

AN EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT OF STUDENT RACE, GENDER, AND
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON SCHOOL COUNSELORS' DECISIONS TO PLACE
STUDENTS IN ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS

by

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ABSTRACT

MERRY LEIGH DAMERON. An examination of the impact of student race, gender, and socioeconomic status on school counselors' decisions to place students in alternative learning programs. (Under the direction of DR. SEJAL PARIKH FOXX.)

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (ASCA, 2012) and ASCA Ethical Standards (ASCA, 2016) highlight the relationship between school counseling, advocacy, and social justice. It is the school counselor's duty to address inequitable policies, procedures, and conditions that may limit students' personal/social and academic development, college access, and career readiness (ASCA, 2012). Additionally, school counselors should be unbiased in their decision-making (ASCA, 2016). An experimental design in which participants responded to one of eight vignettes was used to examine the impact of student race, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) on practicing school counselors' ($N=334$) decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. A factorial analysis of variance revealed no statistically significant differences in school counselors' likelihood of placing students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons based on students' race, gender, or SES. A bivariate correlation also revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between school counselors' belief in a just world, as measured by the Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS; Lipkus, 1991), and likelihood of referring students to ALPs for disciplinary reasons.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this accomplishment to my parents, Alex Miller, Sr. and Lynn Miller. Their love, intentionality, and countless sacrifices provided me with the solid foundation I needed to navigate life successfully and reach this goal. You two are, and forever will be, my heroes.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	xiii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Alternative Learning Programs (ALPs)	1
ALP Placements	1
School Counselors' Decisions to Place Students in ALPs	2
Conceptual Framework	4
Background of the Problem	6
Outcomes for Students in ALPs	6
Disproportionate Discipline and ALP Placements	7
Student Race	8
Student Gender	9
Student Socioeconomic Status	10
Belief in a Just World	10
Advocacy Self-Efficacy	11
School Counselors' Race	13
Summary	14
Significance of the Study	14
Purpose of the Study	16
Research Questions	16
Assumptions	17
Delimitations	18
Limitations	18

Threats to Validity	18
Threats to Internal Validity	18
Threats to External Validity	19
Operational Definitions	19
Student Race	19
Student Gender	20
Student Socioeconomic Status	20
School Counselors' Decisions to Place Students in ALPs	21
Belief in a Just World	21
Advocacy Self-Efficacy	21
School Counselor Race	22
Organization of the Study	22
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	23
Introduction	23
Conceptual Framework	23
Alternative Learning Programs (ALPs)	26
Research on ALPs	29
The Risks and Benefits of ALPs	31
ALP Placements	32
School Counselors' Decisions to Place Students in ALPs	34
Discipline Disproportionality	37
Measures of Disproportionality	39
Student Race	41

African American Students and Discipline Disproportionality	41
African American Students and ALP Placement	43
Student Race and School Counselors' ALP Placement Decisions	44
Student Gender	44
Student Gender and Discipline Disproportionality	46
Student Gender and ALP Placement	47
Student Gender and School Counselors' ALP Placement Decisions	47
Student SES	48
Student SES and Discipline Disproportionality	49
Student SES and ALP Placement	50
Student SES and School Counselors' ALP Placement Decisions	51
Belief in a Just World	52
School Counselor Belief in a Just World	53
School Counselor Belief in a Just World and ALP Placement Decisions	55
Advocacy Self-Efficacy	55
School Counselor Advocacy Self-Efficacy	57
School Counselor Advocacy Self-Efficacy and ALP Placement Decisions	58
School Counselor Race	58
School Counselor Race and ALP Placement Decisions	59
Summary	61
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	62
Introduction	63
Participants	63

Data Collection Procedures	68
Instrumentation	70
The Vignettes	71
School Counselor ALP Placement Decision	72
School Counselor Advocacy Self-Efficacy	72
School Counselor Belief in a Just World	73
School Counselor Race	73
Research Design	74
Research Questions	74
Data Analysis	75
Summary	76
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS	77
Introduction	77
Results	77
Instrument Reliability and Validity	77
Data Screening	79
Outliers	79
Missing Values	80
Normality	80
Multicollinearity	80
Data Analysis	81
Analysis of Variance	81
Analysis of Covariance	84

Summary	88
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION	88
Overview	88
Discussion of Results	90
Discussion of Demographic Data	90
Analysis of Variance	91
Student Race	92
Student Gender	93
Student Socioeconomic Status	94
Analysis of Covariance	96
School Counselor Belief in a Just World	96
School Counselor Advocacy Self-Efficacy	98
School Counselor Race	98
Contributions of the Study	99
Limitations of the Study	101
Implications of Findings	103
Implications for Practitioners	103
Implications for Counselor Education	108
Recommendations for Future Research	110
Concluding Remarks	113
REFERENCES	115
APPENDICES	129
Appendix A: Vignettes	129

Appendix B: School Counselor Advocacy Self-Efficacy	132
Appendix C: School Counselor Belief in a Just World	133
Appendix D: Demographic Questions	134
Appendix E: Talk Aloud Study	136
Appendix F: Talk Aloud Instructions	137
Appendix G: Pilot Study Feedback—Part I	138
Appendix H: Pilot Study Feedback—Part II	139
Appendix I: E-mail to Potential Participants	140
Appendix J: Informed Consent	142

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1	Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants	67
TABLE 2	Independent and Dependent Variables, Covariates, and Corresponding Instrumentation	71
TABLE 3	Cronbach's Alpha and Number of Items for Study Scales	79
TABLE 4	Results of ANOVA for Dependent Variable, Student Race, Student Gender, and Student Socioeconomic Status	82
TABLE 5	Means and Standard Errors of School Counselors' Decisions to Place Students in Alternative Learning Programs as a Function of Student Gender, Race, and Socioeconomic Status (SES)	83
TABLE 6	Correlation Coefficients for Bivariate Correlation Between Dependent Variable and Covariates	86
TABLE 7	Results of ANCOVA for Dependent Variable, Student Race, Student Gender, and Student Socioeconomic Status, Belief in a Just World	87
TABLE 8	Adjusted and Unadjusted Means for the Dependent Variable for Student Gender, Student Race, and Student Socioeconomic Status	87

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Alternative Learning Programs

Every year nearly half a million students are sent to alternative learning programs (ALPs) in the United States, yet there is little research examining alternative education (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). ALPs can be defined as, “programs that serve youth, including those with disabilities, who are at risk of school failure” (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010, p. 14). Literature suggests, however, several broader definitions of ALPs. ALPs are often recognized as serving students whose behavior is disruptive to the traditional school setting (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Foley & Pang, 2006; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Sanchez-Munoz, 2005). Other classifiers include serving students who are falling behind academically (Kim & Taylor, 2008), who demonstrate difficulty functioning at their home school (Booker & Mitchell, 2011), or are even housing students who are dangerous to self or others, released from a correctional facility, pregnant, court-ordered, or truant (Katsiyannis & Williams, 1998; Sanchez-Munoz, 2005). The wide number of reasons for placement is one element that adds to the complexity of the placement process for ALPs (Foley & Pant, 2006). In this study, we will define ALPs as schools serving youth removed from their traditional schools for reasons that may include, but are not limited to, poor academic performance or disruptive behavior.

Alternative Learning Program Placements

ALP placement refers to a student’s removal from a traditional school and subsequent placement into an ALP (Dameron, 2017). Insight into entrance and exit patterns, including the demographic make-up of the student population, is critical because

it limits “placements based on administrative convenience or isolation of ‘undesirables,’ denial of education services, and engagement in haphazard practices that lack planning and adequately trained personnel” (Katsiyannis & Williams, 1998, p. 282).

Without knowledge of the alternative education system within the United States, it is difficult to understand how ALP placements might be haphazard. The number of ALPs varies greatly from state to state. For example, for the 2010-2011 school year Maine, New Hampshire, and Mississippi reported no ALPs while California reported 1,365 ALPs, Texas reported 1,071, and Minnesota 487. The number of students served in ALPs for the same school year ranged from 0 (Maine, New Hampshire, Mississippi) to 172,892 (California; Watson & Lewis, 2014). In addition to the state-by-state variance, the 14,000 independent school districts in the United States are, for the most part, free to decide their own disciplinary policies. This allows for the possibility that bias may emerge from the subjective practice of placing a student into an ALP for discretionary reasons (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). The disproportionate placement of certain groups of students (i.e., males, students of color) is a phenomenon documented in the literature (e.g., Carver & Lewis, 2010; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016), but currently there is no published literature specifically examining placement processes for ALPs or school counselors’ decision-making within these processes.

School Counselors’ Decisions to Place Students in ALPs

According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2012), school counselors act as advocates for socially just outcomes when they address discriminatory procedures, policies, or instructional conditions that may hinder

student personal/social development, career readiness, college access, or academic achievement. Additionally, the ASCA Ethical Standards (2016) call upon professional school counselors to understand how privilege, prejudice, and oppression based on qualities including, but not limited to: racial identity, ethnicity, gender, and economic status impact students. School counselors acting within the ASCA's professional (ASCA, 2012) and ethical (ASCA, 2016) standards will advocate against discriminatory procedures and understand the extent to which prejudice impacts students. All school counselors, acting as unbiased advocates, should be aware of their attitudes and behaviors within the ALP placement process to help ensure equitable procedures are in place for *all* students.

Scholars are beginning to address the role of school counselors in ALPs (e.g., Downs, 1999; Mullen & Lambie, 2013) and specific interventions that school counselors can utilize within these settings (i.e., O'Brien & Curry, 2009). These manuscripts, however, do not address the role of the school counselor in ALP placements. In a study of $N=42$ school administrators, social workers, and school counselors serving in ALPs within the state of North Carolina, Dameron (2017) examined the types of referral and placement processes used to assign students to ALPs. Sixty-seven percent of respondents ($n=28$) identified school counselor referral from home school as referral method utilized within the state. Additionally, participants selected the primary method of referrals or placements utilized for their ALP. School counselor or social worker referral or placement from home school was the second most frequently selected choice, with 14% of respondents indicating it was the primary method of referrals/placements for their program. While these results are not generalizable outside of the state of North Carolina,

they highlight the critical role many school counselors play in the referral and placement processes for ALPs.

Currently, there is no research specifically examining school counselors' decisions in the ALP placement process. This study explored this topic by examining how student's race, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) impact school counselors' likelihood of placing students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. Additionally, the study utilized school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race as covariates to determine the impact of these factors on school counselors' ALP placement decisions.

Conceptual Framework

John Rawls' theory of justice and policy theory guides and informs this study. According to Rawls' (1971) theory of justice, there are fundamental principles of equality that are logically acceptable to free, rational persons. Another key principal is the idea of "justice as fairness," which emphasizes the use of cognitively, but not explicitly agreed-upon standards, to establish procedures and policies (Rawls, 1971, p. 11). Of key importance to the current study are three principles included in John Rawls' theory of justice: (a) basic rights, which include the right to education; (b) equal opportunity, which indicates that if inequity exists, it should favor the most disadvantaged; and (c) the Just Savings Principle, which relates to cross-generational equity, including the use of taxation to support education (St. John, 2007).

The placement of a student into an ALP is a life-changing experience that may impact students' educational outcomes and life-trajectory (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Lange & Sletten, 2002) and the rates of placement should be just and fair to all students. There

is a need, then, to examine the system, including the key players within that system (e.g., school counselors, teachers, administrators) to ensure that students' equity, basic rights, and equal opportunity are met. Policy theory and research "help us understand that research can inform policy, even if rational policy models have seldom held up" (St. John, 2007, p. 72). The responsibility of the researcher operating under Rawls' theory of justice and policy theory, then, is to ensure that rational policy models are in place.

Currently there is no published literature examining the ALP placement process nor are there studies that examine these variables in relation to school counselors' decisions, belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, or race. This study provides insight into this process by examining the impact of race, gender, and SES on school counselor' decisions to place students into ALPs. Well-positioned as advocates (ASCA, 2012; 2016) and decision-makers within the ALP placement process (Dameron, 2017), it is vital to examine factors that impact school counselors' decisions.

In the following section, I will briefly describe the background of the problem, including outcomes for students in ALPs, the concept of discipline disproportionality, and the relationship of discipline disproportionality to the current study. I will then provide a rationale for the inclusion of each independent variable (i.e. gender, SES, and race) and school counselors' ALP placement decisions. I will then provide a brief rationale for the inclusion of the study's covariates (i.e., belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and school counselor race). A thorough review of the research literature related to each independent variable and the covariates will be provided in chapter two.

Background of the Problem

Outcomes for Students in ALPs

Little research exists examining the impact of ALPs in meeting students' educational needs (Caroleo, 2014). In a publication entitled, *The National Status of Alternative Education Report*, Watson and Lewis (2014) provided academic proficiency statistics regarding math and English and language arts. Academic proficiency varied from state to state, with math proficiency ranging from eight percent in the District of Columbia to 93% in Delaware. Regarding English and language arts proficiency, Delaware retained the top spot (97%) and students in the District of Columbia held the lowest attainment (16%).

Outcome variables related to ALPs explored through a meta-analysis (Cox & Davidson, 1995) and literature synthesis (Lange & Sletten, 2002) include: (a) delinquency; (b) school performance/academic achievement; (c) school attitude; (d) self-esteem; (e) student response to flexibility and choice; and (f) student sense of satisfaction, belonging, and changes in self-esteem (Cox & Davidson, 1995; Lange & Sletten, 2002). Notably, few of these variables pertain to academic outcomes, and the results of these inquiries revealed a small overall effect on school performance (Cox & Davidson, 1995) or mixed-results related to academic outcomes (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

In addition to the unclear impact on academic outcomes, Fenning and Rose (2007) argue that removal from the traditional school places students in a direct link to the prison system, a phenomenon known in literature as the school-to-prison pipeline (see Wald & Losen, 2003). Enrollment in ALPs may lead to positive student outcomes (Caroleo, 2014; Cox & Davidson, 1995; Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Pane & Salmon-

Florida, 2009). However, the lack of research and data on academic outcomes (Lehr Moreau, Lange, & Lanners, 2004) and possible infringement on the rights of students and their parents (Barbour, 2009; Geronimo, 2011) demands research that examines the placement process as it relates to marginalized populations.

Disproportionate Discipline and Placements into Alternative Learning Programs

Research on ALP placement is often situated within the context of discipline disproportionality. While discipline disproportionality as it relates to variables such as suspension and expulsion is not the focus of this research, it is important to understand the relevance this line of research. The disproportionate representation of students of color, known in literature as the discipline gap, is a trend initially documented by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) in 1975 (Butler, Lewis, Moore, & Scott, 2012). Since this time, the literature is consistent in demonstrating the existence of the discipline gap in relation to students of color and other marginalized populations (i.e., special education students, low-SES students; see Fenning & Rose, 2007; McCarthy & Hodge, 1987; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002, Skiba et al., 2011).

On the disciplinary spectrum, placement in an ALP for disciplinary reasons is a severe form of punishment sometimes criticized for isolating students from their peers and leading to students feeling ostracized and resentful of removal from a traditional school environment (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Sakayi, 2001). Researchers are beginning to examine the discipline gap and its relationship to student placement in ALPs, but there is little quantitative research that examines this phenomenon. It is important, then, to draw from research related to discipline disproportionality as a broad topic to provide greater context and insight into the impact of the demographic variables

included in this study. Therefore, in the following sections and in the literature review, research on discipline disproportionality related to many forms of exclusionary discipline (e.g., suspensions and expulsions) in addition to ALP placements will be discussed.

Student race. The impact of race is frequently examined within discipline literature (see Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; Butler et al., 2012; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Foley & Pang, 2006; Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011; Sprague, Vincent, Tobin, & Pavel, 2013; Sullivan, Van Norman, & Klinbiel, 2014; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). African American (AA) students, in comparison to White students, are often overrepresented in exclusionary discipline even when considering the same behavioral offenses, statistical artifacts, and despite the measurement criteria used (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010). The literature on discipline disproportionality and Hispanic and Latino students is more inconsistent (see Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Skiba et al., 2011; Tajalli & Garba, 2014) and there is little information on the American Indian and Alaskan Native Population (see Sprague et al., 2013). Of the independent variables the current study will examine, race is the most commonly evaluated in the existing literature.

Research on the impact of race on ALP placement appears to be in its infancy. Interestingly, the eight quantitative studies available on ALP placement and minority students were all published since 2011 (see Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Fabelo et al., 2011; Hilberth & Slate, 2014, Slate, Gray, & Jones, 2016; Sprague et al., 2013; Tajalli & Garba, 2014; Vincent, Sprague, & Tobin, 2012). This may indicate that the overrepresentation of minority students in ALPS is an issue just gaining recognition within the research community. Two studies explored the differences in

proportion of ALP placement by race and grade (i.e., Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Slate et al., 2016) and one examined placements across students' race/ethnicity and special education status (i.e., Vincent et al., 2012). While these studies examine the rate of ALP placement for students of color, there is currently no research examining the decision-process that led to the placement, nor is there research related to school counselors' role within this process. The current study adds significantly to the literature by exploring the impact of race in relation to school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs.

Student gender. While statistics on the gender makeup of ALP students within the United States is nonexistent, research appears to indicate that males receive a disproportionate number of placements (e.g., Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Washington, 2008). From the discipline disproportionality literature, studies on the impact of gender traditionally reveal that males receive suspensions at higher rates than female students (see Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 2002). Sullivan et al. (2014) identify gender as a sociodemographic characteristic related to a differential risk of suspension. Additionally, in Rocque's (2010) study of office referrals for 45 elementary schools, the author notes, "Student gender is also strongly related to discipline and delinquency and thus must also be accounted for" (p. 566).

In addition to the precedent to examine the impact of gender when exploring issues related to school discipline, there is research that also examines the unique experiences of female ALP students (e.g., Russel & Thompson, 2011; Zhang, 2008). Their findings reveal female students may modify their behavior in order to adapt to their environment (Russel & Thompson, 2011) or need unique supports within ALPs to achieve academic success (Zhang, 2008). This study is the third quantitative exploration

of gender in relation to ALP placement and the first to examine the impact of gender on school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs. The findings, then, fill an important gap and add significantly to the literature.

Student socioeconomic status. Within the United States, Carver and Lewis (2010) reported that approximately 34% of students enrolled in ALPs attend schools with a poverty concentration above 19%. In a qualitative study examining adolescents' ($N=74$) reports of problems and punishments in school, Brantlinger (1991) found that both low-income and high-income participants reported that low-income adolescents received more severe and more frequent punishment at school. Within the literature on discipline disproportionality, SES is often examined as variable of interest (see Brantlinger, 1991; Butler et al., 2012; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Sullivan et al., 2014; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982), but there are no empirical studies that report trends related to student SES and ALP placement. This study, then, is the first to examine SES in relation to ALP placement, and more specifically, the impact of student SES on school counselors' decisions to refer students to ALPs for disciplinary reasons.

Belief in a Just World

The basic premise behind belief in a just world is that people get what they deserve, and deserve what they get (Lipkus, 1991; Lipkus, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996). According to Lipkus (1991), people who believe the world is just believe in the existence of socio-political, interpersonal, and personal justice and have a higher internal locus of control. As it relates the disciplinary process, Human-Vogel and Morkel (2017) explain that personal belief in a just world impacts perception of a problem and response to it.

This occurs, the scholars explain, because one's personal desire to maintain belief in a just world motivates them to want to restore justice when they encounter or witness perceived injustice.

Within the literature two scholars (i.e., Jones, 2013; Parikh, Post, & Flowers, 2011) examined school counselors' belief in a just world in relationship to social justice advocacy. Jones found that school counselors' ($N=88$) belief in a just world was not a predictor of social justice advocacy attitudes. Parallel to these results, Parikh et al. found that belief in a just world had an inverse relationship with social justice advocacy.

Within this study, it is possible that school counselors' belief in a just world will impact their decision-making process as they may view student misbehavior as an injustice restorable through ALP placement. Disciplinary decisions are highly contextual (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). While it would be impossible to explore all the contextual elements that influence school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons, school counselors' belief in a just world was utilized as a covariate in this study to explore the potential importance of this construct in school counselors' decision-making process.

Advocacy Self-Efficacy

As it relates to counseling, Kiselica and Robinson (2001) describe advocacy counseling as engaging in helping clients by influencing individuals and institutions that impact clients' lives. Field and Baker (2004) describe effective school counselor advocates as those that monitor the school environment and climate to recognize ways in which students' voices are "not heard or are devalued" (p. 57). The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) incorporates four themes as a part of its framework: leadership,

advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change. According to the National Model, school counselors, as educational leaders, advocate for students' personal/social developmental, career, and academic needs. As the research related to outcomes for students in ALPs demonstrates (e.g., Watson & Lewis, 2014), students' placement in these programs may impact students in each of these areas. School counselors, in their role as advocates, are well-positioned to speak for students considered for ALP placements. To date, there is no literature examining school counselor advocacy for students considered for ALP placements for disciplinary reasons. This study helps fill this gap by exploring the relationship between school counselor advocacy self-efficacy and decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons.

Self-efficacy relates to the secure viewpoint that one can manage environmental stressors (Mullen, Lambie, Griffith, & Sherrell, 2016), execute challenging tasks, and accomplish desired goals (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura (1977a; 1997b), self-efficacy beliefs relate to people's expectations on two levels: (a) their expectations to acquire knowledge and skills, and (b) their expectations to achieve the steps necessary to complete a task and triumph over problems, even in the face of distress and social pressure.

Recent additions to literature include examinations of topics related to school counselor advocacy (e.g., Gonzalez, 2017; Lassiter & Sifford, 2015; Simons, Hutchinson, & Bahr, 2017) and school counselor self-efficacy (e.g., Mullen & Lambie, 2016; Johnson, Ziomek-Daigle, Hasikins, & Paisley, 2017), but rarely examines advocacy self-efficacy (e.g., Goldsmith, 2011; Simons, et al., 2017). The ASCA (2012) National Model and ASCA (2016) ethical standards highlight the role of the professional school

counselor as an advocate. This study examined the impact of race, gender, and SES on school counselor decisions to refer students to ALPs for disciplinary reasons. By examining school counselor advocacy self-efficacy in relation to school counselor ALP placement decisions, this study provides important insight into the impact of this covariate in the decision-making process.

School Counselor Race

Researchers often explore teacher and principal demographic variables in an effort to gain an understanding of the factors that impact the discipline gap. Teacher demographic variables explored include race (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Kinsler, 2011; Monroe, 2009; Monroe, 2013; Vavrus & Cole, 2002), age (Salvano-Pardieu, Fontaine, Bouzzaou, & Florer, 2009), gender (Salvano-Pardieu et al., 2009; Vavrus & Cole, 2002), and socioeconomic status (Brantlinger, 1991). While studied less frequently than teacher variables, one scholar explored the impact of principal race (Kinsler, 2011) and other scholars explored principal attitude toward discipline (Skiba et al., 2014). Regarding race, Bradshaw et al. (2010) determined teacher-student ethnic match did not reduce office discipline referral risk for Black students. Additionally, Kinsler (2011) determined that teacher or principal race did not impact the likelihood of student punishment. The results of these quantitative inquiries appear to indicate that educators' race does not directly impact disciplinary choices. The results of qualitative inquiries, however, add a different perspective. Vavrus and Cole (2002) examined the way teachers and students in one urban high school construct disciplinary moments. "Removing a student from class," the scholars noted, "is a highly contextualized decision based on subtle race and gender relations that cannot be adequately addressed in school

discipline policies” (p. 87). Monroe (2013) also urged teachers to recognize and dismantle their biases to help eliminate the discipline gap.

To date, there are no published studies exploring school counselor demographic variables related to discipline disproportionality or ALP placement decisions. While research on the impact of race on disciplinary practices for teachers and principals appears to indicate that teachers and principals are racially unbiased in their decisions (e.g., Kinsler, 2011), scholars acknowledge subtle racial relations as contributing to the disciplinary decision-making process (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). School counselor race, then, was utilized as a co-variate to explore the impact of this demographic variable on school counselors’ decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons.

Summary

The previous sections presented brief descriptions of ALPs and ALP placements, school counselors’ ALP placement decisions, the conceptual framework, the background of the problem, and outcomes for students in ALPs. Additionally, descriptions of student race, gender, SES and their relationships to discipline disproportionality and ALP placements were provided. Finally, the concepts of belief in a just world, school counselor advocacy self-efficacy, and school counselor race were introduced. This study sought to understand the impact of race, gender, and SES on school counselors’ decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons.

Significance of the Study

While the number of students enrolled in ALPs remained relatively steady in the five-year period between the 2007-2008 and 2012-2013 school years, data indicate a nearly 320% increase in student enrollment in ALPs since the 1992-1993 school year

(Snyder & Dillow, 2015). With a large and increasing ALP population, it is critical that educators, including school counselors, researchers, and policymakers stay informed and engaged with this portion of public school students. Often, there is a stigma associated with ALPs, which are sometimes labeled as warehouses or dumping grounds for students who are falling behind academically or have behavioral problems (Kim & Taylor, 2008).

Fenning and Rose (2007) speak to the heightened anxiety school leaders feel when they believe they must be in control of student behavior. They argue that because minority students, due to academic problems or SES, are not perceived as fitting the norm of the school, they are often labeled as troublemakers or even as dangerous. This fear leads to students of color being targeted for removal and, if this exclusion occurs, the scholars maintain, these students are placed in direct link to the prison system. Based on the theoretical underpinnings for the current study, we should, as a society and as researchers, be concerned with the impact of student placement into ALPs on marginalized students.

One element of the ASCA National Model (2012) and the ASCA ethical standards (ASCA, 2016) is the relationship between school counseling, advocacy, and social justice. The profession calls school counselors to address inequitable instructional conditions, policies, and procedures that may limit college access, career readiness, personal/social development or academic achievement of students (ASCA, 2012). Additionally, acting within their ethical standards (ASCA, 2016), school counselors should be unbiased in their decision-making. According to Dameron (2017) school counselors often play a critical role in the ALP referral and placement process. Previous research examined the disproportionate placement of certain populations of students into

ALPs (e.g., Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Booker & Mitchell, 2011). To this point, however, research has not expanded to examine the mechanisms behind these disproportionalities. The placement process is one of the logical points of interest for this line of inquiry. Gaining insight into school counselors' decision-making and variables that impact this process (i.e., student race, gender, and SES, and school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race) has the potential to provide researchers, policy makers, and school counselors themselves insight this critical process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how student's race, gender, and SES impact school counselors' likelihood of placing students ALPs for disciplinary reasons. In addition, this study examined how student's race, gender, and SES impacted school counselors' likelihood of placing students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons taking into consideration school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

1. How do student race, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) impact school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons?
 - a. Is there a significant difference between males and females on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?
 - b. Is there a significant difference between White and African American (AA) students on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?

- c. Is there a significant difference between economically disadvantaged and economically advantaged students on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?
- 2. After controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race, how does student race, gender, and SES impact school counselors' decisions to place students in alternative learning programs for disciplinary reasons?
 - a. After controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race is there a significant difference between males and females on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?
 - b. After controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race is there a significant difference between White and AA students on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?
 - c. After controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race is there a significant difference between economically advantaged and economically disadvantaged students on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made during this research:

- 1. It was assumed all participants answered all questions honestly and to the best of their ability.
- 2. It was assumed that the demographics would be randomly distributed among the variables.

Delimitations

This study had the following delimitations:

1. Participants were members of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), were licensed school counselors, and were currently working as professional school counselors in K-12 learning settings.
2. Participants were individuals who provided email addresses to the ASCA as a valid means of communication
3. Participants were individuals who have internet access.

Limitations

1. Differences may exist between school counselors who are members of the ASCA and those who are not.
2. The study utilized vignettes to control the independent variables in this study. There could be differences in the way people responded to real people than they did to vignettes.
3. A self-report bias may exist among individuals responding to the survey questions.

Threats to Validity

Threats to Internal Validity

Validity relates to the accuracy of the data and the extent to which it measures what it is supposed to measure (Huck, 2012). Threats to internal validity, then, are factors that make it less likely that change measured in the dependent variable(s) are due to the independent variable(s). In this study, the dependent variable is school counselors' decisions to place students into ALPs for disciplinary reasons. The independent variables are student race, gender, and SES and covariates are school counselors' belief in a just

world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race. A potential threat to internal validity is the potential for socially desirable responses. This threat was minimized by randomly assigning participants to only one vignette reflecting one student race, gender, and SES, thereby lessening the likelihood that respondents knew the intent of the study.

Threats to External Validity

External validity, also known as generalizability, refers to the extent to which a study's findings apply to other situations (Mertens, 2015). The concept of generalizability is connected to the population to which we hope to generalize our findings. Population validity is established when the accessible population is representative of the target population (Mertens, 2015). Because the sample consisted of school counselors currently serving in K-12 schools who were licensed school counselors and members of the ASCA, it is generalizable to licensed, practicing school counselors who are members of ASCA. The findings may not be generalizable, however school counselors who are not licensed, practicing, or members of ASCA.

Operational Definitions

Student Race

Race is a biological system of classifying people based on shared genetic history or common physical characteristics, such skin color (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1993). For the purposes of this research, students were identified as "White" or "African American." In four of the vignettes students were identified as "White" and in four of the vignettes students were identified as "African American."

Student Gender

Phillips (2005) notes the differences between gender and sex, describing sex as “the relatively unchanging biology of being male or female” and gender as “the roles and expectations attributed to men and women in a given society . . . which change over time, place, and life stage” (p. 11). Disciplinary decisions are highly contextualized in subtle gender relations (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, we examined the impact of *gender* rather than *sex*. In the current study, students were either identified as “male” or “female.” In four of the vignettes students were identified as “male” and in four of the vignettes students were identified as “female.”

Student Socioeconomic Status

In the United States, the federal government measures poverty level by comparing gross income and family size. For example, a family of four meets the federal definition of in poverty if their gross family income is less than \$24,600

(<http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/2014-federal-poverty-level-standards.aspx#>).

Student socioeconomic status is commonly conceptualized as a function of three elements: (a) parents’ occupation, (b) parents’ level of education, and (c) family income (Michigan State Department of Education, 1971). A measure that is often available, however, and is utilized as a proxy for SES, is free or reduced lunch status. Several discipline disproportionality researchers have utilized this variable as a proxy for SES (see Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000; Rocque, 2010).

This study described students as receiving free lunch in four of the vignettes as the marker for student economic disadvantage. In the four remaining vignettes, students

characterized as economically advantaged were described as coming from homes in which the parents are well-educated and have well-paying occupations.

School Counselors' Decisions to Place Students in ALPs

Alternative learning program (ALP) placement is the removal of a student from his or her traditional school into an ALP (Dameron, 2017). In this study, school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons was measured by a five-item Likert scale of their likelihood to refer the students depicted in the vignettes to an ALP. The items in the Likert scale, ranged from 1 "not likely at all" to 5 "extremely likely."

Belief in a Just World

In this study, belief in a just world is operationally defined as the participants' score on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. The instrument measures the belief that "People get what they deserve and deserve what they get" (Lipkus, 1991, p. 1172).

Advocacy Self-Efficacy

School counselor advocacy self-efficacy pertains to their belief in the ability to carry out the advocacy duties outlined in the ASCA (2012) National Model (Goldsmith, 2011). In this study, advocacy self-efficacy is operationally defined as participants' score on seven items related to self-efficacy in the area of advocacy from one factor of the School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (Bodehnorn, 1991). The seven selected items have been utilized in two studies as a measure of school counselor advocacy self-efficacy (i.e., Goldsmith, 2010; Simmons et al., 2017). The items in the Likert scale range from 1 "never" to 5 "frequently."

School Counselor Race

School counselor race is defined as the race to which the individual participant identifies and is measured by participant responses to a single survey item on the Demographic Questionnaire. For the purposes of this study, participants self-reported by selecting which of the following best describes their race: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, or Multiracial.

Organization of Study

This study consists of five chapters. In Chapter one, the purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions, hypotheses, variables of interest, assumptions, delimitations, limitations, threats to validity, operational definitions, and summary were reviewed. In Chapter two, the literature regarding each variable and the relationship between each of the independent variables (student race, gender, and SES), covariates (school counselor belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race) and the dependent variable (school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs) will be addressed to demonstrate the need for this research. In Chapter three, the research methodology that will be used in this research will be described. The description of participants, research questions, procedures, instrumentation, research design, and data analysis will also be discussed. Chapter four describes the results. Finally, chapter five includes a discussion of the results, as well as implications for practitioners and counselor educators.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine how student's race, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) impact school counselors' likelihood of placing students in alternative learning programs (ALPs) for disciplinary reasons. In addition, this study examined how student's race, gender, and SES impacted school counselors' likelihood of placing students in ALPs, taking into consideration school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race. This chapter will be divided into 12 main sections. In the first section, the conceptual framework will be discussed. In the next section, ALPs will be defined, research on ALPs will be examined, and risks and benefits of ALPS will be discussed. In the third section, ALP placements will be defined. In the fourth section, the concept of school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs will be examined. In the fifth section the research related to discipline disproportionality will be introduced as well as common measures of disproportionality. In the next three sections, empirical research related to the independent variables (student race, gender, and SES), along with the relationships between these variables ALP placement, and school counselors' ALP placement decisions will be discussed as a demonstration of the need for this research. In the following three sections the covariates (belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and school counselor race) will be introduced as well as the relationship between the covariates and school counselors' ALP placement decisions. The final section provides a summary of the chapter.

Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by John Rawls' (1971, 2001) theory of justice. Central to Rawls' (1971) theory of justice is the idea that there are fundamental principles of

equality that free, rational persons would logically accept. Utilizing these cognitively, but not explicitly agreed-upon standards, to establish policies and procedures is known as “justice as fairness” (Rawls, 1971, p. 11). St. John (2007) describes three of Rawls’ principles and their relationship to education. These principles include: (a) basic rights, which includes the right to education; (b) equal opportunity, which indicates that if inequity exists, it should favor the most disadvantaged; and (c) the Just Savings Principle, which relates to cross-generational equity, including the use of taxation to support education (St. John, 2007).

Additionally, Rawls (1971) principle of redress is salient to the current study. According to this principle, society must compensate for the fact that some persons are naturally born with fewer assets or to less advantageous social positions. To counterbalance this inequity, society should provide greater resources, including educational resources, to marginalized persons. Based on this principle, society should concentrate educational resources on marginalized students—many of whom may receive placements at ALPs. This may, however, not be the case. Within the United States, some have criticized ALPs as being “dumping grounds” for at-risk students (Kim & Taylor, 2008) or even as violating students’ rights to receive minimally adequate education (Barbour, 2009). There should be data and oversight, then, on the rates by which students, and specifically marginalized students, are placed into ALPs. School counselors, acting as decision-makers within the referral and placement processes (Dameron, 2017) are well-positioned to advocate for students within the placement procedures and for just policies and procedures within this process. In fact, acting as an

advocate for equality is both a professional (ASCA, 2012) and ethical (ASCA, 2016) mandate within the school counseling profession.

Rawls' (1971) theory of justice rests on the notion that rational, free citizens maintain similar notions about what is right. Along these lines, unconscious or implicit bias in education is often difficult to address due to the assumption that egalitarian values guide education systems within the United States (Carter, Fine, & Russell, 2014). Moreover, disparities within school discipline and the lack of harmonization of practice and policy efforts has resulted in limited progress in this area of educational reform (Carter et al., 2014). Applying Rawls' (1971, 2001) theory of justice, one could argue that marginalized students, including economically disadvantaged students or those within the racial minority should be the most protected by policies and procedures within the education system. The literature, however, reveals that marginalized students are often the recipients of disproportionate discipline practices and are placed at ALPs more often than their non-marginalized peers, thus contradicting Rawls' theory of justice and principle of redress.

Research indicates a relationship between exclusionary discipline practices and negative student outcomes (e.g., Fabelo et al., 2011; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Examples of these negative outcomes include poor academic achievement, falling behind in coursework, having to repeat a grade, elevated risk of future suspensions, and potential disengagement from school (Porowski, O'Conner, & Passa, 2014). Mizel et al. (2016) recommend that school districts address discipline disproportionality by evaluating and modifying policies that intentionally or inadvertently reinforce inequity. Additionally, drawing from Rawls' (1971) principle of redress, policies that are in place should

counterbalance inequalities experienced by marginalized populations through the distribution of resources. An important implication for this study, therefore, is if school counselors place students in ALPs at higher rates based on race, gender, or SES, then school counselors should become aware of their potential biases in order to serve students more ethically. If school counselors are not found to place students in ALPs at higher rates based on these characteristics, then it will highlight the critical role that school counselors can play within the referral process as unbiased advocates for the equitable treatment of students in the ALP placement process.

Alternative Learning Programs

According to the most recently available national data, there were 575,805 students enrolled in American ALPs during the 2012-2013 school year, indicative of a 320% growth in this population over a ten-year period (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Some scholars, however, believe this is a low national estimate, reporting that over 1,000,000 students may have attended ALPs in the United States during the 2001-2002 school year (Lehr et al., 2004). According to the most recent national data on the number of ALP programs, there were 10,300 ALPs during the 2007-2008 school year, 63% of which were housed in buildings separate from traditional schools (Carver & Lewis, 2010). These programs primarily served 9th to 12th grade students (88 to 96%), with 41 to 63% of districts reporting programs serving 6th through 8th grade students and 8 to 18% of districts having programs for 1st through 5th graders. Reasons for transfer ranged from disruptive verbal behavior (57% reporting this as a transferrable offense) to chronic truancy (53% reporting) or the possession or use of a firearm (42% reporting; Carver & Lewis, 2010)

There is no student-level state or national data source that breaks down ALP enrollment by race, gender, or SES. Research appears to indicate, however, that males (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Fabelo et al., 2011) and economically disadvantaged students (Carver & Lewis, 2010; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2016) are overrepresented in ALPs. Regarding ethnicity, African American students (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Blake et al., 2011; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Hilbreth & Slate, 2014; Slate, et al., 2014; Tajalli & Garba, 2014) and students identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native (Sprague et al., 2013; Vincent et al., 2012), compared to White students, are overrepresented in ALPs, while research on Hispanic and Latino/a students garnered mixed results (e.g., Blake et al., 2011; Tajalli & Garba, 2014).

Alternative education, as we know it today, originated during the late 1950s and early 1960s (Tissington, 2006). Individual states and school districts define their ALPs differently. These definitions may be based on the features of their programs or their key characteristics (i.e., setting, services, population, structure; Porowski et al., 2014). The literature provides many definitions of ALPs, some of which are based on the students the schools serve, others by the services provided to those students, and some based on both. For example, Atkins and Bartuska (2010) define ALPs as, “programs that serve youth, including those with disabilities, who are at risk for school failure” (p. 14). Their description is based on the students served and does not provide an explanation of the services provided to those students. Other student-level identifiers found in the literature include serving students whose behavior is disruptive to the traditional school setting (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Foley & Pang, 2006; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Sanchez-Munoz, 2005), students who are falling behind academically (Kim & Taylor, 2008), who

demonstrate difficulty functioning at their home school (Booker & Mitchell, 2011), or in some cases, those who are court-ordered, truant, or pregnant (Sanchez-Munoz, 2005). Of these populations, ALPs primarily serve students with behavioral problems (Porowski et al., 2014).

Foley and Pang (2006) provide an example of defining ALPs by the types of services they provide and divide ALPs into three types. The first type of ALP, they describe, are schools of choice with a specific instructional approach (e.g., open grade) or programmatic content theme (e.g., school of art). The second type provides services to students identified by home schools as disruptive and are described as presenting a “last chance” to students before they are expelled. The third type involves an emphasis on rehabilitation or remediation, with the intended goal of students entering the school, modifying their behavior, and then returning to the traditional school setting. Clearly, the literature is not unanimous in its description or definition of ALPs. The definition of ALP varies from state to state and, in many cases, there are several different types of ALPs functioning within each state.

Based on the literature, in this study ALPs are defined as: schools serving youth removed from their traditional schools for reasons that may include, but are not limited to, poor academic performance or disruptive behavior. It is important to include the phrase “poor academic performance” in this definition because it is clear in the literature that many students receive ALP referrals based on academic reasons (e.g., Kim & Taylor, 2008). The vignettes in this study, however, only depicted a disciplinary scenario. Therefore, the results of this study can only be generalized to school counselor decisions regarding ALP placements for disciplinary reasons.

Research on ALPs

Limited research exists that specifically examines the effectiveness of ALPs in meeting students' educational needs (Caroleo, 2014). Cox and Davidson (1995) utilized meta-analysis to synthesize empirical research on ALPs from 1966 to 1993. Additionally, Lange and Sletten (2002) synthesized available findings and discussed research-based outcomes for alternative school students and Watson and Lewis (2014) examined academic proficiency for ALPs in the United States in the areas of math and English and Language Arts. Using delinquency, school performance, school attitude and self-esteem as outcome variables, Cox and Davidson reported finding no effect on delinquency and a small overall effect on self-esteem, attitudes toward school, and school performance. Reflecting on their findings about ALP students' attitude toward school, the scholars noted, "most students enjoy going to an alternative program" (Cox & Davidson, 1995, p. 229). This statement aligns with more recent research that indicates students perceive teacher support at ALPs as greater than the support received in traditional settings (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015) and may provide an effective treatment environment for students in need of additional support (Van Acker, 2007). Lange and Sletten categorized outcomes for alternative school students in three areas: student academic achievement; student response to flexibility and choice, and students' sense of satisfaction, belonging, and changes in self-esteem. Similar to Cox and Davidson's findings, the scholars described students' experiences at alternative schools as "overwhelmingly positive" (p. 16). Their examination of studies related to academic outcomes, however, indicated mixed results. Finally, Watson and Lewis found that academic proficiency in ALPs varied greatly from state to state, with math proficiency ranging from 8-93% and English

and Language Arts proficiency ranging from 16-97%. In explaining her experiences utilizing transformative teaching and learning at an ALP, a heuristic researcher described students as having a “consequential, collaborative, and positive purpose for returning to school every day” (Pane & Salmon-Florida, 2009, p. 290). Research, then, indicates that students often experience positive outcomes related to ALP attendance. Questions remain, however, regarding the effectiveness of these programs in meeting students’ needs (Caroleo, 2014).

To this point, Lehr and his colleagues (2004) determined that only 53% of states surveyed had a system in place for collecting data and documenting outcomes for ALP students. Of the respondents, 63% indicated they collected data on the results of state-mandated testing and 70% reported collecting information on graduation rates. The scholars noted the difficulty of achieving a state-level understanding of how students benefit from ALP attendance when only 19 of the 36 states surveyed indicated a system in place documenting outcomes for ALP students. Determining the outcomes of student placement into ALPs is beyond the scope of this study. The lack of information regarding the effectiveness of ALPs in meeting students’ needs (Caroleo, 2014) demonstrates the necessity of examining the referral process for ALPs and school counselor decisions within this process. Based on the theoretical framework, marginalized students (e.g., low-SES students, minority students) should not be overrepresented in these programs, particularly when program effectiveness is in question. This study, recognizing the critical role of school counselors as advocates for the equitable treatment of all students, examined these factors in relation to school counselors’ decisions regarding ALP placement to shed light on this potential issue.

The Risks and Benefits of ALPs

The literature provides dissenting views on the effectiveness and appropriateness of ALPs (Caroleo, 2014) and some even describe them as infringing upon the rights of students and their parents (Barbour, 2009). Caroleo (2014) conducted a literature review examining the risks and benefits of alternative education. The scholar discussed the advantages and disadvantages of alternative education regarding learning environment, quality of education, and stigma and self-esteem. Advantages included the creation of a community-like learning environment and responsive staff members, pronounced focus on vocational skill attainment, and increased academic success and self-esteem for students enrolled in ALPs. Counterbalancing these advantages, the scholar also noted students may experience segregation from peers and the mainstream learning environment, inferior academic standards, and stigma attached to attendance. Caroleo concluded that further research is needed to determine how alternative education can be utilized to serve marginalized youth. Additionally, the scholar noted that the consensus from the literature is that there is a need for outcome research on the effectiveness of ALPs.

Barbour (2009) argues that ALPs may violate students' rights to receive a minimally adequate education and parents' right to control their children's education. The scholar notes that, while some ALPs are successful in serving and re-engaging "at-risk" students, more accountability procedures are necessary to understand if individual ALPs are providing an appropriate level and quality of educational services. Horace Mann, a noted pioneer of public education within the United States, believed alternative schools (i.e., private or publically funded) would create social inequality (Clausen, 2010).

Summarizing an examination of alternative education as it relates to the concept of popular sovereignty, Clausen noted, “Alternative education systems, alone and unchecked, will lead to their own forms of exclusion, prejudice, and repression” (p. 108). The scholar added that alternative education is both legitimate and essential within a democracy. These programs need oversight, however, to ensure that the referral and subsequent placement of students in such programs is just and fair. Enrollment may lead to positive outcomes for many students (Caroleo, 2014; Cox & Davidson, 1995; Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Pane & Salmon-Florida, 2009), but the lack of data regarding educational outcomes (Lehr et al., 2004) and the potential infringement upon student and parent rights (Barbour, 2009) necessitates research that specifically examines the placement process. This study sought to highlight the role of the school counselor as unbiased student advocates (ASCA, 2012; 2016) who are well-positioned (Dameron, 2017) to reduce the possibility that students receive disproportionate placements in ALPs based on demographic characteristics (i.e., student race, gender, and SES).

Alternative Learning Program Placements

An ALP placement is a student’s placement into an ALP after their removal from a traditional school setting (Dameron, 2017). Researchers have identified the critical nature of examining the entrance and exit patterns into ALPs (e.g., Katsiyannis & Williams, 1998). On the disciplinary spectrum, placement in an ALP is a severe form of punishment that isolates students from their peers and sometimes leads to students feeling ostracized and resentful of removal from a traditional school environment (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Sakayi, 2001). According to Brown (2007), exclusionary disciplinary actions that culminate in ALP placement can cause or lead to irregular attendance, lost

classroom and instructional time, academic difficulties, and mistrust and weak relationships with school adults. School districts within the United States, for the most part, have freedom to decide their own disciplinary policies, which increases the chances that students are subjectively placed in ALPs (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). The current literature examining ALP placements, much of which will be examined throughout this chapter, explores ALP placements related to variables including gender (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Fabelo, et al., 2011), special education status (e.g., Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Sprague et al., 2013), SES (Anderson & Ritter, 2017); and race (e.g., Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Slate et al., 2016; Vincent et al., 2012). To date, however, there is no published literature explicitly investigating placement processes for ALPs. Furthermore, school counselors' decision-making related to the placement process is also unexplored in the literature.

In addition to examining the disproportionate of students into ALPs based on certain demographic characteristics, some researchers have explored the experiences of students within these settings. In their study of students ($N=198$) mandatorily placed in an alternative school, Carpenter-Aeby and Aeby (2012) explored student perceptions of their assignment. According to the results of their exit survey, in 10 of 14 questions, between 54 and 98% of students responded positively in terms of their satisfaction with elements of the ALP. Aligning with these results, a qualitative study by Kim and Taylor (2008) also examined the experiences of students, teachers, and other personnel at an ALP within a Midwestern state. Many participating students expressed a desire to remain at the ALP rather than return to their home school, reflecting the idea that they, “went from a dumping ground to a safety net” (Kim & Taylor, 2008, p. 211). These positive

views highlight the fact that many students have satisfactory experiences within ALPs.

What students like, however, and what is best for their academic achievement and life trajectory, may not line up. Returning to Carpenter-Aeby and Aeby's study, while the majority of students reported satisfaction with the program, only 33.3% of the students felt the ALP was good for them. Sanchez-Munoz (2004) provides a sobering statement after conducting a case study on five ALPs within the state of California. The scholar concludes:

Academic standards were lacking, pedagogical consistency was absent, and an institutional effort to self-evaluate was tacitly discouraged. Students rarely articulated a discourse of dissatisfaction about the program; however, few students graduate, few matriculate back to their parent school, and fewer still continue their education beyond high school. (p. 14)

The question is, why does it matter if students are disproportionately placed at ALPs based on race, gender, or SES? It matters because the quality of education and opportunities students receive at these programs may, in some cases, not be the same as if students remained enrolled in traditional schools. Additionally, school counselors, as advocates operating within the profession's professional and ethical standards (ASCA 2012; 2016) should examine their gatekeeping role to ensure that students are not the victims of subjective placements based solely on demographic characteristics.

School Counselors' Decisions to Place Students into ALPs

Currently, there is no published literature examining school counselors' decisions in ALP placements. The literature that does exist related to school counselors and ALPs examines the role of school counselors within ALPs (i.e., Downs, 1999; Mullen &

Lambie, 2013) or interventions that are salient for school counselors within these settings (O'Brien & Curry, 2009). One potential explanation for the dearth of literature examining the role of school counselors in the ALP placement process is that there is a persistent problem relative to the role of school counselors in relation to school discipline (Bickel & O'Neill, 1979). Responding to this ambiguity, the ASCA (2013) created a position statement on the school counselor and discipline. In that position statement, the ASCA notes, "The school counselor is not a disciplinarian" (p. 1). School counselors, then, could interpret involvement in the ALP placement process as ill-fitting for the school counselor's role. The position statement goes on, however, to describe the school counselor's role in discipline as including many supportive and preventive services. This role includes advocating for best-practices in school wide discipline and ensuring equitable and objective disciplinary practices are in place (ASCA, 2013). School counselors, then, are within the standards of the profession to be involved within the placement process, specifically in the role of advocates to ensure that objective and equitable practices are in place.

As previously stated, there is no published literature related to school counselors' decisions regarding ALP placements. There is, however, evidence that school counselors are engaged in the ALP placement process. Recently, Dameron (2017) investigated referral and placement processes for ALPs within the state of North Carolina. The researcher surveyed $N=42$ school administrators, social workers, and school counselors and examined the types of referral and placement processes used to assign students to ALPs. In the study, Dameron defined referral as meaning, "that a request is made, but someone else (either a person or committee) must review and approve the referral prior to

a placement” (p. 4). School counselor referral from home school was identified by 67% of respondents ($n=28$) as a referral method utilized within the state. Regarding student placement (meaning no one else must review the request) 20% of participants indicated school counselor or social worker placement from home school is method of ALP placement for their program. Additionally, school counselor or social worker referral or placement from home school was the second most frequently selected choice when participants were asked what they would consider the primary method of referral or placement for their program or school. Fourteen percent of respondents indicated it was the primary method of referrals/placements for their program. These results appear to indicate that, for at least one state, school counselors play a critical role in the ALP referral and placement process.

While it is inappropriate for school counselors to act as disciplinarians, it is both appropriate and advisable for school counselors to ensure equitable and objective disciplinary practices and procedures are in place (ASCA, 2013). School counselors, then, are well within the professional (ASCA 2012; 2013) and ethical (ASCA, 2016) standards to act as student-advocates within this process and, as the study by Dameron (2017) may indicate, are already acting as decision-makers within the ALP placement process. While Dameron’s study appears to show that school counselors are players within these procedures, this study expands this line of research by exploring how student race, gender, and SES impact their decisions. Additionally, this study is the first to utilize school counselors’ belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race as covariates to explore the impact of these variables on school counselors’ ALP placement decisions.

Discipline Disproportionality

The concept of discipline disproportionality, often labeled within the literature as the discipline gap, is a well-documented phenomenon spanning the past forty years (e.g., Children's Defense Fund, 1975; McCarthy & Hodge, 1987; Skiba et al., 2014). Gregory et al. (2010) define the discipline gap as the difference in the number of exclusionary discipline events (e.g., suspensions and expulsions) between racial and ethnic minority students and White students and between students receiving special education services and non-special education students. Research indicates that exclusionary discipline may be associated with negative outcomes, including lower academic achievement (Skiba & Rausch, 2004) and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Fabelo et al., 2011).

Existing literature focuses primarily on discipline disproportionality as it relates to student discipline experiences within the traditional school context. There is limited research, however, on ALP placement. The research that does exist has examined ALP placements within single states during a single school year (e.g., Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Sprague et al., 2013; Slate et al., 2016; Tajalli & Garba, 2014; Vincent et al., 2012). The independent variables explored in relation to ALP placement include race/ethnicity (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Slate et al., 2016; Sprague et al., 2014; Tajalli & Garba, 2014; Vincent et al., 2012), gender (Booker & Mitchell, 2011), grade level (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Slate et al., 2016), and special education status (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Sprague et al., 2014; Vincent et al., 2012). Recently, Anderson and Ritter (2017) examined seven years of student-level infraction data from the state of Arkansas. The scholars utilized seven demographic variables (i.e., race, grade level, special education status, limited English proficiency

status, and free and reduced lunch status) in relation to seven disciplinary consequence categories, including placement into an alternative learning environment. Their research, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections, provided insight into the impact of these demographic variables on ALP placements within the state of Arkansas.

Research on ALP placement is situated underneath the broad umbrella of research on discipline disproportionality. While it is promising that researchers are beginning to explore various demographic variables and their relationship to ALP placement, this type of research appears to be in its infancy. Therefore, it is important to examine the research on discipline disproportionality to provide a broader context for the issue and because a review of this wider base of literature supports the selection of the independent variables. The majority of research on discipline disproportionality examines the impact of race on exclusionary discipline practices (e.g., Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Hoffman, 2014; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010). Research in this area also expands to other factors, including the impact of special education status (Anyon et al., 2014), gender (Bradshaw et al., 2010), achievement (Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl, Toumbourou, & Catalano, 2014), and SES (Mizel et al., 2016). Quantitative research on ALP placement in the United States increased over the last decade (e.g., Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Sprague et al., 2013; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Even with an increase in empirical research in this area, it is important to draw from research on discipline disproportionality to get a more complete picture of marginalized students' experiences with discipline. Including literature on discipline disproportionality in relation to the independent variables will draw attention to the disciplinary experiences

of marginalized populations within the United States. The literature on discipline disproportionality indicates that exclusionary discipline is associated with many negative outcomes (e.g., higher rates of future misbehavior, lower academic achievement, school dropout, involvement in the juvenile justice system; Anderson & Ritter, 2017). In the sections that follow, each of the independent variables will be explored (i.e., student race, gender, and SES), respectively, in relation to the research on discipline disproportionality and ALP placement. Additionally, each of these variables will be discussed in relation to school counselors' ALP placement decisions.

Measures of Disproportionality

To understand the research on the discipline gap and ALP placement it is important to be familiar with measures of disproportionality commonly used within the literature. Porowski et al. (2014) identified three measures for assessing disproportionalities (composition index, risk index, and relative rate ratio). The composition index, often used to measure disproportionalities in special education, provides the proportion of students by race/ethnicity in a disability category or within special education. The risk index, also utilized within research on disproportionality in special education, utilizes a comparison group (i.e., White students) to assess the rate at which a particular group is classified in need of services. Finally, the relative rate ratio compares the risk for classification (in the case of special education) or the risk of receiving a disciplinary action (e.g., suspension, ALP placement) for one group with the risk for a referent-group. A ratio smaller than one indicates a reduced risk, a ratio of one indicates an equal risk, and a ratio greater than one demarks an increased risk (Porowski et al., 2014).

Anderson and Ritter (2017) calculated odds ratios by calculating the odds of a student in a subgroup (e.g., low-income student) being in a consequence category (e.g., receiving OSS) by dividing the number of students in a consequence category by the percentage of the total students in that group. “For example,” the authors noted, “White students represent 65% of students in the state of Arkansas, and 38% of students receiving OSS, so the odds ratio is equal to $(0.38 / 0.65)$ or approximately 0.58” (p. 8). Odds greater than one, the researchers explain, indicate group overrepresentation in a category. Researchers also report odds ratios when they use logistic regression to examine the predictive power of selected independent variables on the dependent variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Booker & Mitchell (2011) utilized binary logistic regression to report odds ratios in their study on the impact of gender, ethnicity, age, and special education status on patterns in recidivism and discretionary placement in disciplinary alternative education programs. Additionally, Rocque (2010) employed logistic regression to report odds ratios related to the impact of race on office referrals.

Chi-square analysis is utilized to examine if observed frequencies are similar to or statistically different than expected frequencies. The null hypothesis is retained if the observed frequencies are similar to the expected frequencies and rejected if the frequencies are sufficiently different (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Several researchers (e.g., Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Slate et al., 2016; Sprague et al., 2013) utilized chi-square analyses to test various hypotheses related to discipline disproportionality. For example, Hilberth and Slate posited several research questions related to the differences in proportion of Black and White student assignment to various disciplinary consequences (i.e., ISS, OSS, disciplinary alternative education placement) by grade level. Employing

this test, the researchers determined if statistically significant differences were present for each discipline consequence, grade level, and ethnic category. While researchers may employ other statistical procedures, these are the primary measures and means of analysis utilized when examining factors related to risk of ALP placement.

Student Race

Beginning with a study by the Children's Defense Fund (1975), researchers have examined the relationship between race and discipline for over 40 years (e.g., Anyon et al., 2004; McCarthy & Hodge, 1987; Morris & Perry, 2016). Losen and Martinez (2013) reported that the racial discipline gap in high schools increased since the early 1970s, with a 12.5% increase in the suspension rate for African American (AA) students between the 1972-73 and 2009-2010 school years. Research over the past 40 years primarily focused on AA student experiences with school discipline, but many also explored other racial/ethnic groups (e.g. Anyon et al., 2004; Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles. 2006; Skiba et al., 2014). Due to the overwhelming body of literature that indicates AA students are disciplined disproportionately in comparison to White students, these two races were selected as the races represented in the vignettes. We will examine the research on AA students. There is not a section on White students because, for each of these studies, White students are the reference group, rendering a separate description of the literature repetitive.

African American Students and Discipline Disproportionality

The considerable majority of research on AA students and discipline disproportionality indicates that AA students, using White students as a reference group, receive disproportionate amounts of office discipline referrals (Anderson & Ritter, 2017;

Anyon et al., 2004; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Brown & Di Tillio, 2013; Mizel et al., 2016; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011), out of school suspensions (OSS) (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Fabelo et al., 2011; Kinsler, 2011; Krezmien et al., 2006; Mizel et al., 2016; Morris & Perry, 2016; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Porowski et al., 2014; Slate et al., 2014; Snyder & Dillow, 2015; Sullivan et al., 2014; Wu et al., 1982), and expulsions (Mizel et al., 2016; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010).

Empirical studies also indicate, in comparison to White students, AA students typically receive harsher punishments for the same violations (Butler et al., 2009), have increased odds of first school removal for disciplinary reasons (Petras et al., 2011), and are more likely to receive school discipline in general (Wallace et al., 2008). Groundbreaking research by Skiba and colleagues (2014) examined the relationship between student characteristics, school characteristics, infractions, and rates of exclusionary discipline. The findings revealed that, regarding racial disparities in exclusionary discipline, principal attitude on discipline was a more impactful predictor than individual student characteristics or student behavior. This study, then, highlights the importance of examining school and educator characteristics when exploring discipline disproportionality.

Recently, Gastic (2017) calculated a behavior-adjusted relative risk ratio (BAR) to examine the differences in students' self-reported behaviors and disciplinary consequences. Specifically, Gastic examined a group's risk (e.g., AA students) of receiving disciplinary consequences for fighting compared with the risk of another group, while adjusting for the differences in self-reported rates of on-campus fighting. Using the BAR, the scholar determined that AA students were 1.69 times more likely than White

students to receive disciplinary consequences for on-campus fighting. This study demonstrates that we cannot explain AA students' receipt of exclusionary discipline practices by the notion that AA students exhibit more punishable behaviors than their White counterparts.

African American Students and ALP Placement

Most research examining AA students and ALP placement indicates that AA students are more likely than White students to be placed in ALPs (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Hilbreth & Slate, 2014; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). In their recent research, Anderson and Ritter (2017) examined seven years of data from public schools in Arkansas (2008-2009 through 2014-2015 school years). Regarding referrals to ALPs, the scholars found that AA students were nine and a half times more likely than White students to receive an ALP referral. There is, however, some dissenting research. One study determined that AA and Hispanic students were less likely than White students to be placed in ALPs for their first disciplinary violation (Fabelo et al., 2011).

Additionally, Foley and Pang (2006) reported that surveyed directors and principals of ALPs in Illinois indicated White youth were the primary ethnic group served within their programs. The researchers did not provide demographic statistics on the youth in ALPs or explain how this compared to the relative amounts of White students served in schools within the state of Illinois. Without this information, it is difficult to put this information into context. Finally, Vincent and colleagues (2012) explored disciplinary exclusions in a Pacific Northwestern state in the U.S. during the 2009-2010 school year. Using White students as a reference group, the researchers determined that rate of placement of AA students into ALPs was insignificant. The evidence for discipline disproportionality and

disproportionate placement in ALPs is strongest in relation to AA students, making a comparison between AA students and White students a literature-based decision for the races depicted in the vignettes.

Student Race and School Counselors' Decisions to Place Students into ALPs

Currently, there is no published research examining student race and school counselors' decisions to place students into ALPs for disciplinary reasons. The majority of research examining AA students, using White students as a reference group, indicates that AA students are overrepresented in ALPs (i.e., Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Hilbreth & Slate, 2014; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Given these findings, the current study examined the impact of student race (i.e., AA or White) on school counselors' decisions to refer students to ALPs for disciplinary reasons.

Student Gender

Gender has a strong relationship with discipline and must, therefore, be accounted for (Rocque, 2010). Statistics on gender makeup of ALP students in the United States does not exist. Booker and Mitchell (2011), noting this gap, sought to explore the characteristics of students placed in disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs) by examining three DAEPs in the Southwest during the 2004-2005 school year. The final number of participants included 269 students, ranging from 6th to 12th grade, coming from three schools (two urban, one suburban). The scholars did not report the number of males and females served in each of these programs; but they did report that males were at increased odds for placement ($OR=1.491$). Research by Washington (2008) supports these findings. The scholar reported that, for one urban school district,

male enrollment in an ALP was greater than female enrollment for every year examined, starting in 1995-1996 extending through the 2002-2003 academic year.

Brown and Davies (1975) examined sexism in American education and found this construct demonstrated through textbook bias, denial of access to specific course offerings based on gender, subconscious sex discriminatory attitudes by teachers, and other factors. In describing the relationship between education and gender, Stromquist (2006) noted, “Education is seen as the main instrument by which we will achieve equality among diverse social groups, and especially between women and men” (p. 145). Additionally, in defining “all the way equality” (p. 83), Ben-Shahar (2016) portrays justice in education as equality in educational outcome between all children, notwithstanding race, ability, socioeconomic status, or gender.

Competing forces make it difficult to understand what represents equality between males and females in alternative education. Males appear to be placed at ALPs at higher rates than females (e.g., Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Fabelo et al., 2011; Washington, 2008). Logically, then, we should consider the plight of males, who appear to receive disproportionate levels of this severe form of punishment. This phenomenon, however, may impact female ALP students in a wide range of ways. Two scholars, pointing out the importance of girl to girl relationships, noted females have diminished opportunities to build these connections in male-dominated ALPs. Females ($N=6$) within the ethnographic study adapted to endure their environments through staying quiet, stirring trouble, and adopting masculine behaviors (Russell & Thompson, 2011). Additionally, Zhang (2008) examined the challenges experienced by ($N=53$) female participants with a history of emotional, behavioral, social, and school-related issues.

The scholar encouraged alternative educators in Singapore to account for the unique needs of female students and promote to their educational success.

Previous research examining gender within ALPs reveals that males may be placed at higher rates than females (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Washington, 2008). Additionally, researchers explored the unique experiences of female alternative education students within the United Kingdom (Russel & Thompson, 2011) and Singapore (Zhang, 2008). While there is no current research examining the perspectives of female alternative students within the United States, these studies demonstrate that female students, who are in the minority within ALPs, may adapt their behavior. This study will fills informational gap by revealing the impact of gender on school counselors' decision to refer students to ALPs for disciplinary reasons.

Student Gender and Discipline Disproportionality

Most research related to gender and disproportionality indicates that that males are more likely to receive disciplinary consequences than females (Anyon et al., 2014; Brown & Di Tillio, 2014; Curtiss & Slate, 2014; Fabelo et al., 2011; Hemphill et al., 2014; Kinsler, 2011; McElderry & Cheng, 2014; Mizel et al., 2016; Morris & Perry, 2016; Petras et al., 2011; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2014; Snyder & Dillow, 2015; Wallace et al., 2008). In studies reporting odds ratios for office discipline referrals, the odds ratios of males receiving referrals in comparison to female students ranged between 2.15 and 3.69 (Anyon et al., 2004; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Rocque, 2010) and the odds ratios for males receiving out of school suspension in relation to female students ranged from 1.20 to 2.81 (Hemphill et al., 2014; Morris & Perry, 2016; Skiba et al., 2014). While the majority of research reveals male students receive more referrals

and disciplinary consequences than females, some research indicated that females were more likely to receive disciplinary sanctions (Butler et al., 2012; Losen & Martinez, 2013) or that, when other factors were taken into consideration, the impact of gender was insignificant (McCarthy & Hodge, 1987). Given the contradictory results, this study provides further clarity on the significance of gender in relation to discipline disproportionality, as ALP placement is on the discipline spectrum.

Student Gender and ALP Placement

Empirical research examining gender and ALP placement is mixed. Fabelo and his colleagues (2011) tracked three cohorts of Texan students (N=928,940) for eight years and analyzed the data for six years (the researchers considered the first and final years for each cohort “reference years”). The scholars found that a higher percentage of males (68.5%) experienced DAEP placement than females. These findings align with Booker and Mitchell (2011), who determined males have increased odds of being referred to a DAEP. It should be noted, however, that the researchers found no significant differences related to gender and discretionary placement in DAEPs. It is important to note that Fabelo et al. examined DAEP placements in Texas, highlighting that a student removed from a traditional school for more than three days is assigned to a DAEP. This policy may differ greatly from many states’ policies regarding ALP placements, as the literature acknowledges the subjective nature the placement process (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

Student Gender and School Counselors’ Decisions to Place Students into ALPs

There is no published literature on student gender and its impact on school counselors’ decisions to place students into ALPs for disciplinary reasons. Research

examining gender and ALP placement is sparse and reveals mixed conclusions. Most research indicates that males experience exclusionary discipline more frequently than females. It is important, then, to account for gender when examining school counselors' decisions regarding ALP placement. Based on previous research (i.e., Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Fabelo et al., 2011; Washington, 2008) school counselors may decide to refer males to ALPs at higher rates than females. The importance of this potential finding is twofold: a) If this is the case, school counselors should examine their potential bias in this process; b) if school counselors are not found to refer males at higher rates, it highlights their potential role as non-biased advocates for all students within the ALP placement process.

Student Socioeconomic Status

On a national level, the poverty rate for children under the age of 18 was 20% in 2015. The poverty rate was highest for Black children (36%), American Indian/Alaskan Native children (32%), and Hispanic children (32%). Biracial and multiracial children experienced poverty at a rate of 21%, White children, 12% and Asian children, 11% (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2016). Currently, there are no student-level statistics available on the SES of students enrolled in ALPs in the United States. According to Carver (2010), approximately 34% of the students enrolled in ALPs attended schools where the poverty concentration was 20% or greater.

Recent research indicated SES impacts student achievement (Basque & Bouchamma, 2016; Bellibas, 2016) and that the discrepancies between low and high SES academic performance are consistent even after adjusting for intelligence (von Stumm, 2017). Additionally, Aikens and Barbarin (2008) examined the impact of school

environment on children's early reading and found that elementary school students in high poverty schools demonstrated slower growth. These results are consistent with Bellibas' (2016) finding that students attending schools with higher quality educational resources are more likely to achieve better test scores in reading, mathematics, and science. Unfortunately, however, high poverty schools may, in some cases, have fewer resources (Pribesh, Gavigan, & Dickinson, 2011). Conversely, better economic outcomes (i.e., less financial hardship, income, likelihood of employment) are associated with higher levels of education (Ross & Wu, 1995). Education, then, is a fundamental property of SES (APA, 2007).

Student SES and Discipline Disproportionality

Socioeconomic status is known to account for some differences in discipline, but not for the majority of variance (Rausch & Skiba, 2004). Often explored in discipline literature, students identified as economically disadvantaged are habitually found to experience exclusionary discipline practices at an elevated rate than economically advantaged students (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Bratlinger, 1991; Hemphill et al., 2014; Kinsler, 2011; McElderry & Cheng, 2014; Mizel et al., 2016; Morris & Perry, 2016; Wu et al., 1982). Additionally, empirical research indicates economically disadvantaged students are more likely to be referred to the office (Anyon et al., 2004; Mizel et al., 2016; Rocque, 2010) and have an increased hazard odds ($OR=1.68$) of first school removal compared with economically advantaged students (Petras et al., 2011). Kinsler (2011) examined discipline data for North Carolina for the 2001-2002 school year. The scholar found that, compared to the entire population, suspended students are significantly more likely to receive free or reduced lunch. The findings on SES and

discipline disproportionality, however, are inconsistent. Several researchers determined SES is not a significant predictor of disciplinary consequences (Butler et al., 2012; McCarthy & Hodge, 1987; Wallace et al., 2008) and three studies found mixed results (McCloughlin & Noltemeyer, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2014). For example, Skiba et al. (2014) utilized several models to examine the impact of behavioral and student characteristics, including student free or reduced lunch status. In the first model, free or reduced lunch status students were significantly less likely to receive an expulsion (OR=-0.803) compared to an in-school suspension, but significantly more likely to receive out of school suspension (OR=1.051) than non-free or reduced lunch status students. However, when school characteristics were added in the researchers' second model, free or reduced lunch status students were significantly more likely to receive both expulsion (OR=1.175) and out of school suspension (OR=1.189) than students who did not receive free or reduced lunch. Although research in the area demonstrates mixed results, there is a precedent in the literature on discipline disproportionality to include a measure of SES.

Student SES and ALP Placement

Currently, there is no research examining the relationship between SES and ALP placement. Brantlinger (1991) conducted qualitative interviews with students ($N=74$) to examine adolescents' perceptions of social class distinctions in problems and punishments within schools. High-income adolescents implied that their teachers are more tolerant of them compared to low-income students for several reasons, including that they believed teachers were intimidated by their parents or identified with them more. The majority of American educators are White, middle class females (Morrell,

2010). While there are currently no data to examine this claim, it is possible that economically disadvantaged students could be more frequently placed in ALPs because their middle-class teachers do not identify or relate to them as easily or that their families lack the social capital to advocate on their behalf.

Student SES and School Counselors' Decisions to Place Students into ALPs

While it is currently unexamined in the literature, it is possible that school counselors who, like teachers, are predominately female (77%), White (77%) and have attained a Master's Degree or higher (95%; Bruce & Bridgeland, 2012), may more closely-relate to female, White, economically advantaged students. While it will be beyond the scope of this study to identify the root cause of such a disparity, it is important to explore the relationship between SES school counselors' decisions in the ALP placement process.

Research demonstrates that economically disadvantaged students may be at an increased risk for academic difficulties and have less access to educational resources (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Basque & Bouchamma, 2016; Bellibas, 2016; Pribesh et al., 2011). Placement in an ALP may exacerbate these issues. To this point, Lehr et al. (2004) identified a lack of funding and the quality and quantity of staff two significant issues facing alternative schools. Furthermore, "A high school diploma from an elite prep school represents a different level of achievement and resources than a diploma from an inner-city high school; it also provides greater access to further education or a good job" (APA, 2007). There is a certain level of stigma attached to attendance and matriculation from an ALP (Barbour, 2009; Caroleo, 2014). ALPs, which may lack funding, quality staff, and appropriate measures to document academic success (Lehr et

al., 2004) may not have the resources to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged students. Exploring SES in relation to school counselors' ALP placement decisions is critical in determining if economically disadvantaged students receiving the educational services that meet their needs and set them on a path to social, emotional, and economic health.

Belief in a Just World

Rubin and Peplau (1973) introduced the concept of belief in a just world and used their developed scale to measure the construct in a study of American men ($N=58$) impacted by the 1971 draft lottery. The scholars defined the idea of a just world as, “a world in which good people are rewarded and bad people are punished” (p. 73) and anticipated that participants with a strong belief in a just world would be more prone to evaluate those with positive fortunes in the lottery system as more admirable and deserving than those with more negative fates. Their results indicated that participants' scores on the Just World Scale differentiated between likelihood of cognitively justifying fellow group members' fates. Since Rubin and Peplau's introduction of the Just World Scale, many researchers have created and validated scales to measure belief in a just world for adults in the United States (e.g., Corey, Trosi, & Nicksa; 2015; Lambert, Burroughs, & Nguyen, 1999; Lipkus, 1991), Canada (e.g., Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987) and China (e.g., Zou, Liu, Huang, Liu, & Gou, 2015). Over the past forty-five years, researchers examined the construct of belief in a just world in relation topics including, but not limited to altruistic behavior (Zuckerman, 1975), depression (Ritter, Benson, & Snyder, 1990), helping (Depalma, Madey, Tillman, & Wheeler, 1999),

personality and values (Wolfadt & Dalbert, 2003), and perceptions of discrimination (Lipkus & Siegler, 1993).

According to Lipkus (1991), people who believe in a just world possess a higher internal locus of control and believe that interpersonal, socio-political, and personal justice exist. The foundational notion behind the premise is, people get what they deserve, and deserve what they get (Lipkus, 1991). As explained by Rubin and Peplau (1973), people go to great lengths to alleviate the suffering of others to maintain the fit between wickedness and punishment (and between goodness and happiness). They will only exert this effort, however, when they believe the person suffering is undeserving of her lot. Echoing this premise, Human-Vogel and Morkel (2017) recently noted that a personal desire to preserve belief in a just world motivates a need to reestablish justice when perceived injustice is encountered or observed. The scholars relate this notion to school discipline by maintaining that belief in a just world is impactful in relation to both the perception of and response to a problem.

School Counselor Belief in a Just World

Two scholars specifically examined school counselors' belief in a just world (i.e., Jones, 2013; Parikh et al., 2011). In their study of $N=313$ school counselors, Parikh et al. (2011) identified belief in a just world and political ideology as significant variables in relation to participants' social justice advocacy attitudes. Specifically, school counselor belief in a just world accounted for 4% of the variance in the model when entered as the final step in the scholars' sequential multiple regression. The researchers explain that the findings indicated an inverse relationship, with school counselors with lower belief in a

just world more likely to have “higher and more positive attitudes” towards social justice advocacy (Parikh et al., 2011, p. 65).

Jones (2013) also examined belief in a just world and its impact on the social justice advocacy attitudes of practicing school counselors ($N=88$). In contrast to the findings by Parikh et al. (2011), belief in a just world was not a predictor of social justice advocacy attitudes in Jones’ investigation. There was, however, a statistically significant negative relationship between participants’ belief in a just world and their scores on a measure of multicultural counseling awareness. In discussing this relationship, Jones noted that participants “who strongly believe that people get what they deserve in life had less awareness of the impact of outside influences on individual success” (p. 78).

The current research on school counselors and belief in a just world centered around the relationship between the construct and social justice advocacy attitudes and garnered differing results. While the results of these explorations varied, their findings in relationship to the proposed study are important. Hutchins (2010) noted the possibility that counselors’ beliefs about justice in the world may impact their perceptions of their roles as advocates within the school setting. This study explored the impact of several student demographic variables (i.e., student race, gender, and SES) on school counselor decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. In adding school counselors’ belief in a just world as a covariate, the researcher controlled for this construct and examined its impact on school counselors’ decisions to refer students to ALPs for disciplinary reasons.

School Counselor Belief in a Just World and ALP Placement Decisions

Currently, there is no research on the school counselor belief in a just world and ALP placement. Recently, however, Human-Vogel and Morkel (2017) examined personal belief in a just world for South African teachers ($N=74$) and students ($N=1624$) in relation to their perceptions of problem behavior within the classroom. Their results indicated that teachers with higher personal belief in a just world reported significantly higher mean problem behaviors related to teacher negativity, disrespecting rules and property, and challenging authority. In discussing these findings, Human-Vogel and Morkel noted that teachers with high personal belief in a just world may perceive problem behaviors as necessitating discipline to preserve the justness of the world. While these findings cannot be generalized to school counselors or discipline within the United States, the scholars demonstrate the belief in just world as impactful in disciplinary decisions. This study, then, utilized school counselor belief in a just world as a covariate and examined its impact on school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons.

Advocacy Self-Efficacy

Advocacy as it relates to counseling involves engagement in client's lives by influencing individuals and institutions that impact them (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). Both the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) and ASCA code of ethics (ASCA, 2010) call upon professional school counselors to act as advocates. Within the ASCA National Model, school counselors advocate for students needs related to career, academics, and personal/social development. The ASCA (2016) code of ethics challenges school counselors to:

Monitor and expand personal multicultural and social-justice advocacy awareness, knowledge and skills to be an effective culturally competent school counselors . . . [and] . . . understand how prejudice, privilege and various forms of oppression based on ethnicity, racial identity, age, economic status, abilities/disabilities, language, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity expression, family type, religious/spiritual identity, appearance and living situations (e.g., foster care, homelessness, incarceration) affect students and stakeholders. (p. 7)

Ethnicity, racial identity, economic status and gender are included among the characteristics listed as potentially impacted by prejudice and privilege. These variables are identified within the literature as areas in which disciplinary prejudice often exists and will be explored through this study.

Recently, scholars examined school counselor advocacy related to topics including LGBTQ students (Gonzalez, 2017; Lassiter & Sifford, 2015; Simons et al., 2017), career development for undocumented Latino youth (Storlie, 2016), representation of Latino students in gifted education (Bessman, Carr, & Grimes, 2013), working with students involved in the juvenile justice system (Crook, 2015), and social justice (Feldwisch & Whitson, 2015). There is no current research related to school counselor advocacy related students considered within the ALP placement process.

Self-efficacy relates to the standpoint that a person can complete challenging tasks, accomplish desired goals (Bandura, 1997) and cope with environmental stressors (Mullen et al., 2016). Within recent literature, scholars explored school counselor self-efficacy related to multicultural competence (Owens, Bodenhorn, & Bryant, 2010;

Holcomb-McCoy, Harris, Hines, & Johnston, 2008), school counselor program choice (Bodenhorn, Wolfe, & Airen, 2010), program delivery (Mullen & Lambie, 2016), English language learners (Johnson, et al., 2017), and the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout (Gunduz, 2012).

School Counselor Advocacy Self-Efficacy

There a paucity of literature examining the concept of school counselor advocacy self-efficacy. There are, however, two studies that explore this specific construct (i.e., Goldsmith, 2011; Simons, et al., 2017). Goldsmith (2011) surveyed ($N=85$) ASCA members to explore school counselors' self-efficacy for advocacy of gifted students. The scholar found that advocacy self-efficacy significantly predicted participants' activity with gifted students and advocacy competency. Recently, Simons and colleagues (2017) examined school counselors' ($N=398$) advocacy self-efficacy for LGB students. Using the theory of planned behavior to understand what influences school counselor LGB advocacy activity, the scholars found that advocacy self-efficacy significantly predicted both LBG advocacy intention and advocacy activity. The results of these studies indicate the potential connections between advocacy self-efficacy and advocacy intention (Simons et al., 2017) and behaviors (Goldsmith, 2011; Simons et al., 2017). As the previously explored literature revealed, there are both benefits and risks to ALP placements. The ASCA national model (ASCA, 2012) and ethical standards (ASCA, 2016) highlight the importance of advocacy as it relates to the school counseling profession. These advocacy efforts should include advocating for students being considered for ALP placement. By controlling for the impact of advocacy self-efficacy, the current study may provide

insight into the role of this construct in relation to school counselor decisions to place students in ALPs.

School Counselor Advocacy Self-Efficacy and ALP Placement Decisions

Currently, there is no published research related to school counselor advocacy self-efficacy and ALP placement decisions. A search of several databases for literature related to: (a) school counselor advocacy and alternative education or alternative learning programs, and (b) school counselor self-efficacy and alternative education or alternative learning programs, yielded no results. The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) and ethical codes (ASCA, 2016) highlight the critical role of school counselors as unbiased advocates for all students. Using school counselor advocacy self-efficacy as a covariate, this study explored impact of school counselor advocacy self-efficacy on school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons.

School Counselor Race

According to the most recently available national statistics, school counselors are predominantly White (77%) and female (77%; Bruce & Bridgeland, 2012). The population in the United States, however, is increasingly diverse (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011), meaning that many school counselors are working with students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds than their own. Almost fifty years ago, Heath (1970) challenged elementary school counselors to be aware of the impact of racism. "No matter where we perform our counseling skills," the scholar noted, "we are victims of one gigantic, disturbing element of our society—racism" (p. 2). The extensive amount of research exploring the discipline gap demonstrates that racism remains impactful within today's educational society.

A review of the literature revealed that several researchers have examined the impact of school counselors' race on topics including multicultural competence (Chao, 2013; Na, 2012; Williams, 2010), burnout (Ford, 2013), self-efficacy working with recent immigrant students (Na, 2012), involvement in school, family, and community partnerships with linguistically diverse families (Aydin, 2011), and social justice advocacy attitudes (Parikh et al., 2011). Several of the researchers (i.e., Aydin, 2011; Chao, 2013; Ford, 2013; Na, 2012) found race or race/ethnicity of the school counselor to be statistically significant within their research. Two scholars (i.e., Parikh et al., 2011; Williams, 2010) did not find statistically significant results related to school counselor race in relation to social justice advocacy attitudes. Na (2012), however, surveyed $N=381$ professional school counselors and determined that school counselor race/ethnicity was related to their self-efficacy in working with recent immigrant students.

School counselors, the majority of whom are White females, are working with an increasingly diverse population of students (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2012; Humes et al., 2011). There is a precedent within the literature to explore school counselor race as a variable of interest, and several scholars found school counselor race to be impactful in their research (e.g., Aydin, 2011; Chao, 2013; Ford, 2013; Na, 2012). Therefore, the current study utilized school counselor race as a covariate to explore its impact on school counselor decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons based on race, gender, and SES.

School Counselor Race and ALP Placement Decisions

Numerous researchers have explored teacher and principal demographic variables in relation to student discipline. Several scholars (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Kinsler, 2011;

Monroe, 2009; Monroe, 2013; Vavrus & Cole, 2002) examined the impact of teacher race on student discipline and one researcher looked at student-principal race interactions (Kinsler, 2011). Bradshaw et al. (2010) examined the office discipline referrals for minority students in 21 different elementary schools. Their analysis revealed that teacher-student ethnic match did not reduce the referral risk for AA students. Similar to these results, Kinsler (2011) found that the likelihood of punishment was not impacted by teacher or principal race. If the quantitative research indicates teacher and principal race does not dictate disciplinary choices, is it important to explore this construct in relation to student discipline? The results of qualitative inquiries help answer this question. Utilizing both ethnographic and discourse analytic approaches, Vavrus and Cole (2002) explored the way teachers and students in one urban high school construct disciplinary moments. In describing their results, the scholars noted that, “removing a student from class is a highly contextualized decision based on subtle race and gender relations that cannot be adequately addressed in school discipline policies” (p. 87). Furthermore, Monroe (2013) concluded that, in addition to bolstering their professional efficacy, teachers need to identify and dismantle their biases in order to help eliminate the discipline gap. To date, there is no research examining school counselor race in relation to school discipline or ALP placement decisions. Drawing from the advice of qualitative researchers exploring the complexity of racial relations within the school setting (e.g., Monroe, 2013; Vavrus & Cole, 2002), this study utilized school counselor race as a covariate to determine its impact on the dependent variable (i.e., school counselors’ decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons).

Summary

In summary, the results of quantitative studies examining the impact of race on discipline disproportionality and ALP placement vary, but the majority of research on AA students and discipline disproportionality and ALP placement reveals they are disciplined and placed at ALPs more often than White counterparts. Regarding gender, previous research indicates males receive disciplinary consequences at higher rates than females, but the results of studies examining gender and ALP placement provide mixed results. The research related to SES and discipline disproportionality is mixed, and the topic of SES in relation to and ALP placement is unexplored. Finally, research specifically examining these variables (i.e., student race, gender, and SES) and school counselor decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons, is non-existent.

School counselor belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race, are three areas of inquiry explored in the literature, but never in relation to school counselor decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. This study, utilizing these constructs as covariates, was first to examine the impact of these variables on school counselors ALP placement decisions.

This study was the first to explore the impact of gender, race, and SES on school counselors' decisions to place students into ALPs for disciplinary reasons and to include belief in a just world, school counselor advocacy self-efficacy, and school counselor race as covariates. According to John Rawl's (1971, 2001) theory of justice, policies should favor the most disadvantaged groups in our society. Decades of research indicates that certain groups may experience discipline at higher rates than, for instance, White, socioeconomically stable, able-bodied students. Guided by this framework, this study is

a contribution to the literature that can help inform school counselors of their potential biases in relation to student ALP placements for disciplinary reasons. If, rather than uncovering potential biases, school counselors are found to make unbiased decisions about disciplinary ALP placements based on these variables, it will further demonstrate the need for school counselors to act as advocates for students going through this potentially life-changing process.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how student's race, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) impact school counselors' likelihood of referring students to alternative learning programs (ALPs) for disciplinary reasons. In addition, this study examined how student's race, gender, and SES impact school counselors' likelihood of referring students to ALPs for disciplinary reasons taking into consideration school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race. The following sections of this chapter describe the participants, data collection procedures, instrumentation, research design, and data analysis procedures used in this study.

Participants

Participants in this study were selected through a random sample of American School Counselor Association (ASCA) members who indicated that they are currently serving in K-12 settings. According to the ASCA member directory, the total number of members categorized as serving in K-12 settings is approximately 33,000. Of these members, a random sample of 4,000 members of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) categorized as serving in K-12 settings was obtained and represented the population used for this study. The researcher sent each of the 4,000 school counselors an e-mail inviting them to participate in the study (500 e-mails per each of the eight study groups). Of the originally 4,000 e-mails sent, 237 were returned as undeliverable and 12 were blocked because the recipient's e-mail address rejected the e-mail as spam. A total of 143 incomplete surveys were removed from the initial data collected, with 21 removed from group 1, 21 from group 2, 18 from group 3, 12 from

group 4, 11 from group 5, 19 from group 6, 15 from group 7, and 24 from group 8.

Participants in the removed surveys answered between one and five of the initial items on the survey but failed to go beyond that point. After removing incomplete surveys from the eight study groups ($n=143$), the final data set included 334 participants who self-reported that they were licensed professional school counselors currently practicing in K-12 settings. This represents an 8.90% response rate based on the 3,751 successfully delivered e-mails. An a-priori power analysis using G*Power indicated 206 participants would be necessary to achieve a medium effect size at 95% confidence. With $N=334$ participants, the researcher met this goal.

Demographic data collected included gender, age, race, years of experience, school level, region, type of community, and the free and reduced lunch (FRL) status of the school where the school counselors served. The demographic questionnaire also included a question about whether or not the district in which the school counselors serve has an ALP and a question about whether or not the school counselors were currently involved in the referral or placement process for the district ALP. There was also one question included to assess school counselors' attitudes towards exclusionary discipline and one question included to assess participants' attitudes towards prevention programs.

Nearly 85% of the participants identified as female ($n=283$), while the remaining participants identified as male ($n=48$). The participants' reported ages ranged from 25 to 75, with a mean age of 43.32. Three participants elected not to identify their gender and ten decided not to state their age. More than 82% ($n=275$) of participants identified their race as White, followed by 10.2% as Black or African American ($n=34$), 3% as Hispanic or Latino/a ($n=10$), 2.4% as Multiracial ($n=8$), 0.9% as Asian ($n=3$) and 0.3% as Native

Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ($n=1$). Three participants elected not to identify their race.

Regarding years of experience, more than 51% of participants indicated they had less than 10 years of experience as a school counselor ($n=171$), nearly 33% indicated they had between 10 and 19 years ($n=110$), 12.3% indicated they had between 20 and 29 years of experience ($n=41$) and 2.7% reported over 30 years of service ($n=9$). Of the respondents, over 44% indicated they served in a 9th-12th grade setting ($n=149$), followed by nearly 30% indicating service in K-5th grade settings ($n=100$), and 24.6% indicating they work in a 6th-8th grade setting ($n=82$). Regarding the region in which they work, 41% of participants indicated they are working in the South ($n=137$), followed by 23.7% in the Midwest ($n=79$), 20.1% in the West ($n=67$), and 14.7% in the Northeast ($n=49$). Three respondents elected not to identify their years of experience, three did not identify their school level, and two chose not to identify their region.

When asked which of the following best describes the community in which their school was located, 41.9% indicated Suburban ($n=140$), 31.1% indicated rural ($n=104$), and nearly 27% selected Urban ($n=90$). Finally, participants were asked to select the range that reflected the number of students in their school that receive FRL. In response to this question, 27.5% indicated 25-79% FRL ($n=92$), nearly 27% indicated their school falls within the 50-74% range ($n=90$), nearly 25% indicated 75-100% of their students receive FRL ($n=83$), and 20.7% indicated less than 24% of their students receive FRL ($n=69$). All participants responded to the questions regarding community and school FRL.

Participants were also asked, “Is there an alternative learning/education program in your district?” Eighty-two percent of respondents indicated there is an alternative learning program in their district ($n=274$) and 16.8% responded that there is not ($n=56$). Four participants decided not to answer this question. When asked about their involvement in the referral or placement process for their district’s ALP, 45.8% of participants indicated they are involved in the process ($n=153$) and 51.2% responded that they are not involved ($n=171$). Seven participants elected not to respond.

To assess participants’ attitudes about exclusionary discipline, school counselors were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: “Certain students are not gaining anything from school and disrupt the learning environment for others. In such a case, referrals to alternative learning programs are justified to preserve the learning environment for students who wish to learn.” Over two percent of respondents indicated they strongly disagreed with the statement ($n=7$), 11.7% indicated they disagreed ($n=39$), 15.9% responded that they slightly disagreed ($n=53$), 42% slightly agreed with the statement ($n=140$), 21.9% agreed with the statement ($n=73$), and over six percent indicated they strongly agreed with the statement ($n=21$). One participant elected not to respond.

To examine their attitudes about prevention programs, participants were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with this statement: “I believe that putting in place prevention programs can reduce the need for exclusionary discipline practices, including alternative learning program placements.” Less than one percent of participants strongly disagreed with the statement ($n=3$), 0.3% indicated they disagreed with the statement ($n=1$), 0.9% responded they slightly disagreed with the statement

($n=3$), over 16% indicated they slightly agreed ($n=55$), 41.9% responded that they agreed with the statement ($n=140$), and nearly 40% indicated they strongly agreed ($n=132$). All participants responded to this question. Frequencies and percentages for all demographic data are represented in Table 1, below.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Characteristic		Frequency (n)	Percentage
<i>Gender</i> ($N=331$)	Female	283	84.7
	Male	48	14.4
<i>Age</i> ($N=324$)	21-29	31	9.6
	30-39	101	31.2
	40-49	104	32.1
	50-59	61	18.8
	60+	27	8.3
<i>Race</i> ($N=331$)	Asian	3	0.9
	Black or African Am.	34	10.2
	Hispanic or Latino/a	10	3.0
	Native Hawaiian or OPI	1	0.3
	White	275	82.3
	Multiracial	8	2.4
<i>Years of Experience</i> ($N=331$)	0-9 years	171	51.2
	10-19 years	110	32.9
	20-29 years	41	12.3
	30+ years	9	2.7
<i>School Level</i> ($N=331$)	K-5th grade	100	29.9
	6th–8th grade	82	24.6
	9th-12th grade	149	44.6
<i>Region</i> ($N=332$)	Northeast	49	14.7
	Midwest	79	23.7
	South	137	41.0
	West	67	20.1

<i>Community</i> (N=334)	Urban	90	26.9
	Suburban	140	41.9
	Rural	104	31.1
<i>FRL</i> (N=334)	0-24%	69	20.7
	25-49%	92	27.5
	50-74%	90	26.9
	75-100%	83	24.9
<i>District ALP</i> (N=330)	Yes	274	82.0
	No	56	16.8
<i>Referral Involvement</i> (N=324)	Yes	153	47.2
	No	171	52.8
<i>Exclusion Attitude</i> (N=333)	Strongly Disagree	7	2.1
	Disagree	39	11.7
	Slightly Disagree	53	15.9
	Slightly Agree	140	41.9
	Agree	73	21.9
	Strongly Agree	21	6.3
<i>Prevention Attitude</i> (N=334)	Strongly Disagree	3	0.9
	Disagree	1	0.3
	Slightly Disagree	3	0.9
	Slightly Agree	55	16.5
	Agree	140	41.9
	Strongly Agree	132	39.5

Data Collection Procedures

Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. In the first step of this study, a vignette was created to depict a situation in which a student is being considered for referral to an ALP for disciplinary reasons. Then, modifications were made to the vignette to depict differences in student race (White or African American), gender (male or female) and SES (economically disadvantaged or economically

advantaged), forming the basis for the eight study groups (see Appendix A). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight study groups through random selection in Microsoft Excel. Each individual in the eight participant groups received an email describing the purpose of the study as an examination of school counselors' decision-making process in placing students at alternative learning programs and a link to a SurveyShare website designed for each of the eight vignettes presented in the study.

After following the link, participants were provided with an introduction to the study procedures, time estimate, and informed consent. School counselors were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Upon completion of the informed consent and the selection of the "I accept" option, participants were prompted to a screen containing one of the eight vignettes. After reading the vignette, participants were prompted to select, on a five-point Likert scale, their likelihood of placing the student described to an ALP. The items in the Likert scale, range from 1 "not likely at all" to 5 "extremely likely." Participants were then prompted to the survey section measuring their advocacy self-efficacy, as measured by seven selected factor items from the *School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale* (Bodenhorn, 2001; Goldsmith, 2011), and their belief in a just world, as measured by the seven-item *Global Belief in a Just World Scale* (Lipkus, 1991). Once the participants completed the two instruments, they were prompted a final time to a demographic questionnaire, which served as the concluding portion of the study. The demographic questionnaire contained one item providing a self-report of the participant's race. Participants self-reported by selecting which of the following best describes their race: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White,

or Multiracial. The survey link was available to participants for two weeks, with a follow-up e-mail sent to all potential participants after one week.

The random of selection from participants across the country is a way to reduce error (Dillman, 2000) and limit interpretation issues within quantitative analysis (Mertens, 2015). The nationwide directory of membership maintained by the ASCA was the source of participants for this study. Additionally, choosing potential participants from a random sample of the overall membership helped reduce error. Another procedure designed to reduce error is a pilot study to address issues related to the wording and length of the survey. A pilot study was completed to assess the time it would take to complete the full battery of instruments, the wording and overall clarity of the vignettes, and that the choice selection for participants is clear. The method and results of the pilot study are attached as Appendices E, F, G, and H. The random sample of participants and the random assignment to study groups also reduced potential error in this study. Finally, in accordance to another error-reduction recommendation (Dillman, 1978), participants were informed that their responses will be kept anonymous and confidential.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation involved in this study consist of two vignettes, two assessments, and a demographic form. The instruments include: *The Global Belief in a Just World Scale* (Lipkus, 1991) and selected factor items (Goldsmith, 2011) from *The School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale* (Bodehnorn, 2001). The independent variables, dependent variable, covariates, and the corresponding instruments used to measure each are illustrated in Table 2. Time estimates were gathered from a talk aloud pilot study.

The intent and psychometric properties of each are addressed in the sections following

Table 2.

Table 2

Independent and Dependent Variables, Covariates, and Corresponding Instrumentation

Type of Variable	Variable Name	Instrument
Independents	Student Race	Vignettes 1-8
	Student Gender	Vignettes 1-8
	Student SES	Vignettes 1-8
Dependent	School Counselor decision to place students in an ALP for disciplinary reasons	Likert Scale
Covariates	Belief in a Just World	<i>Global Belief in a Just World Scale</i> (Lipkus, 1991)
	Advocacy Self-Efficacy	<i>School Counselor Advocacy Self-Efficacy Scale</i> (ACES; Goldsmith, 2011)
	School Counselor Race	Item 3 of the Demographic Questionnaire

The Vignettes

To assess the impact of the independent variables in the study (i.e., student race, gender, and SES) on the dependent variable (school counselor decision to refer students to an ALP), a vignette was constructed that depicts a hypothetical situation in which a student is being considered for ALP referral for disciplinary reasons. Each of the eight vignettes depict the same scenario. The student's race (White or AA), gender (male or female), and SES (economically advantaged or economically disadvantaged) varies, for a total of eight vignette possibilities. A talk aloud exercise was conducted (see Appendices E, F, G, and H) to test the clarity of the vignettes and determine time estimates for the full study. Participants ($N=5$) were asked to read two vignettes and speak about notable differences. All five of the participants noticed the following differences between the

students depicted in the vignettes: (a) “race,” (b) “gender,” (c) “socioeconomic status,” and (d) “name” (see Appendix G).

School Counselor Decision to Place Students in an ALP

To assess the dependent variable, school counselor decision to place students in an ALP, participants answered a question about their likelihood to refer the student depicted in a vignette to an ALP. Following the presentation of the vignette, participants were asked how likely they would be to refer the student depicted in the vignette to an ALP. The items in the Likert scale ranged from 1 “not likely at all” to 5 “extremely likely.” The other choices were: 2 “slightly likely,” 3 “somewhat likely,” and 4 “very likely.”

School Counselor Advocacy Self-Efficacy

The *School Counselor Advocacy Self-Efficacy Scale* (ASES) was used to assess the first co-variate, school counselor advocacy self-efficacy. Bodenhorn (2001) developed the *School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale* (SCSE) to measure school counselor self-efficacy for use in research, to identify training needs for practicing school counselors, and as a potential outcome measure for school counseling education programs (Bodenhorn 2001; Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005). Goldsmith (2011) reviewed the original scale and, with permission, selected and validated seven items from one factor of the SCSE scale (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005) related to school counselor-self-efficacy in the area of advocacy. Goldsmith utilized an expert panel to review the items, provide feedback, and validate the scale for use as a measure of advocacy self-efficacy. In addition to Goldsmith’s use of the scale, Simons, et al. (2017) also utilized the ASES as a measure of school counselor advocacy self-efficacy and reported high reliability

(Cronbach's $\alpha=.91$). Participants responded to the 7-question ASES on a 6-point Likert-scale with answers ranging from 1 "Never" to 6 "Frequently." Scores had a potential range of 7 to 42, with higher scores indicating greater belief in their ability to carry out the advocacy duties outlined in the ASCA (2012) National Model (Goldsmith, 2011).

School Counselor Belief in a Just World

To assess the first covariate, belief in a just world, *The Global Belief in a Just World Scale* (GBJWS) was used. According to Lipkus (1991), the 7-item scale measures the belief that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. Participants responded to 7 items on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strong disagreement" to 6 "strong agreement." Accordingly, responses ranged from 7-49, with higher scores reflecting greater belief that the world is a just place and people get what they deserve, and lower scores reflecting greater disagreement with these constructs (Lipkus, 1991). Lipkus reported an acceptable level of internal consistency for the scale (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.827$) as well as discriminant and convergent validity.

School Counselor Race

The third and final covariate for the study is school counselor's self-reported race and will be measured by participants' responses to item #3 on the demographic questionnaire. Participants were asked: *Which of the following best describes your racial heritage?* Participants then chose one item from the following seven choices: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, or Multiracial.

Research Design

The experimental study used a completely randomized design that consisted of three independent variables (student gender, race, and SES), and three covariates (school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race). Participants were randomly assigned into one of eight conditions: (a) male, White, economically disadvantaged; (b) male, AA, economically disadvantaged; (c) female, White, economically disadvantaged; (d) female, AA, economically disadvantaged; (e) male, White, economically advantaged; (f) male, AA, economically advantaged; (g) female, White, economically advantaged; (h) female, AA, economically advantaged. The dependent variable was school counselor likelihood to refer students to ALPs for disciplinary reasons based on the independent variables, as assessed by the eight vignettes. The second question in this study controlled for the effects of the covariates.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

1. How do student race, gender, and socioeconomic status impact school counselors' decisions to place students in an ALPs for disciplinary reasons?
 - a. Is there a significant difference between males and females on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?
 - b. Is there a significant difference between White and African American students on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?
 - c. Is there a significant difference between economically disadvantaged and economically advantaged students on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?

2. After controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race, how does student race, gender, and SES impact school counselors' decisions to place students in an ALP for disciplinary reasons?
 - a. After controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race is there a significant difference between males and females on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?
 - b. After controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race is there a significant difference between White and African American students on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?
 - c. After controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race is there a significant difference between economically advantaged and economically disadvantaged students on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?

Data Analysis

Statistical procedures were conducted using the statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, 2015). Prior to running the analyses, the data was screened for missing data, univariate and multivariate outliers, and normality. Additionally, to test the homogeneity of covariance matrices, Box's M was utilized to ensure this assumption was not violated. Finally, the independence of observations was addressed by examining correlations among the independent variables and covariates (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

The first question was: How do student race, gender, and socioeconomic status impact school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons?

In order to examine the main effects related to the independent variables (IVs), a factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. This allowed the researcher to examine the main effects related to three IVs (two conditions each) to a single dependent variable (DV; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

The second question was: After controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race, how does student race, gender, and socioeconomic status impact school counselors' decisions to place students in alternative learning programs for disciplinary reasons? To answer this question, a factorial analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted. The purpose of an ANCOVA is to determine if mean differences among the experimental groups on the adjusted DVs are likely to have occurred by chance (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). To examine the impact of each covariate (i.e., belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and school counselor race) on the adjusted DVs, an ANCOVA was conducted. The .05 level was used to determine significance in all statistical tests.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the methodology utilized to investigate how student's race, gender, and SES impact school counselors' likelihood of placing students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. In addition, this study examined how student's race, gender, and SES impact school counselors' likelihood of placing students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons taking into consideration school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race. The previous sections detail the description of participants, data collection procedures, instrumentation, research design, research questions, and data analysis used in this study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how student's race, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) impacted school counselors' likelihood of placing students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. Additionally, this study examined how student's race, gender, and SES impacted school counselors' likelihood of placing students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons taking into consideration school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race. This chapter presents the findings of this study. The first section includes reliability and validity measures. In the second section, the researcher provides information regarding data screening. Finally, in the third and fourth sections, the results of the two statistical analyses utilized in this study are provided.

Results

Instrument Reliability and Validity

This section provides a description of instrument reliabilities. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency measures were used to estimate the reliability of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS; Lipkus, 1991) and the School Counselor Advocacy Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES; Goldsmith, 2011). Cronbach's alpha and number of items for each survey are provided in Table 3. Results indicated that both survey scales had an acceptable level of reliability ranging from .764 to .838.

Although Cronbach's alpha cannot be used to assess the reliability of the vignettes, Evans et al. (2015) discussed the use of vignettes in studying clinical decision-making and noted that, "In general, clinicians' perceptions of and responses to vignettes appear to resemble their responses to real life situations" (p. 164). This statement is

rooted in research, including a study by Lunza (1990) that revealed nurses' responses to vignette scenarios accurately predicted their responses to future situations they experienced in their work. A meta-analysis of 111 studies (i.e., Murphy, Herr, Lockhart, & Maguire, 1986) revealed that, overall, vignette methodologies align with actual behavioral observations. The scholars also noted, however, that vignettes sometimes lead to larger effect sizes. Returning to Evans and colleagues, the scholars note that participants' responses to vignettes should be interpreted as a strong predictor of behavior given the circumstances described in the vignette. Based on the literature, clinical experience, and research, Evans et al. made several recommendations for vignette content which were taken into consideration when creating the vignettes for this study (e.g., keeping the length between 50 and 500 words, basing the vignettes off of the literature and clinical experience, following a narrative, and using present tense). By following these methodological recommendations, the researcher aligned this study with literature-based standards for vignette research.

Table 3

Cronbach's Alpha and Number of Items for Study Scales

Variable	Instrument	Cronbach's α	Number of Items
Student Race	Vignettes 1-8	n/a	n/a
Student Gender	Vignettes 1-8	n/a	n/a
Student SES	Vignettes 1-8	n/a	n/a
School Counselors' Decisions to Place Students into an ALP	Likert scale	n/a	1
School Counselors' Belief in a Just World	Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS)	.838	7
School Counselors' Advocacy Self-Efficacy School Counselors' Race	School Counselor Advocacy Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES)	.764	7

Data Screening

Prior to running major analyses, the researcher screened the data using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The researcher used the screening process to examine outliers, missing values, normality, and multicollinearity. Assumptions related to ANOVA and ANCOVA were also addressed

Outliers. The researcher conducted an analysis of univariate outlier data by examining box plots and stem-and-leaf plots. ANOVA and ANCOVA analyses were run with and without these outliers and they did not significantly impact the results. Therefore, the decision was made to retain the univariate outliers. The researcher also computed Mahalanobis' distance and determined there were no multivariate outliers.

Missing Values. The online survey platform, SurveyShare, provided information regarding the number of participants who started the survey but did not complete it ($n=143$). These incomplete responses were kept separate from the completed data set ($n=334$). The researcher completed a Missing Values Analysis on the completed data set using SPSS software. One participant did not respond to the Likert scale utilized to determine the likelihood of placing a student in an alternative learning program (ALP; 0.3% missing). Four participants did not have a total score for the ASES (1.2% missing). Thirteen participants did not have a total score for the BIAJWS (3.9% missing); and three participants did not respond to the demographic question related to their race/ethnicity (0.9% missing). The researcher completed Little's MCAR test to determine if the data were missing completely at random (MCAR). The results indicated the data could be treated as MCAR ($\chi^2=21.750$; $df=14$; $p=.084$). Based on these results, listwise deletion was utilized in the final analysis. Deleting cases is an appropriate procedure for handling missing values if there are only a few cases and they are missing at random (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Normality. Skewness and kurtosis are two elements of normality (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The researcher assessed for skewness and kurtosis through the Explore function of SPSS. According to Gravetter and Wallnau (2014), acceptable limits for skewness and kurtosis are between -2 and 2. Based on this standard, the researcher determined there were no issues with skewness and kurtosis.

Multicollinearity. The researcher also assessed for multicollinearity, or high correlation between two variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Bivariate correlations

and variance inflation factors (VIFs) were examined. All VIFs were around 1.00 and there were no correlations >0.90 . Therefore, there was no evidence of multicollinearity.

Data Analysis

Analysis of Variance

The first main research question for this study was: How do student race, gender, and socioeconomic status impact school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons? The sub-research questions were: (a) Is there a significant difference between males and females on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?, (b) Is there a significant difference between White and African students on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?, and (c) Is there a significant difference between economically advantaged and economically disadvantaged students on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP? To answer these questions, the researcher used a factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine the main effects related to the three independent variables (IVs; two conditions each) to a single dependent variable (DV; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Specifically, a factorial ANOVA was performed to assess the impact of the IVs (student race, student gender, and student SES) on school counselors' likelihood to refer students to ALPs for disciplinary reasons. Student race, gender, and SES were depicted in the vignettes, and each IV had two levels, forming the basis for eight study groups. For student race, the levels were White and African American (AA). For student gender, the levels were male and female, and for SES the levels were economically advantaged and economically disadvantaged. To assess the DV, participants answered a question on a Likert scale ranging from 1 "not likely at all" to 5 "extremely likely" regarding their likelihood to refer the student depicted in a vignette to an ALP.

In addition to screening the data and assessing for normality and multicollinearity, the researcher used SPSS to assess for homogeneity of variances, which is an assumption of factorial ANOVA. The Levene's test was used to test this assumption. With an alpha level of .05, $F(7, 325)=1.211$, $p=.29$, the null hypotheses of no variance is retained, indicating the assumption is met.

A three-way factorial ANOVA was conducted to compare the main effects of student gender, race, and SES on school counselors' decisions to place students in an ALP for disciplinary reasons. The results of the ANOVA are presented in Table 4. Only the main effects are being reported in this study. Each factor (i.e., student gender, race, and SES) consisted of two levels. For student gender, the levels were male and female; for race, White and AA; and, for SES, economical advantaged and economically disadvantaged, forming the basis for eight study groups. The researcher examined the impact of the main effects for the independent variables (i.e., student race, gender, and SES); therefore, the differences between the group sizes were inconsequential.

Table 4

Results of ANOVA for Dependent Variable, Student Race, Student Gender, and Student Socioeconomic Status

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Partial Eta Squared</i>
Corrected Model	3	.639	.592	.620	.005
Intercept	1	2105.431	1951.222	.000	.856
Student Gender	1	.521	.483	.487	.001
Student Race	1	1.377	1.276	.260	.004
Student SES	1	.011	.010	.920	.000
Error	329	1.079			
Total	333				
Corrected Total	332				

All main effects were statistically insignificant at the .05 level. The main effect for student gender yielded an F ratio of $F(1, 329)=.483, p=.487$, indicating no significant differences between males and females on school counselors' likelihood to place the students depicted in the vignette into an ALP for disciplinary reasons. The main effect for race yielded an F ratio of $F(1, 329)=1.276, p=.260$, revealing no significant differences between White and AA students in relation to school counselors' decisions to place students into ALPs. Finally, the main effect for SES yielded an F ratio of $F(1, 329)=.010, p=.920$, indicating that there were no significant differences related to school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs between economically advantaged and economically disadvantaged students depicted in the vignettes. Means and standard errors of school counselors' likelihood to place students in ALPs as a function of student gender, race, and SES are depicted in Table 5.

Table 5

Means and Standard Errors of School Counselors' Decisions to Place Students in Alternative Learning Programs as a Function of Student Gender, Race, and Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Factor	Level			
	<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>	
Student Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
	2.572	.081	2.492	.081
Student Race	<u>White</u>		<u>African American</u>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
	2.596	.081	2.468	.080
Student SES	<u>Economically Advantaged</u>		<u>Economically Disadvantaged</u>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
	2.538	.086	2.526	.076

Note: SES=socioeconomic status

In summary, the main effects for student gender, race, and SES were statistically insignificant, indicating that school counselors were no more likely to place male students than female students, White students than AA students, or economically advantaged than economically disadvantaged students into ALPs for disciplinary reasons.

Analysis of Covariance

The second main research question for this study was: After controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race, how does student race, gender, and SES impact school counselors' decisions to place students in an ALP for disciplinary reasons? The sub-research questions associated with the second main research question were: (a) After controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race is there a significant difference between males and females on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?, (b) After controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race is there a significant difference between White and African American students on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?, and (c) After controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race is there a significant difference between economically advantaged and economically disadvantaged students on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?

To answer these questions, the researcher used a factorial analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to examine the main effects related to the three IVs (two conditions each) to DV after adjusting for differences associated with one or more covariates (CVs; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). One purpose of ANCOVA is to reduce the error term, therefore increasing the sensitivity of the test of main effects and interactions. Therefore,

a factorial ANOVA was performed to assess the impact of the IVs (student race, student gender, and student SES) on school counselors' likelihood to refer students to ALPs for disciplinary reasons, after holding constant school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race.

School counselors' advocacy self-efficacy was measured by the ASES (Goldsmith, 2010). The ASES is a 7-item scale designed to measure school counselor self-efficacy in the area of advocacy. Participants responded to the 7-question ASES on a 6-point Likert-scale with answers ranging from 1 "Never" to 6 "Frequently." Scores had a potential range of 7 to 42, with higher scores indicating greater belief in their ability to carry out the advocacy duties outlined in the ASCA (2012) National Model (Goldsmith, 2011). School Counselor belief in a just world was measured by the GBJWS (Lipkus, 1991). According to Lipkus (1991), the 7-item scale measures the belief that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. Participants responded to 7 items on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strong disagreement" to 6 "strong agreement." Accordingly, responses ranged from 7-49, with higher scores reflecting greater belief that the world is a just place and people get what they deserve, and lower scores reflecting greater disagreement with these constructs (Lipkus, 1991).

In addition to screening the data and assessing for normality and multicollinearity, the researcher used SPSS to assess for homogeneity of variances, which is an assumption of factorial ANCOVA. The Levene's test was used to test this assumption. With an alpha level of .05, $F(7, 312)=1.205$, $p=.299$, the null hypotheses of no variance is retained, indicating the assumption is met. An additional assumption of ANCOVA is the homogeneity of regression lines. The research utilized SPSS to test this assumption and

the results were statistically insignificant, indicating the assumption was not violated.

The final assumption for ANCOVA is that the CVs are correlated with the DV. Using SPSS to test this assumption, only school counselors' belief in a just world, as measured by the Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS; Lipkus, 1991) came out significant.

Therefore, it was the only covariate included in the ANCOVA model. School counselors' advocacy self-efficacy, as measured by the ASES (Goldsmith, 2010) and school counselors' race, as measured by Item 3 on the demographic questionnaire, did not correlate with the DV. Therefore, they were not included in the ANCOVA.

Correlation coefficients for bivariate correlation between the dependent variable and covariates are reported in Table 6.

Table 6

Correlation Coefficients for Bivariate Correlation Between Dependent Variable and Covariates

<i>Covariate</i>	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>
School Counselors' Belief in a Just World	.174**
School Counselors' Advocacy Self-Efficacy	-.070
School Counselors' Race	.055

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The researcher conducted a factorial ANCOVA to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between male and female students, White and AA students, and economically advantaged and disadvantaged students on school counselors' likelihood to refer students to an ALP controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world. The results of the ANCOVA are presented in Table 7. There were no significant differences based on student gender, race, and SES after controlling for school

counselors' belief in a just world. The adjusted and unadjusted means for the dependent variable, school counselors' likelihood of placing students into ALPs, for the main effects of the independent variables (student gender, race, and SES) are reported in Table 8.

Table 7

Results of ANCOVA for Dependent Variable, Student Race, Student Gender, and Student Socioeconomic Status, Belief in a Just World

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Partial Eta Squared</i>
Corrected Model	4	3.151	3.305	.018	.037
Intercept	1	79.691	76.762	.000	.196
Student Gender	1	.272	.262	.609	.001
Student Race	1	1.951	1.880	.171	.006
Student SES	1	.125	.121	.728	.000
Belief in a Just World	1	9.868	9.868	.002	.029
Error	315	1.038			
Total	320				
Corrected Total	319				

Table 8

Adjusted and Unadjusted Means for the Dependent Variable for Student Gender, Student Race, and Student Socioeconomic Status

	Unadjusted Means	Adjusted Means
Student Gender	2.532	2.537
Student Race	2.532	2.537
Student Socioeconomic Status	2.532	2.537

While school counselors' belief in a just world slightly impacted school counselors' likelihood of placing students into an ALP ($\eta^2 = .029$), there were no significant differences related to the IVs (i.e., student gender, race, and SES) after controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world.

Summary

The purpose of this experimental study was to examine how student's race, gender, and SES impact school counselors' likelihood of placing students ALPs for disciplinary reasons. In addition, the study explored how student's race, gender, and SES impact school counselors' likelihood of placing students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons taking into consideration school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race. This chapter described the results of this study. The first section described instrument reliability and validity. The second section described the data screening procedures. The third section described the results of the ANOVA analysis used to examine the main research question and its corresponding sub-questions. Finally, the fourth section described the results from ANCOVA analysis used to examine the second main research question and its corresponding sub-research questions.

Results indicate that student race, gender, and SES did not impact school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. School counselors' belief in a just world significantly correlated with the DV (school counselors' decision to place students in an ALP). When added as a covariate in the model, however, school counselors' belief in a just world did not significantly impact school counselors' decisions to place students into ALPs based on student race, gender, and SES. Overall, these results indicate that school counselors are no more likely to place males than females, AA than White students, or economically disadvantaged than advantaged students, into ALPs for disciplinary reasons. This remains true when holding constant school counselors' belief in a just world.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This experimental study examined the impact of student race, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) on school counselors' decisions to place students in alternative learning programs (ALPs) for disciplinary reasons. Additionally, this study examined the impact of student race, gender, and SES on school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons after controlling for school counselors' believe in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race. The results of this research are discussed in this chapter. This chapter includes an overview, a discussion of the results of the study, the contributions of the study, limitations of the study, implications of the findings, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Overview

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (ASCA, 2012) and ASCA Ethical Standards (ASCA, 2016) emphasize the relationship between school counseling, advocacy, and social justice. School counselors are urged to address inequitable policies, procedures, and conditions that may limit students' college access, personal/social and academic development, and career readiness (ASCA, 2012). Additionally, the ASCA ethical standards (ASCA, 2016) note school counselors should be unbiased in their decision-making. Therefore, this research study aimed to establish an empirical understanding of school counselors' decisions to place students into ALPs for disciplinary reasons.

The researcher examined the impact of student race, gender, and SES on school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. Additionally, the researcher explored school counselors' decisions to place students into ALPs for

disciplinary reasons, taking into consideration school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy-self efficacy, and race. After thoroughly reviewing the literature, the researcher determined that an examination of the impact of student's race, gender, and SES was appropriate. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the impact of each independent variable (IV; i.e., student race, gender, and SES) on the dependent variable (school counselors' decisions to place students into an ALP for disciplinary reasons). Through the review of literature, the researcher also determined that an examination of the impact of students' race, gender, and SES, after controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race, was appropriate. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to examine the impact of student race, gender, and SES on school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs after holding constant the covariates (i.e., school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race).

Discussion of Results

Discussion of Demographic Data

An examination of the demographic data for the study indicated a lack of diversity among participants. Within the sample, there was a lack of variability in that participants were predominately White, female, and between the ages of 30 and 49. These results mirror findings by Bruce and Bridgeland (2012), which indicated school counselors within the United States are predominately White, female, and between the ages of 25 and 64. Additionally, the majority of respondents reported less than 10 years of experience, suggesting school counselors in the early part of their careers may be more likely to participate in research related to the ALP placement decision-making process.

The results of this research, then, reflect the decision-making process of school counselors in the earlier, rather than the latter, part of their careers. While the demographic variability of participants' school level, region, and community is greater than the variability in race, gender, and years of experience, it should be noted that participants in this study worked primarily in suburban high schools located in the Southern region of the United States.

Analysis of Variance

The first research question was: How do student race, gender, and SES impact school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. The sub-research questions associated with this research question were: (a) Is there a significant difference between males and females on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP?, (b) Is there a significant difference between White and African American students on the likelihood of being placed in a ALP?, and (c) Is there a significant difference between economically disadvantaged and economically advantaged students on the likelihood of being placed in an ALP.

In order to examine school counselors' likelihood of placing students into an ALP for disciplinary reasons, the researcher created eight vignettes. The scenario depicted in each of the vignettes was the same (see Appendix A), apart from the student's race (White or African American), gender (male or female), and SES (economically advantaged or economically disadvantaged), forming the basis of eight study groups. The school counselors' likelihood of referring a student to an ALP was assessed through a five-item Likert scale question, with responses ranging from 1 "not likely at all" to 5 "extremely likely." The analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed no statistically

significant differences for the main effects of race, gender, and SES on school counselors' likelihood of placing students into ALPs for disciplinary reasons.

Student race. The results of this analysis appear to indicate that, in a situation where a school counselor deciding whether or not to place a student at an ALP, the school counselor is not basing this decision upon the student's race (i.e., the school counselor is no more likely to place an African American (AA) student than a White student). In light of previous research, this finding is meaningful, as the results of this study may indicate school counselors are racially unbiased in their ALP placement decisions. There is no currently published research examining student race and school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. However, previous research in the area of discipline disproportionality consistently reveals that AA students receive disproportionately higher rates of exclusionary discipline measures than their White peers (e.g., Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Children's Defense Fund, 1974; Snyder & Dillow, 2015; Wu et al., 1982). Additionally, the majority of previous research examining AA students and ALP placement indicates that AA students are more likely than White students to receive placements in ALPs (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Hilbreth & Slate, 2014; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Previous research does not, however, indicate the level of school counselor involvement in the ALP placement process. It is possible, then, based on the current findings, that school counselors' involvement in the ALP placement process could potentially aid in reducing racial disproportionality in ALP placements.

While it is inappropriate for school counselors to act as disciplinarians (ASCA, 2013), it is within the professional and ethical standards (ASCA, 2012; ASCA, 2016) to

act as advocates for socially just disciplinary procedures. The results of this research, then, provide insight into the impact of student race on ALP placement decisions and appear to indicate that school counselors are no more likely to place AA students in ALPs than White students, making them appropriate and important advocates for students being considered for ALP placement.

Student gender. Regarding school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons, the results of this analysis appear to indicate that school counselors are no more likely to place males than females. Although the majority of research reveals that males experience exclusionary discipline at higher rates than females (e.g., Anyon et al., 2014; Curtiss & Slate, 2014; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2014; Wallace et al., 2008), the research examining gender and ALP placement is sparse and reveals mixed conclusions. Fabelo et al. (2011) and Booker and Mitchell (2011) determined males, compared to females, are at increased odds of ALP placement, Booker and Mitchell also determined these results were insignificant regarding discretionary placements. The current findings appear to make sense given the current literature. For example, Booker and Mitchell found that there were no significant differences between males and females for discretionary (i.e., non-mandatory placements). In the current study, school counselors used their discretion to determine whether or not a student should be placed in a ALP. The findings, then, support the conclusion gender is not impactful for discretionary ALP placement decisions.

This study reveals that school counselors, when facing an ALP placement decision for disciplinary reasons, are no more likely to place males than females. These findings, then, are interesting in light of previous research on discipline disproportionality

that indicates males are at an overall higher risk for exclusionary discipline than females (Fabelo et al., 2011; Booker & Mitchell, 2011). The findings, however, may not necessarily be contradictory. Previous research demonstrates that males often experience exclusionary discipline and ALP placements at higher rates than females (e.g., Anyon et al., 2014; Curtiss & Slate, 2014; Fabelo et al., 2011; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2014; Wallace et al., 2008), but do not experience discretionary ALP placements at higher rates than females (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). These findings strengthen the notion that discretionary ALP placements do not put males at increased odds of placement. Additionally, previous research does not indicate the level of school counselor involvement in the disciplinary process. The results of this study indicate that school counselors, when faced with an ALP placement decision for disciplinary reasons, are no more likely to place males than females. School counselors, then, serving as unbiased advocates for students being considered for ALP placements, have the potential to reduce gender bias in ALP placements.

Student socioeconomic status. The results of this study suggest that school counselors are no more likely to refer economically disadvantaged students than economically advantaged students to ALPs for disciplinary reasons. Within literature on discipline disproportionality, students identified as economically disadvantaged often experience exclusionary discipline more than their economically advantaged peers (e.g., Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Bratlinger, 1991; Kinsler, 2011; Mizel et al., 2016; Wu et al., 1982). This research appears to contradict these findings, as school counselors were no more likely to refer economically disadvantaged students than economically advantaged students. There is dissenting research however, with several researchers finding SES is

not a significant predictor of disciplinary consequences (Butler et al., 2012; McCarthy & Hodge, 1987; Wallace et al., 2008). Additionally, three studies garnered mixed results related to SES and student discipline (Mcloughlin & Noltemeyer, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2014).

The results of this study add to the growing base of literature exploring student ALP placement and is the first to examine student SES in relation to ALP placements and school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. Contradictory to some research that indicates economically disadvantaged students are more likely to receive exclusionary discipline, the findings of this research suggest that school counselors are no more likely to place economically disadvantaged students in ALPs than economically advantaged students. Therefore, these findings may mean that school counselors, if involved in ALP placement decisions, could potentially help reduce bias in ALP placements based on student socioeconomic status.

The ASCA emphasizes the importance of multicultural competence among school counselors in order to provide support for students and promote equitable access to education (ASCA, 2012). Additionally, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) calls for the inclusion of multicultural competencies into counseling curriculum (CACREP, 2016; CACREP Standard II.D.2.f). The ASCA and other scholars have emphasized the importance of multicultural training for school counseling students (ASCA, 2009, 2012; Chao, 2013; Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999; Nelson, Bustamante, & Watts, 2013) so they can fulfill their role as advocates and duty to act as change agents for all students (Airen, 2009; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016). The current findings reveal that school

counselors making ALP placement decisions did not demonstrate bias regarding student gender, race, and SES. Previous research indicates that school counselors perceive themselves as multiculturally competent (Airen, 2009; Holcomb-McCoy 2001; 2005). This research reveals that, in relation to students' gender, race, and SES, school counselors go beyond only self-perceptions of multicultural competence but are also answering the professional (ASCA, 2012) and ethical (ASCA, 2016) calls to act as unbiased, multiculturally competent practitioners and decision-makers.

Analysis of Covariance

The second research question addressed in this study was: After controlling for school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race, how does student race, gender, and SES impact school counselors' decisions to place students in alternative learning programs for disciplinary reasons? The covariates examined in this study, then, were school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race. Bivariate correlations revealed that only school counselors' belief in a just world correlated with the dependent variable (DV; i.e., school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons); school counselors' race and school counselors' advocacy self-efficacy did not significantly correlate with the DV.

School counselor belief in a just world. In the current study, school counselors' belief in a just world had a small statistically significant effect on their ALP placement decisions ($\eta^2 = .029$), meaning that school counselors with higher belief in a just world were slightly more likely to refer students to ALPs for disciplinary reasons. This finding appears to indicate, then, that one belief that impacts school counselors' ALP placements decisions is belief in a just world. School counselors who indicated they believe more

strongly that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get were more likely to place students in ALPs than school counselors who demonstrated less agreement with this construct. Previous research on school counselors' belief in a just world revealed mixed results. While Parikh and colleagues (2011) found an inverse relationship between school counselors' belief in a just world and attitude towards social justice advocacy, Jones (2013) determined school counselors' belief in a just world was not a predictor of social justice advocacy attitudes. The current findings do not add clarity to the relationship between school counselors' belief in a just world and advocacy attitudes towards social justice advocacy, as the impact of belief in a just world was examined in relation to ALP placement decisions rather than social justice advocacy attitudes. The school counselors in the current study were asked their likelihood of placing the students depicted in a disciplinary scenario in an ALP. If, for example, the scenario had asked participants to indicate their likelihood of advocating for the students depicted in the scenarios, then the findings would have provided more clarity on the relationship between school counselors' belief in a just world and social justice advocacy attitudes.

These current findings do, however, support similar research by Human-Vogel and Morkel (2017) that determined teachers with higher personal belief in a just world may see discipline for problem behaviors as more necessary than teachers with low belief in a just world in order to preserve the justness of the world. Similarly, school counselors with higher belief in a just world may see ALP placements for disciplinary reasons as more necessary in order to preserve the justness of the world. Therefore, school counselors' examination of their own belief in a just world could be impactful. For example, based on these findings, school counselors who determine they have a higher

belief in a just world should realize that their adherence to this construct may connect with a higher likelihood of placing a student in an ALP.

School counselor advocacy self-efficacy. Although research related to school counselor advocacy self-efficacy is limited, two scholars examined this specific construct in relation to advocacy of gifted students (Goldsmith, 2011) and LGB students (Simons et al., 2017). Goldsmith determined that advocacy self-efficacy significantly predicted participants' advocacy competency and activity with gifted students. Similarly, Simons and colleagues determined that LGB advocacy intention and activity were significantly predicted by advocacy self-efficacy. The finding that school counselor advocacy self-efficacy did not correlate with school counselors ALP placement is not necessarily contradictory to previous research. In this study, school counselors were not asked to indicate their likelihood of advocating for students being placed ALPs. Furthermore, it is possible that participants believed that the ALP placement could have been in the best interest of the students depicted in the vignettes. Therefore, these results may not indicate advocacy self-efficacy is not related to school counselors' willingness to advocate for students being considered for ALP placements. Rather, they should be interpreted as indicative that advocacy self-efficacy does not impact the likelihood that school counselors will decide to place students in ALPs.

School counselor race. Previous research related to student discipline and educators' race revealed teacher race is not impactful referral risk for AA students (Bradshaw et al., 2010) or in students' likelihood of punishment (Kinsler, 2011). A qualitative study, however, determined that student discipline is a highly contextualized decision impacted by race and gender relations (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). The current

findings appear to support previous quantitative research that indicates race may not be impactful in disciplinary decisions. School counselors' race was not impactful in their likelihood of placing students to ALPs, meaning that school counselors of all races were just as likely or unlikely to place students to ALPs. Since school counselor race was not significantly correlated with the DV, however, the impact of school counselor race on likelihood of placing students into ALPs based on student race, gender, and SES, could not be explored.

Contributions of the Study

This study provides several important contributions to the current literature. There is a growing base of research examining discipline disproportionality in relation to ALP placements in the United States (e.g., Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Tajalli & Garba, 2014; Vincent et al., 2012). However, there is no currently published literature specifically examining the ALP placement process. Previous research looked at ALP placement discrepancies based on student demographic characteristics (i.e., student race and gender), but did not examine the decision-making process related to these placements. This research is the first to examine school counselors' decisions to place students into ALPs for disciplinary reasons based on students' race, gender, and SES. While scholars are beginning to examine the role of school counselors in ALPs (e.g., Downs, 1999; Mullen & Lambie, 2013), these manuscripts do not address school counselors' role or decision-making process in ALP placements, a major contribution of this study.

Another contribution of this study is that the researcher utilized an experimental design. Study participants were randomly assigned to one of eight vignette-based study

groups. The researcher is the first to utilize an experimental design to explore the ALP placement decision-making process. According to Evans and colleagues (2015), the participants' responses to vignettes can be interpreted as a strong predictor of behavior given the circumstances described in the vignette. School counselors' decisions, then, can be interpreted as strong predictors of their actual behavior, a strength and significant contribution of this research.

Additionally, this study is the first to provide national statistics regarding school counselors' current involvement within the ALP placement process as well as insight into the impact of student race, gender, and SES in their decision-making. Previous research by Dameron (2017) provided insight into school counselors' involvement in this process within the state of North Carolina. This research, however, is the first to provide insight into school counselors' involvement in the ALP placement process from a large, nationally representative sample.

Additionally, this study is the first to examine the impact of school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race on school counselors' ALP placement decisions. This research provides insight into the factors that affect these decisions, as researchers acknowledge educators' attitudes are impactful in predicting the probability of exclusionary discipline (Skiba et al., 2014). While several researchers have explored teacher and principal demographic variables (e.g., race, gender, and SES) in relation to student discipline, there is no currently published research exploring school counselor variables related to discipline disproportionality or ALP placement decisions. The researcher's use of covariates to explore their relationships to school counselors' decision-making process is another important contribution of the current study.

The results of this research can be used to draw attention to the importance of school counselors' involvement in the ALP placement process. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2012) calls for school counselors to act as advocates for socially just outcomes related to discriminatory policies and procedures. School counselors, as professionally (ASCA, 2012) and ethically (ASCA, 2016) mandated advocates against discriminatory procedures, should be aware of the ALP placement policies and procedures within their district and school and position themselves as student advocates within this process. The researcher found that students' race, gender, and SES did not significantly impact school counselors' decisions to place students into an ALP for disciplinary reasons. Additionally, these student characteristics (i.e., student race, gender, and SES) did not impact school counselors' decisions when taking into account school counselors' belief in a just world. This is a very important finding for practicing school counselors, as it highlights their potential role as unbiased advocates for all students, including those being considered for placement in ALPs.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to the current study that should be considered when interpreting the findings. The first limitation relates to the study's participants and the generalizability of the results. Responses were limited to ASCA members who self-identified that they were licensed school counselors currently practicing in K-12 settings. It is possible that there are differences between school counselors who are members of the ASCA and those who are not and between those who chose to respond and those who did not. Additionally, there was a lack of diversity among the participants, as the majority of participants self-identified as White females. While a limitation of the study,

this lack of diversity reflects research by Bruce and Bridgeland (2012) that indicated the majority of practicing school counselors within the United States are White females. The results of this study, then, are generalizable to ASCA members who are currently practicing in K-12 settings.

A second limitation of the current study is the use of a five-item Likert scale as the measure for the dependent variable (DV), school counselors' decisions to place students into ALPs for disciplinary reasons. It is impossible to test for the reliability and validity of this measure, which is a weakness of this study. Additionally, the use of a five-item scale may have limited the variance of participants' responses, which may have impacted the results.

Pertaining to the use of vignettes, a third limitation of the current study is the use of the vignettes to control the independent variables (IVs). While Evans and colleagues (2015) suggest the use of vignettes is predictive of future behavior, the researcher acknowledges that the way the participants respond to vignettes may be different than how they would actually respond in real-life situations.

A fourth limitation is the potential for social desirability. School counselors were informed that their responses were anonymous and confidential. They were also notified that participation in the study was an opportunity to use intuition as a school counselor, when presented with limited information about a student, and contribute to the research into school counselor involvement in relation to student placements into ALPs. They were also informed that there were no right or wrong answers. It is possible, however, that school counselors noticed that the researcher clearly identified the race, gender, and

SES of the students depicted in the vignettes, and that the participants answered in such a way as to not appear biased.

Implications of the Findings

The results of this study contribute to the literature on discipline disproportionality by being the first to examine school counselors' decisions to place students into ALPs for disciplinary reasons based on student race, gender, and SES. Through the use of an experimental design, this study is the first to examine the decision-making process associated with ALP placement decisions. This is a logical line of inquiry based on findings that certain groups of students, including AA students (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Blake et al., 2011; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Hilbreth & Slate, 2014; Slate et al., 2014; Tajalli & Garba, 2014), males (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Fabelo et al., 2011), and economically disadvantaged students (Carver & Lewis, 2010; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2016) are overrepresented in ALPs. Additionally, this study is the first to examine school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons when taking into account school counselors' belief in a just world, advocacy self-efficacy, and race. Another important contribution of this research is that it provides nationally-representative statistics related to school counselors' involvement in the ALP placement process. This information is not provided elsewhere within the literature. The results of this study, then, have important implications for practicing school counselors, school counselor educators, and training programs..

Implications for Practitioners

According to the results of this experimental research, practicing school counselors were no more likely to refer AA students than White students, male students

than female students, or economically disadvantaged students than economically advantaged students to ALPs for disciplinary reasons. This finding is critical because research indicates AA students (when compared to White students), males, and economically disadvantaged students are overrepresented in ALPs within the United States (e.g., Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Blake et al., 2011; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Carver & Lewis, 2010; Fabelo et al., 2011). If they are not already, then, school counselors should become involved in the ALP placement process in order to help ensure that ALP placement decisions are not made based solely on student demographic characteristics (i.e., student race, gender, SES). Additionally, they should become familiar with the ALPs in their district to gain a clear understanding of the services they provide and how students' placement in these programs are likely to impact them.

It is critical to acknowledge that student placement into an ALP can have advantages for students, including increased academic success and self-esteem for enrollees, community-like learning environments, and greater perceived support (Caroleo, 2014; Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015). Other scholars, however, believe ALPs infringe upon the rights of students and their parents (Barbour, 2009) and there is limited research examining the effectiveness of ALPs in meeting students' educational needs (Caroleo, 2014). The purpose of this research is not to debate the effectiveness of ALPs. Rather, the findings suggest that school counselors are well-positioned as student advocates (ASCA, 2012; 2016) who can potentially reduce the possibility that students receive disproportionate placements in ALPs based solely on demographic characteristics.

While lack of bias contributes to the importance of school counselors' involvement in ALP placements, it also fits well within ASCA's description of the roles of school counselors as advocates, consultants, and collaborators. The four themes embedded in the framework of the ASCA National Model are: leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change (ASCA, 2012). As educational leaders, school counselors advocate for students' needs related to their personal/social development, career, and academics. As consultants and collaborators, school counselors share strategies, serve as advocates, and work with stakeholders "to support student achievement and advocate for equity and access for all students" (ASCA, 2012, p. 87).

School counselors, if they are not already, should engaged in the ALP placement process, and can do so in many ways. Acting in their role as consultants and advocates, school counselors can meet students being considered for ALP placements and their families and align with students to ensure their voice, and the voices of their parents or guardians, are heard. Secondly, they can become involved in the decision-making process. This may mean serving on ALP placement committees, or, if one is not already in place, creating an ALP placement committee within the school or district that considers each student's case individually. Because this research demonstrates school counselors' lack of bias, their voices are particularly pertinent to these discussions.

Functioning in their role as collaborators, school counselors can educate students parents, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders of the risks and benefits of ALP placements. These stakeholders may not understand the potential impact of ALP placement on students, and school counselors can provide insight in this area. To assist in this, school counselors should be familiar with the ALPs in their district, as research

indicates student academic proficiency at ALPs varies greatly (Carver & Lewis, 2010).

School counselors should look at achievement data for the ALPs in their district, as well as other data such as attendance and retention. This information can help school counselors involved in the ALP process understand the appropriateness of the placement based on the students' individual needs. Partnering with other stakeholders, including the students being considered for placement and their parents, school counselors can help empower all parties in making the decision that is best for the student being considered for placement.

Additionally, this study found a small, but statistically significant relationship between school counselors' belief in a just world and likelihood of placing students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. The results did not indicate school counselors were more likely to place students into ALPs based on race, gender, or SES when taking into account school counselors' belief in a just world. This finding, however, adds to current base of literature that demonstrates this construct impacts school counselors' attitudes (Parikh et al., 2011), awareness (Jones, 2013), and now, decision-making. School counselors, then, should examine their belief in a just world (i.e., belief that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get). School counselors can assess their belief in a just world through the Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS; Lipkus, 1991), which is a simple, 7-question measure that is easily interpreted (i.e., higher scores indicate a higher belief that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get). When examining and internalizing these results, school counselors should realize that their adherence to this construct may impact their decision-making process in relation to ALP placements.

According to the results of this study, 82% of participants ($n=274$) indicated there is an ALP in the district in which they serve as a school counselor. When asked if they are currently involved in the referral or placement process, however, less than 48% of respondents indicated they are currently involved in the referral or placement process. It is possible that this gap is due to the fact that nearly 30% of respondents serve in Kindergarten through 5th grade settings, a population that is served less often by ALPs (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). According to Carver (2010), 18% of ALPs served elementary-aged students during the 2007-2008 school year, although there is evidence that this number is on the rise (Lehr et al., 2004). Although it may be impossible to determine the reasons for this gap, the results of this study indicate that the majority of school counselors who responded to this study are not currently involved in the referral or placement process. School counselors should become aware of the referral or placement process for ALPs within their district and engage within this process. Engagement may include meeting with students being considered for an ALP referral and their parents or serving on referral or placement committees within their school or district. Additionally, engagement may mean advocating for students being considered for ALP placements if the school counselor believes that the placement is unjust or based characteristics such as the students race, gender, or SES.

The ASCA National Model (2012) encourages school counselors to utilize data analysis to gain insight and advocate for students on both a personal and systems level. For example, school counselors can analyze data at their school to examine trends in ALP placements. If it is determined that students at their school are more likely to be referred or placed at ALPs based on certain characteristics (i.e., race, gender, or SES), school

counselors can act as advocates to identify the sources of the systemic issue. Also, as previously mentioned, school counselors can involve themselves within the referral process, helping to advocate for students and ensure placements are fair and just. It is possible that a referral process is not in place. For example, placements may be based on principal referral. School counselors, then, could suggest or advocate that a committee be formed at the school or district level to examine each student's case individually. At the individual school level, members of this committee could include the student, the students' parent/guardian(s), a regular education teacher, a special education teacher (if applicable), a school administrator, and the school counselor. At the district level, examples of potential committee members are: administrators from both the home school and ALP, school counselors from the ALP and home school, the Special Education Director, and the Student Services Director. Ultimately, the goal is to examine the student on an individual basis, taking into consideration the student's academic and behavioral history, needs (personal, academic, psycho/social), current and potential supports, and the overall appropriateness of the placement based on these factors.

Implications for Counselor Education

The results of this research also have important implications for school counselor educators and training programs. It is important that school counselors in training understand non-traditional school environments, such as ALPs, even if they do not plan to serve within these settings. School counselor educators should add information about ALPs into the curriculum and emphasize the importance of advocacy for students being considered for referral or placements into ALPs. Examples of ways that school counselors could infuse ALP student issues into the curriculum include creating case

studies that involve the ALP placement or referral process into school counselor training courses, generating in-class or online discussions surrounding the ethical considerations for ALP referrals and placements, and inviting school counselors serving in ALPs as guest speakers. Additionally, school counselor training programs could include ALPs as practicum and internship sites, providing exposure to these programs and fostering an understanding of ALP environments. Additionally, educators should point out the risks (e.g., varying academic standards, potential infringement on students' rights; Barbour, 2009; Carver & Lewis, 2010) and benefits (e.g., community-like learning environments, increased self-esteem; Caroleo, 2014) of ALP placements. By exploring these risks and benefits, counselor educators can attune school counselor trainees to the importance of their involvement in ALP placement decisions. Without this knowledge, trainees may not understand the importance of advocacy in this area. With this information, however, counselor educators may increase trainees' likelihood of engaging as advocates for students being considered for ALP placements.

The finding that there is a relationship between school counselors' belief in a just world and decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons also has important implications for school counselor educators and training programs. Skiba et al. (2014) found that principals' self-reported orientation towards school discipline significantly predicted the probability of students' expulsion and out-of-school suspension. This significant finding highlighted the importance of educators' attitudes when creating systemic change related to discipline disproportionality. School counselors' belief in a just world did not significantly impact their likelihood of disproportionately placing students into ALPs based on race, gender, or SES. The results do, however, indicate that

their adherence to this construct increased their overall likelihood of placing the students depicted in the vignettes into an ALP. The implication for counselor educators and training programs is that they may want to assist school counselors in training in examining their belief that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get, as this construct is now associated with higher likelihood of referring students to ALPs for disciplinary reasons, less positive attitudes towards social justice advocacy (Parikh et al., 2011), and lower multicultural counseling awareness (Jones, 2013). School counselors' belief in a just world can be assessed through Lipkus' (1991) Global Belief in a Just World Scale. Counselor educators can administer this test and lead a discussion on the results. Or, counselor educators could assign this as an out-of-class activity in which students' take the measure and write a reflection on the results. These activities, or others utilizing the measure, can help school counselors in training gain awareness of this personally-held belief and its potential impact on their work as a practicing school counselor may allow them to practice in a more unbiased, supportive manner towards students being considered for ALP placements.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study adds to the school counseling literature research base, as well as literature related to discipline disproportionality and ALP placements. This research has important implications for practicing school counselors, counselor educators, and training program; therefore, implications for future research emerge. First, the participants for this study were practicing school counselors who were members of the ASCA. Future studies could include practicing school counselors who are not members of the ASCA to increase generalizability. Additionally, research could also expand to explore the ALP

placement decision-making process of other educational stakeholders, including building- and district-level administrators.

A second recommendation is to strengthen measure for the DV. The researcher utilized a five-point Likert scale to measure the DV, which may have limited the variability of the responses. Asking participants to rate their likelihood on a scale of zero to ten, for example, with zero being not likely at all and ten being extremely likely could increase the variability of responses. This would not, however, increase the reliability and validity of the measure, as there are no statistical tests that can be performed on a Likert-scale.

A third recommendation for future research relates to interactions between variables. In this study, the researcher examined the main effects of student race, gender, and SES on school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. Future research could examine the interactions between these variables (e.g., race and gender, gender and SES) to determine the combined impact on school counselors' ALP placement decisions.

School counselor training is a fourth area for recommended research. Nationally, over half a million students enter ALPs (Booker & Mitchell, 2011), yet there is little research exploring school counselors' roles within these settings (e.g., Downs, 1999; Mullen & Lambie, 2013) and no published research on the role of school counselors in ALP placements. Research examining school counselors' in-trainings feelings of self-efficacy for working in ALPs could provide insight into how well programs are preparing school counselors for service in this field. Additionally, through research into program

curricula, research could uncover how well programs are training school counselors to become involved in the ALP placement process.

School counselors' advocacy self-efficacy related to ALP referral or placement decisions is a fifth area for future research. Within the counseling literature, advocacy can be described as engaging in helping by influencing institutions and individuals impacting clients' lives (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). Effective school counselor advocates monitor the school climate and environment to the end of recognizing ways in which students' voices are devalued or unheard (Field & Baker, 2004). In the current study, school counselors' advocacy self-efficacy was not related to likelihood of placing students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. Future research, however, could explore the impact of advocacy self-efficacy on school counselors' willingness to advocate for students being referred for ALPs. For example, future research could examine the relationship between school counselors' advocacy self-efficacy and willingness to advocate for students being considered for ALP placement when the referral or placement is unjust.

Finally, further research is needed to explore the relationship between school counselors' belief in a just world and their attitudes and behaviors. This study demonstrated that school counselors' belief in a just world had a small, but statistically significant impact on their decision to place students into ALPs for disciplinary research. These findings align with research by Parikh et al. (2011) and Jones (2013) that revealed school counselors' belief in a just world relates to their social justice advocacy attitudes and multicultural counseling awareness, respectively. Similar to the research recommended regarding school counselor advocacy self-efficacy, future research could

explore school counselors' belief in a just world and advocacy behaviors, specifically in regard to students being considered for referral or placements in ALPs.

Concluding Remarks

The ASCA (2016) code of ethics challenges school counselors to “understand how prejudice, privilege and various forms of oppression . . . affect students and stakeholders” (p. 7). The ALP population is growing (Snyder & Dillow, 2015), yet there is limited research examining the efficacy of these programs in meeting students' educational needs (Caroleo, 2014). The results of this study indicate that less than 50% of participants were engaged in the ALP referral or placement process for their district. School counselors, who are professionally (ASCA, 2012) and ethically (2016) called to advocate for *all* students, should be engaged in this process.

Prior research indicates that certain groups of students, including AA students (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Hilbreth & Slate, 2014) and males (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Washington, 2008) are overrepresented in ALPs. Yet, the current study revealed that school counselors' ALP placement decisions were unbiased in relation to students' race, gender, and SES. These findings highlight the critical need for school counselors to serve as potentially unbiased advocates within the ALP referral and placement process.

This experimental study is the first to examine school counselors' decisions to place students in ALPs for disciplinary reasons. It adds to the large base of literature related to discipline disproportionality and extends the knowledge base by providing an experimental examination of the impact of student race, gender, and SES on school counselors' ALP placement decisions. The results of this study are a call to professional school counselors, counselor educators, and counselor training programs to consider the

role that school counselors play in the ALP placement process. This critical examination and the intentional advocacy efforts that may result have the potential to change the trajectory of many students' lives.

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APPENDIX A: VIGNETTES

Directions:

Please read the following vignette and rate your likelihood of placing the student in an alternative learning program. An alternative learning program is defined as a school serving youth removed from their traditional school for reasons that may include, but are not limited to, poor academic performance or disruptive behavior.

Vignette 1

You are a school counselor serving in a high school (9th-12th grade students). You are part of the referral process for referring students from your school to the local alternative learning program. Recently, Ethan has been brought to your attention. Ethan is a sixteen-year-old White male with a history of chronic behavioral issues. You are aware that Ethan's family is economically disadvantaged because he receives free lunch at the high school. Over the past two years, Ethan has received numerous disciplinary infractions, including multiple referrals for disruptive classroom behavior and defiance. Most recently, he received a three-day out of school suspension for a fight that he initiated. Your principal would like to know your opinion on whether or not Ethan should be placed at alternative learning program and has let you know she plans to take your advice on the referral. Based on this information, how likely are you to place Ethan?

Vignette 2

You are a school counselor serving in a high school (9th-12th grade students). You are part of the referral process for referring students from your school to the local alternative learning program. Recently, Demarcus has been brought to your attention. Demarcus is a sixteen-year-old African-American male with a history of chronic behavioral issues. You are aware that Demarcus family is economically disadvantaged because he receives free lunch at the high school. Over the past two years, Demarcus has received numerous disciplinary infractions, including multiple referrals for disruptive classroom behavior and defiance. Most recently, he received a three-day out of school suspension for a fight that he initiated. Your principal would like to know your opinion on whether or not Demarcus should be placed at alternative learning program and has let you know she plans to take your advice on the referral. Based on this information, how likely are you to place Demarcus?

Vignette 3

You are a school counselor serving in a high school (9th-12th grade students). You are part of the referral process for referring students from your school to the local alternative learning program. Recently, Molly has been brought to your attention. Molly is a sixteen-year-old White female with a history of chronic behavioral issues. You are aware that Molly's family is economically disadvantaged because she receives free lunch at the high school. Over the past two years, Molly has received numerous disciplinary infractions,

including multiple referrals for disruptive classroom behavior and defiance. Most recently, she received a three-day out of school suspension for a fight that she initiated. Your principal would like to know your opinion on whether or not Molly should be placed at alternative learning program and has let you know she plans to take your advice on the referral. Based on this information, how likely are you to place Molly?

Vignette 4

You are a school counselor serving in a high school (9th-12th grade students). You are part of the referral process for referring students from your school to the local alternative learning program. Recently, Carmen has been brought to your attention. Carmen is a sixteen-year-old African-American female with a history of chronic behavioral issues. You are aware that Ethan's family is economically disadvantaged because she receives free lunch at the high school. Over the past two years, Carmen has received numerous disciplinary infractions, including multiple referrals for disruptive classroom behavior and defiance. Most recently, she received a three-day out of school suspension for a fight that she initiated. Your principal would like to know your opinion on whether or not Carmen should be placed at alternative learning program and has let you know she plans to take your advice on the referral. Based on this information, how likely are you to place Carmen?

Vignette 5

You are a school counselor serving in a high school (9th-12th grade students). You are part of the referral process for referring students from your school to the local alternative learning program. Recently, Ethan has been brought to your attention. Ethan is a sixteen-year-old White male with a history of chronic behavioral issues. You are aware that Ethan's family is economically advantaged because his parents are well-educated and have well-paying jobs. Over the past two years, Ethan has received numerous disciplinary infractions, including multiple referrals for disruptive classroom behavior and defiance. Most recently, he received a three-day out of school suspension for a fight that he initiated. Your principal would like to know your opinion on whether or not Ethan should be placed at alternative learning program and has let you know she plans to take your advice on the referral. Based on this information, how likely are you to place Ethan?

Vignette 6

You are a school counselor serving in a high school (9th-12th grade students). You are part of the referral process for referring students from your school to the local alternative learning program. Recently, Demarcus has been brought to your attention. Demarcus is a sixteen-year-old African-American male with a history of chronic behavioral issues. You are aware that Demarcus' family is economically advantaged because his parents are well-educated and have well-paying jobs. Over the past two years, Demarcus has received numerous disciplinary infractions, including multiple referrals for disruptive classroom behavior and defiance. Most recently, he received a three-day out of school

suspension for a fight that he initiated. Your principal would like to know your opinion on whether or not Demarcus should be placed at alternative learning program and has let you know she plans to take your advice on the referral. Based on this information, how likely are you to place Demarcus?

Vignette 7

You are a school counselor serving in a high school (9th-12th grade students). You are part of the referral process for referring students from your school to the local alternative learning program. Recently, Molly has been brought to your attention. Molly is a sixteen-year-old White female with a history of chronic behavioral issues. You are aware that Molly's family is economically advantaged because her parents are well-educated and have well-paying jobs. Over the past two years, Molly has received numerous disciplinary infractions, including multiple referrals for disruptive classroom behavior and defiance. Most recently, she received a three-day out of school suspension for a fight that she initiated. Your principal would like to know your opinion on whether or not Molly should be placed at alternative learning program and has let you know she plans to take your advice on the referral. Based on this information, how likely are you to place Molly?

Vignette 8

You are a school counselor serving in a high school (9th-12th grade students). You are part of the referral process for referring students from your school to the local alternative learning program. Recently, Carmen has been brought to your attention. Carmen is a sixteen-year-old African-American female with a history of chronic behavioral issues. You are aware that Carmen's family is economically advantaged because her parents are well-educated and have well-paying jobs. Over the past two years, Carmen has received numerous disciplinary infractions, including multiple referrals for disruptive classroom behavior and defiance. Most recently, she received a three-day out of school suspension for a fight that she initiated. Your principal would like to know your opinion on whether or not Carmen should be placed at alternative learning program and has let you know she plans to take your advice on the referral. Based on this information, how likely are you to place Carmen?

APPENDIX B: SCHOOL COUNSELOR ADVOCACY SELF-EFFICACY

School Counselor Advocacy Self-Efficacy Scale
(selected items from Bodenhorn, 2001; Goldsmith, 2011)

1 Never	2 Rarely	3 Occasionally	4 Fairly Often	5 Frequently
1. I advocate for the integration of student academic career and personal development into the mission of the school.				
2. I advocate for myself as a professional school counselor and articulate the purpose of the goals of school counseling.				
3. I provide resources and guidance to the school population in times of crisis.				
4. I communicate in writing with staff, parents, and the external community.				
5. I consult with external agencies that provide support services for our students.				
6. I understand the viewpoints and experiences of students and parents who are from a cultural background different from mine.				
7. I can find some way of communicating with any student in my school.				

APPENDIX C: BELIEF IN A JUST WORLD

Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS; Lipkus, 1991)

Please indicate your level of agreement on the following scale with respect to how well each statement applies to others and yourself.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strong disagreement						Strong agreement
1.	I feel that people get what they are entitled to have.					1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2.	I feel that a person's efforts are notice and rewarded.					1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3.	I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get.					1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4.	I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves.					1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5.	I feel that people get what they deserve.					1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6.	I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given.					1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7.	I basically feel that the world is a fair place.					1 2 3 4 5 6 7

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Demographic Form

1. What is your gender? ☐ Female ☐ Male

2. What is your age?

3. Which of the following best describes your race?

<input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaskan Native	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian
<input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American	<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino/a
<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	<input type="checkbox"/> White
<input type="checkbox"/> Multiracial	

4. How many years have you served as a school counselor?

5. Please select the range that best describes the school in which you currently serve.

☐ PreK-5th grade ☐ 6th-8th grade ☐ 9th-12th grade

6. Is there an alternative learning/education program in your district?

☐ Yes ☐ No

7. Are you currently involved in the student referral or placement process by which students are transferred to your district's alternative learning/education program(s)? (If you currently serve in an Alternative Learning program, please select, "I serve in an alternative learning program").

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I serve in an alternative learning program

8. Please select the region of the United States in which the school where you serve is located.

☐ Northeast (CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT)
☐ Midwest (IA, IL, IN, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI)
☐ South (AL, AR, DC, DE, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV)
☐ West (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY)

9. Which of the following best describes the community in which your school is located?

☐ Urban ☐ Suburban ☐ Rural

10. Please select the range that reflects the number of students in your school that are on free or reduced lunch:

_____ 0-24% _____ 25-49% _____ 50-74% _____ 75-100%

11. Certain students are not gaining anything from school and disrupt the learning environment for others. In such a case, referrals to alternative learning programs are justified to preserve the learning environment for students who wish to learn.

_____ Strongly Disagree
_____ Disagree
_____ Slightly Disagree
_____ Slightly Agree
_____ Agree
_____ Strongly Agree

12. I believe that putting in place prevention programs can reduce the need for exclusionary discipline practices, including alternative learning program placements.

_____ Strongly Disagree
_____ Disagree
_____ Slightly Disagree
_____ Slightly Agree
_____ Agree
_____ Strongly Agree

APPENDIX E: TALK ALOUD STUDY

TALK ALOUD STUDY
CONSENT FORM AND INFORMATION LETTER

<p>This exercise is being conducted by Merry Leigh Dameron, M.A., a doctoral student in Counselor Education and Supervision at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte for the purpose of improving the instructions provided for the instruments involved in my dissertation. Your feedback, behavioral responses, and other reactions will be used to determine if additional changes or enhancements to the instructions and format of the instruments are necessary in order to improve usability and clarity. This will take approximately 25-30 minutes of your time.</p> <p>As a participant in this exercise, you will participate in two phases. In phase one, you will be asked to complete the full battery of instruments in order to determine the amount of time required to complete all items.</p> <p>In phase two, you will be asked to read the instructions for the items and reflect on the readability, clarity, and usability of the items and instructions. Following your task, you will be asked to talk out loud about your reactions to the process. You will be provided with an attachment consisting of questions on items of particular interest to this researcher.</p> <p>All information you are providing will be held in confidence and you will not be identified in any way during the final report.</p> <p>An observer will be present in the room during the processing period and will take notes. The observer will not reveal any information about individual participants. Certain comments or suggestions may be quoted or paraphrased, but not linked to a particular individual.</p> <p>You may withdraw from this study at any time for any reason without explanation.</p>	<p>I have read the consent form and information about this exercise. I understand the information and agree to participate in this exercise.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Participant's Name (please print)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Participant's Signature</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Date</p> <p>_____</p> <p>UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair or respectful manner. Contact the University's Research Compliance Office (704-687-3309) if you have questions about how you are treated as a research participant. If you have questions about the project, please contact me, Merry Leigh Dameron (mdameron@uncc.edu; 828-443-1907) or my dissertation Chair, Dr. Sejal Parikh Foxx (sbparikh@uncc.edu; 704-687-8963)</p>
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APPENDIX F: TALK ALOUD INSTRUCTIONS

The purpose of this exercise is for participants to identify the readability, clarity, and usability of the various survey items and instructions included in this dissertation instrument. You will complete this procedure individually. An observer will be present during this process in order to ensure that the researcher is fully capturing your feedback. Please note that the observer will be taking notes as you participate in this process.

Directions:

Review the instrument, paying special attention to the instructions. During the talk-aloud activity, the researcher will address each of the questions listed below. Please share with the observer any thoughts, reflections, or suggestions you have to improve the format of the instrument.

Overall instrument:

- Were the instructions clear and understandable?
- Would you revise any of the instructions for better clarity or readability?
- What is your impression of the organization and sequence of the instruments?

Vignettes:

- Please talk about the differences between the following two vignettes. Please be very specific about what is different.

Vignette 1

You are a school counselor serving in a high school (9th-12th grade students). You are part of the referral process for placing students from your school to the local alternative learning program. Recently, Ethan has been brought to your attention. Ethan is a sixteen-year-old White male with a history of chronic behavioral issues. You are aware that Ethan's family is economically disadvantaged because he receives free lunch at the high school. Over the past two years, Ethan has received numerous disciplinary infractions, including multiple referrals for disruptive classroom behavior and defiance. Most recently, he received a three-day out of school suspension for a fight that he initiated. Your principal would like to know your opinion on whether or not Ethan should be placed into an alternative learning program and has let you know she plans to take your advice on the placement. Based on this information, how likely are you to refer Ethan?

Vignette 2

You are a school counselor serving in a high school (9th-12th grade students). You are part of the referral process for placing students from your school to the local alternative learning program. Recently, Carmen has been brought to your attention. Carmen is a sixteen-year-old African-American female with a history of chronic behavioral issues. You are aware that Carmen's family is economically advantaged because her parents are well-educated and have well-paying jobs. Over the past two years, Carmen has received numerous disciplinary infractions, including multiple referrals for disruptive classroom behavior and defiance. Most recently, she received a three-day out of school suspension for a fight that she initiated. Your principal would like to know your opinion on whether or not Carmen should be placed into an alternative learning program has let you know she plans to take your advice on the placement. Based on this information, how likely are you to refer Carmen?

Demographic question #3: Race

- This question asked you to select the race with which you best identify. Did you have any thoughts about this question? If so, what were they?

APPENDIX G: PILOT STUDY FEEDBACK—PART I

Instructions: In part I of the pilot study, participants ($N=5$) completed the full battery of instruments in order to determine the amount of time required to complete all items. The reported completion times of the study instruments are as follows:

1. 5 minutes and 25 seconds
2. 3 minutes and 41 seconds
3. 5 minutes and 36 seconds
4. 4 minutes and 37 seconds
5. 3 minutes and 9 seconds

The average completion time was 4 minutes and 30 seconds.

APPENDIX H: PILOT STUDY FEEDBACK—PART II

In part II of the pilot study, ($N=5$) individuals participated in a talk aloud activity after taking a few minutes to individually review the instruments being used in the study. Directions and results are included below.

Directions:

Review the instrument, paying special attention to the instructions. During the talk-aloud activity, the researcher will address each of the questions listed below. Please share with the observer any thoughts, reflections, or suggestions you have to improve the format of the instrument.

Overall instrument:

- Were the instructions clear and understandable?

Participants felt the instructions were “very clear.” All five participants agreed with the statement, “I believe the instructions were clear and understandable.”

- Would you revise any of the instructions for better clarity or readability?

One participant noted that the words “strong agreement” on the measure of belief in a just world felt confusing because the participant is used to seeing the words “strongly agree” on instruments. This is the wording used by the author of the instrument. Therefore, wording will not be changed. All five participants agreed with the statement, “I believe that the instructions were clear and readable.”

- What is your impression of the organization and sequence of the instruments?

One participant noted the organization was “fine.” Regarding the sequence, all participants agreed that the measure of school counselor advocacy self-efficacy should go before the measure of belief in a just world because both the vignette and the advocacy self-efficacy scale were more school counseling related. The researcher will take this advice in the full study.

Vignettes:

- Please talk about the differences between the following two vignettes. Please be very specific about what is different.

All five participants noticed differences in the race (White, African American), sex (female, male), and SES (economically advantaged, economically disadvantaged) of the students depicted in the vignettes. The participants ($N=5$) also noticed the students had different names.

Demographic question #3: Race

- This question asked you to select the race with which you best identify. Did you have any thoughts about this question? If so, what were they?

One participant noted that the researcher may want to add the choices “biracial” or “multiracial” as choices if you can only select one race. The researcher will add “multiracial” as a choice in the full study.

APPENDIX I: E-MAIL TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Dear {ASCA Member}:

Merry Leigh Dameron, a doctoral candidate at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, is conducting a research study to examine explore school counselors' involvement in relation to student placements in alternative learning programs.

You have been selected to participate in this survey because you are a licensed, practicing school counselor and a member of the American School Counselor Association. Participation is voluntary. This survey will take approximately 5 minutes.

This study involves no foreseeable serious risks. We ask that you try to answer all questions; however, if there are any items that make you uncomfortable or that you would prefer to skip, please leave the answer blank. Your responses are confidential.

Your participation in this survey is important and appreciated. Although there are no direct benefits to individuals participating in this study, this is an opportunity for you to use your intuition as a school counselor when presented with limited information about a student and to contribute to the research into school counselor involvement in relation to placements in alternative learning programs. There are no right or wrong answers.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Merry Leigh or her faculty advisor:

Merry Leigh Dameron, Doctoral Candidate	Dr. Sejal P. Foxx, Assoc. Professor
Department of Counseling	Department of Counseling
(828) 443-1907	(704) 687-8963
mdameron@uncc.edu	sbparikh@uncc.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the UNC Charlotte Compliance Office, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects, at the following e-mail address: uncc-irb@uncc.edu.

If you would prefer not to participate, please do not fill out a survey.

If you are a licensed school counselor, are currently practicing, and consent to participate, please follow the link (below) and complete the survey.

[Survey Link for vignette #1]: <http://uncc.surveymshare.com/s/AYASHTB>

[Survey Link for vignette #2]: <http://uncc.surveymshare.com/s/AYASXVB>

[Survey Link for vignette #3]: <http://uncc.surveymshare.com/s/AYASHWB>

[Survey Link for vignette #4]: <http://uncc.surveymshare.com/s/AYASXWB>

[Survey Link for vignette #5]: <http://uncc.surveyshare.com/s/AYASXXB>

[Survey Link for vignette #6]: <http://uncc.surveyshare.com/s/AYASHYB>

[Survey Link for vignette #7]: <http://uncc.surveyshare.com/s/AYASXYB>

[Survey Link for vignette #8]: <http://uncc.surveyshare.com/s/AYASHZB>

With many thanks,

Merry Leigh Dameron, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

APPENDIX J: INFORMED CONSENT

Project Purpose:

This study will explore school counselors' involvement in relation to student referrals to alternative learning programs. The purpose of this study is to examine factors related to school counselors' involvement in referring students to an alternative learning program for disciplinary reasons.

Investigator:

Ms. Merry Leigh Dameron, a doctoral candidate in the department of counseling at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, is conducting this research. The research is overseen by Dr. Sejal Foxx, an Associate Professor in the department of counseling at UNC Charlotte.

Description and Length of Participation:

You have been selected to participate in this survey because you are a licensed, practicing school counselor. Participation is voluntary. This survey will take approximately 5 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of Participation:

This study involves no foreseeable serious risks. We ask that you try to answer all questions; however, if there are any items that make you uncomfortable or that you would prefer to skip, please leave the answer blank. Your responses are confidential. Your participation in this survey is important and appreciated. Although there are no direct benefits to individuals participating in this study, this is an opportunity for you to use your intuition as a school counselor when presented with limited information about a student and to contribute to the research into school counselor involvement in relation to referrals to alternative learning programs. There are no right or wrong answers.

Confidentiality:

The researcher will make every effort to protect your privacy. All your responses to the survey questions will be anonymous. All survey data will be kept in the primary researcher's password-protected drive account associated with her UNC Charlotte e-mail account.

Fair Treatment and Respect:

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Merry Leigh or her faculty advisor:

Merry Leigh Dameron, Doctoral Candidate	Dr. Sejal P. Foxx, Assoc. Professor
Department of Counseling	Department of Counseling
(828) 443-1907	(704) 687-8963
mdameron@uncc.edu	sbparikh@uncc.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the UNC Charlotte Compliance Office, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects, at (704) 687-1871 or at the following e-mail address: uncc-irb@uncc.edu.

Participant Consent:

If you would prefer not to participate, please do not fill out a survey.

If you are a licensed school counselor, are currently practicing, and consent to participate, please click "I agree" below, and complete the survey.

I consent to participate in this survey:

☐ Yes

☐ No