to conduct research on their respective campuses during scheduled in-service training days. The three campuses employed a total of 150 teachers, of whom 136 (91%) agreed to participate in the study by completing a questionnaire and viewing one of four videotapes. One teacher declined our request to provide any demographic data but agreed to participate otherwise; therefore, demographic information is available for 135 teachers. To mitigate bias, neither the researchers nor school administrators discussed the purpose of the research with the teachers. They were told they were participating in a study about middle school students and teachers. In addition, we arranged to conduct the investigation when the in-service topics were unrelated to cultural diversity in order to prevent the results from being skewed due to participants' sensitivity training on cultural diversity.

As can be seen in Table 1, the demographic information aggregated by video group assignment (African American stroll,

European American stroll, African American standard, and European American standard) indicated that of the participants who completed the questionnaire and viewed the videotaped scenarios, the majority within each group consisted of European American females. Reported childhood residence further indicated that most of the participants also had grown up in suburban communities. Across the group assignments, the vast majority of the participants had attended schools with predominately European American students (69.7%, 82.4%, 61.8%, and 66.7%). Less than one fourth of the teachers in the study had been a student in schools with racially and ethnically diverse student bodies. Regarding teacher certification, the majority of the participants in each of the four group assignments reported credentials as general education teachers. Across the four groups, only 12% to 21% of the participants were special education teachers; participants' years of teaching experience ranged from 9 years to nearly 12 years. Finally, the participants' ages ranged from 22 years to 46 years.

### Instrumentation

A videotape depicting two students walking and a questionnaire with adjectives to indicate perceptions of aggression and achievement were used in this study to ascertain teachers' per-

ceptions of student aggression and achievement. A 4-point Likert scale was also included in the questionnaire to determine whether the study participants would perceive students as needing special education services.

**Videotape.** A scenario was developed to illustrate movement style (in this case, walking). We selected a middle school as the venue for the filming of the videotape to provide teachers with a visual of a familiar location. An African American student and a European American student performed each walking movement (standard and stroll). They began next to a locker, walked into a classroom, and sat down at the rear of the classroom. We developed this scenario because students walking from a locker to a classroom are images that middle school teachers routinely observe.

The European American and African American students were eighth graders who performed the standard walk and stroll as directed by us. Four videotapes were developed. Videotape 1 depicted an African American student demonstrating a stroll. Videotape 2 depicted a European American student demonstrating the same stroll. Videotape 3 showed an African American student demonstrating a standard walk, and Videotape 4 depicted a European American student demonstrating the same standard walk.

To control for dress, we had the students wear attire similar to what a middle school student would wear: blue-jean pants, athletic shoes, white T-shirt, and a basketball jersey of a professional team. To control for physical size, we selected students who were of a similar height and weight.

**Videotape Reliability and Validity.** Five observers (an educational psychologist, a student behavior consultant, an associate psychologist, and two secondary education administrators) previewed the videotaped scenario and movements. After watching the videotape, the observers completed a checklist we had developed to confirm that the students' characteristics, such as weight, height, clothing, standard walk, stroll, and so forth, were similar. Interrater agreement was 100% when each observer, using the checklist, verified the characteristics of the standard walk and the characteristics of the stroll. Using the checklist, the observers also validated the scenario by confirming that each student engaged in similar scenarios that were typical of middle school students.

**Questionnaire.** We used the *Adjective Checklist* (ACL; Gough & Heilbrun, 1983) as the basis for the development of a questionnaire to use in conjunction with the videotapes. The questionnaire was composed of two sections: Section 1 requested demographic information from the participant, and Section 2 consisted of two scales from the 1983 edition of the ACL that allowed the participants to rate their perceptions of "aggression" and "achievement" as shown in the students' demonstration of a walking movement. Each scale had indicative (scored as +1) and contraindicative (scored as -1) adjectives.

The achievement scale consisted of 38 adjectives—25 indicative items (e.g., *active, ambitious*) and 13 contraindicative items (e.g., *apathetic, irresponsible*). The raw score range of the achievement scale was -13 to +25. The aggression scale consisted of 44 adjectives—21 indicative items (e.g., *aggressive, argumentative*) and 23 contraindicative items (e.g., *calm, relaxed*). The raw score range for the aggression scale was -23 to +21. Because 6 of the adjectives from the two scales were the same, instead of 82 adjectives, the questionnaire contained 76 adjectives from the combined ACL achievement and aggression scales. The alpha reliability coefficients for the achievement scale were .85 for boys and .82 for girls. For the aggression scale, the alpha coefficients were .72 for boys and .74 for girls.

One question that used a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *very unlikely*, 2 = *unlikely*, 3 = *likely*, and 4 = *very likely*) was included in Section 2 to determine if the participants would refer the particular student viewed on the videotape to receive special education services. The question read as follows: "Assuming that you were this student's teacher, what is the likelihood that he would need special education services?"

### *Data Collection, Study Design, and Analysis*

We conducted general meetings with the teacher participants on their respective campuses. The participants were assigned randomly to four groups on each campus, and each group watched a different videotape. Each teacher thus viewed one videotape. After providing general instructions to each school's group of participants, we sent them to separate classrooms with their respective groups. To study interaction effects between student ethnicity and student movement and teachers' ratings of student achievement, aggression, and special education placement, we employed completely randomized factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) with two levels of the ethnicity factor (African American and European American) and two levels of the student movement factor (standard walk and stroll).

## Results

### *Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Achievement*

Table 2 presents the results of a factorial ANOVA. As can be seen in the table, the interaction effect between movement and ethnicity was not statistically significant,  $F = 0.52, p = 0.47$ ; therefore, main effects were examined. Statistically significant differences were found for the two main effects of movement style,  $F = 17.80, p = .001$ , and ethnicity,  $F = 4.53, p = .04$ . As shown in Table 3, an examination of the means and standard deviations for movement indicated that teacher participants perceived the students with a stroll to be lower in

achievement,  $M = -1.99$ ,  $SD = 4.97$ , than the students with the standard movement style,  $M = 1.46$ ,  $SD = 4.64$ . Teachers rated the European American student with a stroll,  $M = -2.76$ ,  $SD = 4.91$ , lower in achievement than the African American student with a stroll,  $M = -1.26$ ,  $SD = 5.00$ . They rated the African American student demonstrating the standard walk as higher in achievement,  $M = 2.62$ ,  $SD = 4.87$ , than the European American student demonstrating a standard walk,  $M = 0.29$ ,  $SD = 4.16$ . For the variable of ethnicity, teachers rated the African American student higher in achievement,  $M = .60$ ,  $SD = 5.29$ , than the European American student,  $M = -1.13$ ,  $SD = 4.47$ .

**Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Aggression**

The results of a factorial ANOVA are presented in Table 4. As indicated in the table, there was no statistically significant interaction effect between movement and ethnicity; therefore, main effects were examined. Results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference for movement style,  $F = 31.32$ ,  $p = 0.001$ , but not for ethnicity,  $F = 0.63$ ,  $p = 0.43$ . An examination of the means and standard deviations are presented in Table 5. As can be seen, teachers perceived the students with a stroll as higher in aggression,  $M = -0.57$ ,  $SD =$

6.43, than the students with the standard movement style,  $M = -6.16$ ,  $SD = 5.12$ . No statistically significant differences were found in teachers' perceptions of aggression for the African American student with a stroll,  $M = 0.51$ ,  $SD = 6.21$ , and his European American peer with a stroll,  $M = -1.73$ ,  $SD = 6.54$ . Finally, no statistically significant differences were found between teachers' ratings of aggression for the African American student with the standard walk,  $M = -6.24$ ,  $SD = 5.10$ , and the European American student with the standard walk,  $M = -6.09$ ,  $SD = 5.22$ .

**Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Need for Special Education**

Finally, we examined teachers' perceptions of students' need for special education. Results of the factorial ANOVA are presented in Table 6. There was no statistically significant interaction effect between movement and ethnicity; therefore, main effects were examined. As can be seen in the table, a statistically significant difference for the main effect of movement style was found,  $F = 14.35$ ,  $p = 0.001$ , but not for ethnicity,  $F = 0.37$ ,  $p = 0.54$ . Table 7 shows the means and standard deviations for movement style. Teachers perceived the students with a stroll as more likely to need special education services,  $M = 2.26$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ , than the students with

**TABLE 2.** *F* Ratios for a Two-Factor Factorial ANOVA with Movement Style and Ethnicity as Independent Variables and Achievement as the Dependent Variable

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Movement style (A)	1	402.62	402.62	17.80**	0.001
Ethnicity (B)	1	102.38	102.38	4.53*	0.04
A × B	1	11.76	11.76	0.52	0.47
Residual	132	2985.71	22.62	—	—
Total	135	3502.47	—	—	—

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

**TABLE 3.** Means and Standard Deviations for Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Effects of Standard and Stroll Movement Styles and Ethnicity on Achievement

Ethnicity	Movement					
	Stroll		Standard		Marginal	
	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>
African American	-1.26	(5.00)	2.62	(4.87)	.60	(5.29)
European American	-2.76	(4.91)	0.29	(4.16)	-1.13	(4.77)
Marginal	-1.99	(4.97)	1.46	(4.64)	—	—



**TABLE 4.** *F* Ratios for a Two-Factor Factorial ANOVA with Movement Style and Ethnicity as Independent Variables and Aggression as the Dependent Variable

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Movement style (A)	1	1061.76	1061.76	31.32	0.001
Ethnicity (B)	1	21.44	21.44	0.63	0.43
A × B	1	30.12	30.12	0.89	0.35
Residual	132	4474.29	33.90	—	—
Total	135	5587.62	—	—	—

**TABLE 5.** Means and Standard Deviations for Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Effects of Standard and Stroll Movement Styles and Ethnicity on Aggression

Ethnicity	Movement					
	Stroll		Standard		Marginal	
	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )
African American	.51	(6.21)	−6.24	(5.10)	−2.97	(6.51)
European American	−1.73	(6.54)	−6.09	(5.22)	−3.76	(6.38)
Marginal	−0.57	(6.43)	−6.16	(5.12)	—	—

**TABLE 6.** *F* Ratios for a Two-Factor Factorial ANOVA with Movement Style and Ethnicity as Independent Variables and Special Education as the Dependent Variable

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Movement style (A)	1	4.74	4.74	14.35	0.001
Ethnicity (B)	1	.12	.12	.37	0.54
A × B	1	.44	.44	1.32	0.25
Residual	124	40.99	0.33	—	—
Total	127	46.37	—	—	—

**TABLE 7.** Means and Standard Deviations for Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Effects of Standard and Stroll Movement Styles and Ethnicity on Need for Special Education

Ethnicity	Movement					
	Stroll		Standard		Marginal	
	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )
African American	2.29	(0.74)	1.79	(0.55)	2.03	(0.69)
European American	2.24	(0.55)	1.97	(0.41)	2.10	(0.51)
Marginal	2.26	(0.64)	1.87	(0.49)	—	—

a standard walk,  $M = 1.87$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ . No statistically significant differences were found in teacher's ratings of a need for special education for the African American student with a stroll,  $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ , versus the European American with a stroll,  $M = 2.24$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ . Finally, no statistically significant differences were found in the teachers' ratings of a need for special education for the African American student with a standard walk,  $M = 1.79$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ , and the European American student with a standard walk,  $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ .

## Discussion

Hilliard (1992) argued, "We know that we have a problem in equity when we see the outcomes of education distributed as a function of socioeconomic status, race, culture, [or] language group" (p. 169). Regardless of their socioeconomic status, African American boys (Oswald et al., 1999) remain especially vulnerable to poor schooling, underachievement, inappropriate discipline, and placement in special education programs (Patton, 1998; Patton & Townsend, 2001). In this study, we examined middle school teachers' perceptions of African American boys' aggression, achievement, and need for special education based on the boys' culture-related movements (i.e., stroll).

A major finding was that teachers perceived African American and European American students with a stroll to be lower in achievement than African American and European American students with the standard movement style. African American students were generally perceived as higher achieving than European American students. Another finding was that teachers perceived African American and European American students with a stroll to be higher in aggression than African American and European American students with the standard movement style. No differences in teacher perceptions of aggression were noted for students based on their ethnicity or race. Finally, although no differences were noted based on ethnic or racial classification, teachers perceived African American and European American students with a stroll as more likely to need special education services than African American and European American students with the standard movement style.

These results support researchers' arguments that there needs to be a plurality of perspectives regarding the roles that difference and interpretations of difference have in identifying students' behaviors as disordered (Artiles, 1998; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Oswald et al., 1999; Patton, 1998; Patton & Townsend, 2001). Although some researchers have proposed such efforts as numerical disaggregation (Kauffman, 1993), improved formulae for calculating overrepresentation (Chinn & Hughes, 1987), and ethnic membership redefinition and specificity (MacMillan & Reschley, 1998) to redress disproportionality in special education programs, there is, as Artiles (1998) argued, a need to understand the difference dilemma

beyond the effects of standardized testing, SES, language, or ethnicity. Oswald et al. (1999), for example, noted that variables such as teacher beliefs and professional experiences may help to explain teachers' referral practices regarding African American students that placement rates alone may not. The idea of "teacher as test" (Gerber & Semmel, 1984), or the teacher as a standard for judging the accuracy of an existing deficit, may be a significant variable in the school success and referral to special education of African American students (Bahr et al., 1991). Teachers are highly likely to mistake cultural differences for cognitive or behavioral disabilities, and their ways of knowing are often incongruent with diverse students' educational realities and possibilities. When teachers are not aware of or do not understand the educational needs of African American students, or when they fail to incorporate teaching and learning processes that are more compatible with students' cultures, the consequence may be inaccurate and inappropriate referrals to special education placement for certain students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Therefore, teachers' perceptions and beliefs about student achievement and acceptable behavior—and student outcomes—must be studied continually and systematically.

Another finding was the nonsignificant trend suggesting that teachers perceived African American males with a stroll as higher in achievement than European American males with a stroll. This finding may help explain the impact of culturally conditioned behaviors on teachers' expectations and reactions. This finding further illuminates the complex nature of teachers' perceptions and decisions about their students, especially students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds; thus making it nearly impossible, and less meaningful, to attempt to study the issue of disproportionality from a paradigm that overlooks sociocultural and school-related factors. Marion (1981), for example, found that when European American males failed to meet teachers' expectations of compliant, docile, and conforming behaviors, they were summarily placed in classes for students with mild mental retardation. Marion concluded that when European American males behave in ways reflective of what is perceived as African American males' behavioral styles (e.g., strolling), they are likely to be viewed as more deviant than their African American peers (Marion, 1981; Pollack, 1998). Teachers' expectations for students may be informed by what they understand as appropriate behavior and whom they expect to engage in particular types of behavior.

Given the long history of African American males being perceived as behaviorally deviant and intellectually inferior, it should come as no surprise that other non-African American students perceived as "acting Black" also may be at risk for low teacher expectations and school underachievement. It is possible that males face a greater risk for school failure, despite beginning school with a strong cultural identity (i.e., the stroll; Boykin, 1983; Tatum, 1997) and cultural sagacity. For example, although we expected teachers to rate students with a standard walk similarly, the teachers did not necessarily per-

ceive both students (African American and European American) as equally capable. The nonsignificant trend suggesting that teacher participants perceived the African American student with a standard walk as a higher achiever than the similarly situated European American student reinforces the need for researchers to examine how race, ethnicity, language, culture, and classroom/teacher variables influence referral and placement decisions. In the present study, culturally conditioned behaviors, regardless of student ethnicity, led teachers to see students with a stroll as more aggressive and in greater need of special education. It stands to reason, therefore, that ethnicity and culture are inextricably linked variables for investigating and interpreting how teachers might react to behavioral differences.

### Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. First, the sample size and composition could pose threats to external validity. Second, the adapted *Adjective Checklist* used by the teachers has alpha coefficients that are on the low end of the acceptable range. A third limitation is that this study was a simulation and, as with all simulations, there is an assumption that people's behavior in a staged context generalizes to natural contexts. Nonetheless, this study was an important first step for systematically examining effects of student movement on teachers' perceptions of their achievement, aggression, and need for special education. Although the researchers focused on student ethnicity as the variable, this research could be expanded to examine whether a teacher's ethnicity affects his or her perceptions of African American adolescents' movement styles. Examining the effects of teacher ethnicity would provide additional insight into the differential expectations for and treatment of African American students and others. Student gender could also be used as a variable in future studies to examine teachers' reactions to noted culturally sanctioned patterns of movement demonstrated by African American females (e.g., head rolling and hand waving), given that they, too, may be at risk for poor achievement (Irvine, 1990). Finally, qualitative and quantitative studies could be conducted to determine further teacher-student interactions and student outcomes for students who stroll. For instance, researchers might explore the following questions: For students who stroll, are referrals made, and if so, what are the results of those referrals? Are referred students placed in special education, and what are the outcomes of those placements? If students are not referred, what modifications are made to the existing curriculum and instruction to facilitate their academic achievement and sociocultural identity in the general education classroom?

### Conclusions

The present academic and social skill status of African American learners provides compelling evidence that systematic in-

quiry is warranted. The continued incomplete school success of African American students, particularly adolescent males, justifies culturally responsive inquiry and pedagogy to reverse the present trends toward school and social skill failure.

### REFERENCES

- Artiles, A. J. (1998). The dilemma of difference: Enriching the disproportionality discourse with theory and context. *The Journal of Special Education, 32*, 32-36.
- 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.
- 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.
- Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. (1993). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Boykin, A. W. (1983). The academic performance of Afro-American children. In J. Spence (Ed.), *Achievement and achievement motives* (pp. 324-371). San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.
- Boykin, A. W. (1994). The sociocultural context of schooling for African American children. A proactive deep structural analysis. In E. Hollins (Ed.), *Formulating a knowledge base for teaching culturally diverse learners* (pp. 233-245). Philadelphia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Boykin, A. W., & Bailey, C. T. (2000). *The role of cultural factors in school relevant cognitive functioning: Synthesis of findings on cultural contexts, cultural orientations, and individual differences*. Washington, DC: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk.
- Boykin, A. W., & Toms, F. D. (1985). Black child socialization: A cultural framework. In H. P. McAdoo & J. L. McAdoo (Eds.), *Black children: Social, educational, and parental environments* (pp. 33-51). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Boykin, A. W., & Ellison, C. (1993). The multiple ecologies of Black youth socialization: An Afrographic analysis. In R. Taylor (Ed.), *Black youth* (pp. 93-127). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Brophy, J. E., & Good, T. L. (1970). Teachers' communications of differential expectations for children's classroom performance: Some behavioral data. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 61*, 365-374.
- Carby, H. V. (1998). *Race men*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chinn, P. C., & Hughes, S. (1987). Representation of minority students in special education classes. *Remedial and Special Education, 3*, 41-46.
- Cecil, N. L. (1988). Black dialect and academic success: A study of teacher expectations. *Reading Improvement, 25*(1), 34-38.
- Crano, W. D., & Mellon, P. M. (1978). Causal influence of teachers' expectations on children's academic performance: A cross-lagged panel analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 70*, 39-49.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children*. New York: The New Press.
- Ellison, C., Boykin, A. W., Towns, D. P., & Stokes, A. (2000). *Classroom cultural ecology: The dynamics of classroom life in schools serving low-income African American children*. Washington, DC: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk.
- Foster, H. L. (1986). *Ribbin', jivin' & playing the dozens: The persistent dilemma in our schools*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.
- Fujioka, Y. (1999). Television portrayals and African American stereotypes: Examination of television effects when direct contact is lacking. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 76*(1), 52-75.
- Gay, G. (1994). *At the essence of learning: Multicultural education*. West Lafayette, IN: Kappa Delta Pi.
- Gay, G. (1997). Educational equality for students of color. In J. A. Banks & C. A. Banks (Eds.), *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (3rd ed., pp. 195-228). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.



- Gerber, M. M., & Semmel, M. I. (1984). Teacher as imperfect test: Reconceptualizing the referral process. *Educational Psychologist, 19*, 137-148.
- Glenn, N. A. (1996). Disproportionate representation of African American students in special education programs: Referral and skin graduation (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 1996). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 5709A*, 9705844.
- Good, T. (1987). To decades of research on teacher expectations: Findings and future directions. *Journal of Teacher Education, 38*(4), 32-47.
- Gough, H. G., & Heilbrun, A. B. (1983). *The Adjective Checklist manual*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Hilliard, A. G. (1976). *Free your mind: Return to the source, African origins*. Atlanta: Georgia State University Press.
- Hilliard, A. G. (1992). Behavioral style, culture, teaching and learning. *Journal of Negro Education, 61*, 370-377.
- Holliday, B. G. (1985). Towards a model of teacher-child transactional processes affecting Black children's academic achievement. In M. B. Spencer, G. K. Brookins, & W. R. Allen (Eds.), *Beginnings: The social and affective development of black children* (pp. 117-130). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Irvine, J. J. (1990). *Black students and school failure: Policies, practices, and prescriptions*. New York: Greenwood.
- Irvine, J. J., & Armento, B. J. (2001). *Culturally responsive teaching: Lesson planning for elementary and middle grades*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Ishii-Jordan, S. R. (2000). Behavioral interventions used with diverse students. *Behavioral Disorders, 25*, 299-309.
- Kauffman, J. M. (1993). How we might achieve the radical reform of special education. *Exceptional Children, 60*(1), 6-16.
- Kunjufu, J. (1984). *Developing positive self images and discipline in Black children*. Chicago: African American Images.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Leacock, E. B. (1969). *Teaching and learning in city schools*. New York: Basic.
- MacMillan, D. L., Gresham, F. M., & Bocian, K. M. (1997). Discrepancy between definitions of learning disabilities and what schools use. An empirical investigation. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 31*, 314-326.
- MacMillan, D. L., Gresham, F. M., Lopez, M. F., & Bocian, K. (1996). Comparison of students nominated for pre-referral interventions by ethnicity and gender. *The Journal of Special Education, 30*, 133-151.
- MacMillan, D. L., & Reschly, D. J. (1998). Overrepresentation of minority students: The case for greater specificity or reconsideration of the variables examined. *The Journal of Special Education, 32*, 15-24.
- Majors, R., & Mancini Billson, J. (1992). *Cool pose: The dilemmas of Black manhood in America*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Marion, R. L. (1981). *Educators, parents, and exceptional children*. Rockville, MD: Aspen.
- Neal, L. I. (1997). The effects of African American movement styles on teachers' expectations and reactions (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 1997). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 5807A*, 9802974.
- Obiakor, F. E. (1999). Teacher expectations of minority exceptional learners: Impact on "accuracy" of self-concepts. *Exceptional Children, 66*(1), 39-53.
- Ogbu, J. U. (1985). A cultural ecology of competence among inner-city blacks. In M. B. Spencer, G. K. Brookins, & W. R. Allen (Eds.), *Beginnings: The social and affective development of Black children* (pp. 45-66). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Oswald, D. P., Coutinho, M. J., Best, A. M., & Singh, N. N. (1999). Ethnic representation in special education: The influence of school-related economic and demographic variables. *The Journal of Special Education, 32*, 194-206.
- Patton, J. M. (1998). The disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education: Looking behind the curtain for understanding and solutions. *The Journal of Special Education, 32*, 25-31.
- Patton, J. M., & Townsend, B. L. (2001). Teacher education leadership, and disciplinary practices: Exploring ethnic, power, and privilege in the education of exceptional African American learners. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 24*(1), 1-2.
- Payne, R. K. (1995). *Poverty: A framework for understanding and working with students and adults from poverty*. Baytown, TX: RFT Publishing.
- Persell, C. J. (1977). *Education and inequality: The roots and results of stratification in America's schools*. New York: Free Press.
- Pollack, W. (1998). *Real boys: Rescuing our sons from the myths of boyhood*. New York: Random House.
- Presswood, D. (1998). The influence of African American males' behavioral styles on teachers' referrals to classes for students with emotional disturbance (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 1998). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 6007A*, 9937122.
- Rist, R. (1970). Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education. *Harvard Education Review, 40*, 411-451.
- Scott, J. C. (1985). The King case: Implications for educators. In C. K. Brooks (Ed.), *Tapping potential* (pp. 63-71). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Shade, B., & Edwards, P. A. (1987). Ecological correlates of educative style of Afro-American children. *Journal of Negro Education, 56*(1), 88-99.
- Smitherman, G. (1977). *Talking and testifying*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Smitherman, G. (1985). "What go round come round": King in perspective. In C. K. Brooks (Ed.), *Tapping potential* (pp. 41-62). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologists, 52*, 613-629.
- Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (1990). *Counseling the culturally different* (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley.
- Tatum, B. D. (1997). *Why are all the Black children sitting together in the cafeteria? And other conversations about race*. New York: Basic Books.
- Valles, E. C. (1998). The disproportionate representation of minority students in special education: Responding to the problem. *The Journal of Special Education, 32*, 52-54.

