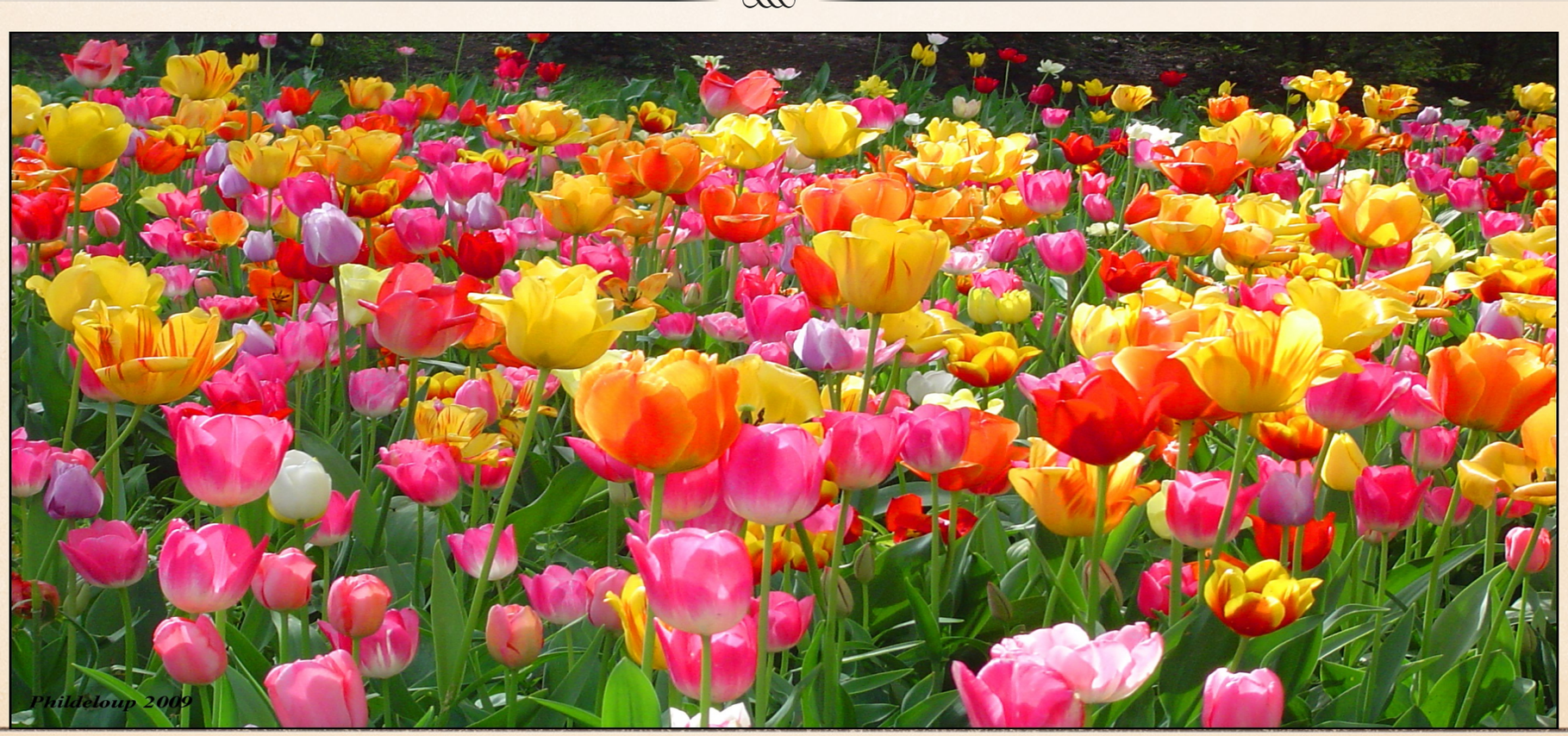
School Psychology in the 21st Century: Objective Tests; Subjective Decision-Making

Steve Hirsch, PhD, NCSP

Shoreline School District, Washington USA

steve.hirsch@shorelineschools.org



THE REALITY OF DISPROPORTIONALITY

Since the dawn of time (1976) special education rosters have been dominated by a greater than proportional frequency of students from ethnic minorities

DID INTEGRATION END DISCRIMINATION?

WE INTEGRATED THE SCHOOL BUT NOT THE CLASSROOM

SPECIAL EDUCATION HAS BEEN CALLED "INSTITUTIONAL RACISM"

Does Special Education placement create racial inequality?

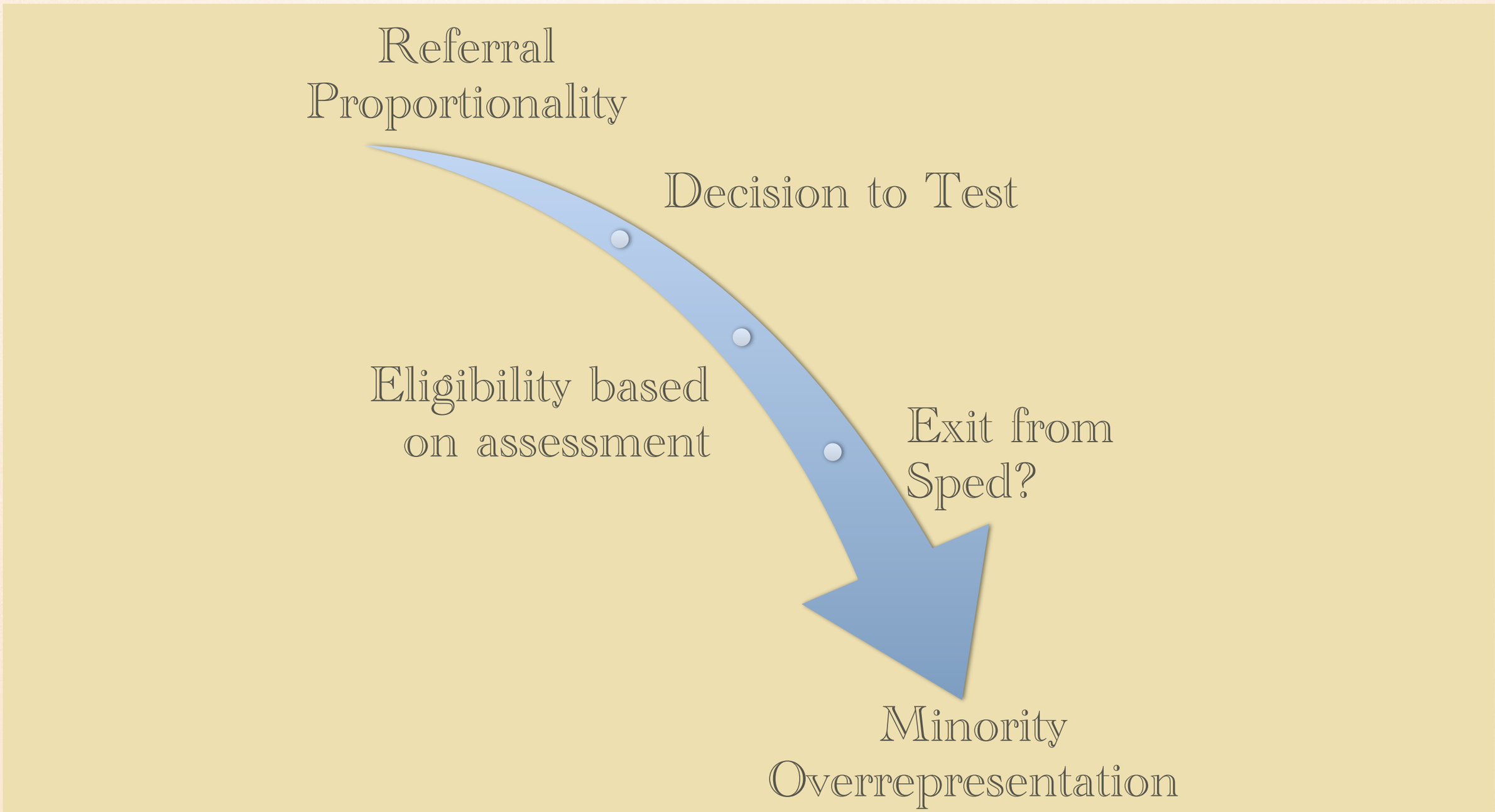
THE RESEARCH LITERATURE FOCUS

INAPPROPRIATE REFERRAL–WHITE TEACHERS AND WHITE ADMINISTRATORS DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE BEHAVIORS AND LEARNING STYLES OF ETHNIC MINORITIES SO REFER MORE TO SPED OR DISCIPLINE

QUESTIONABLE VALIDITY OF TESTS – TESTS USED IN PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT WERE DEVELOPED, ADMINISTERED, SCORED AND INTERPRETED BY WHITE PSYCHOLOGISTS

OUR CONCEPT AND MEASUREMENT OF INTELLIGENCE

PLACEMENT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION IS MORE THAN REFERRAL



STUDY ONE

Followed the fates of over 250 students whose progress was of concern and brought to building team

FOUR QUESTIONS FOR THE FOUR GATES

- 1. Is the proportion of minority referral similar to that found in the general education population?

- 2. Of the referrals, is the proportion of minority students to be formally assessed equal to that of non-minority students?

- 3. Of those tested, is the proportion of minority students being found eligible for sped equal to that of non-minority students?

- 4. Is the proportion of minority students being recommended for exit from a special education program similar to their proportion within that special education population?

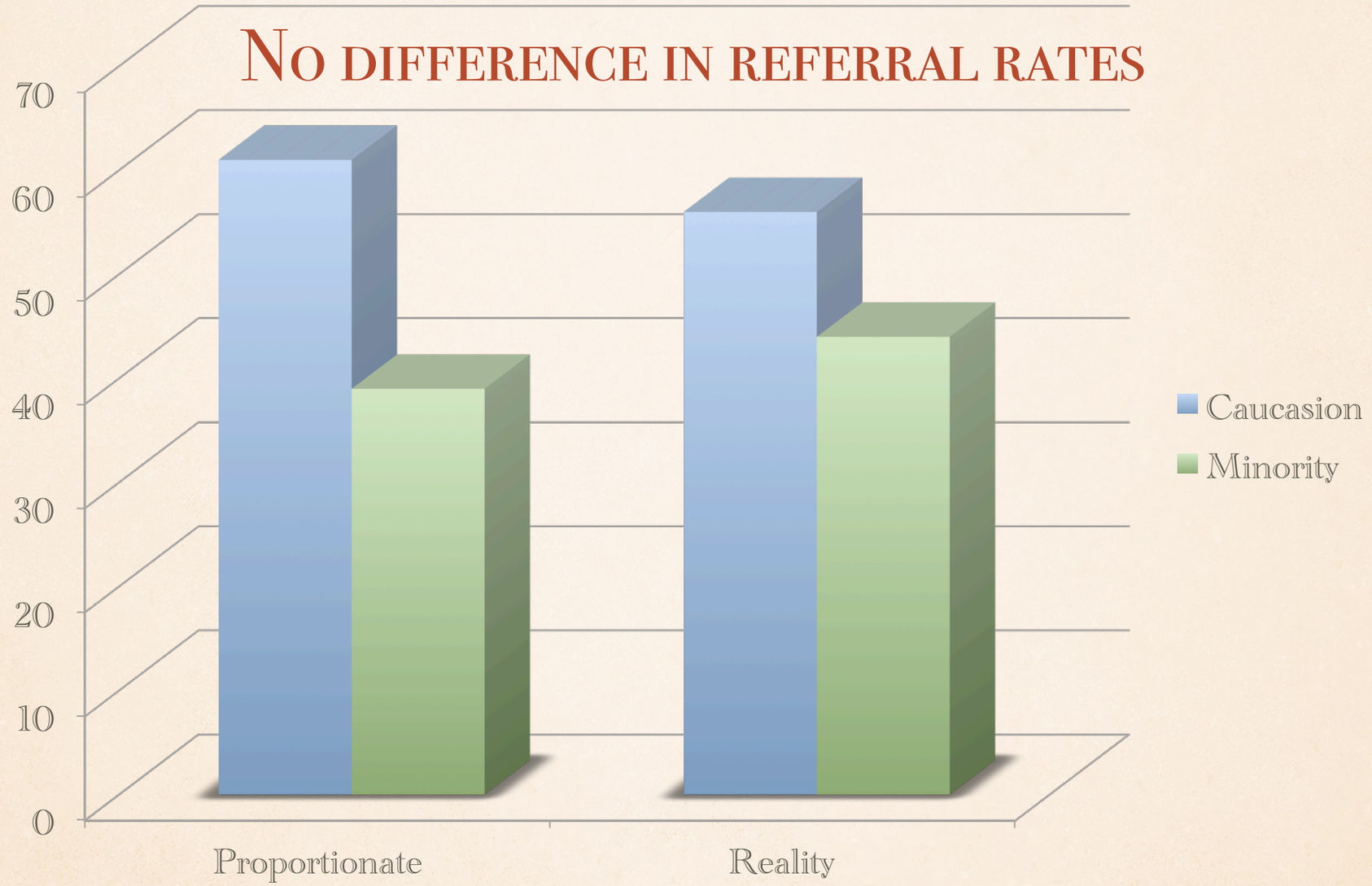
METHODOLGY

Caveats

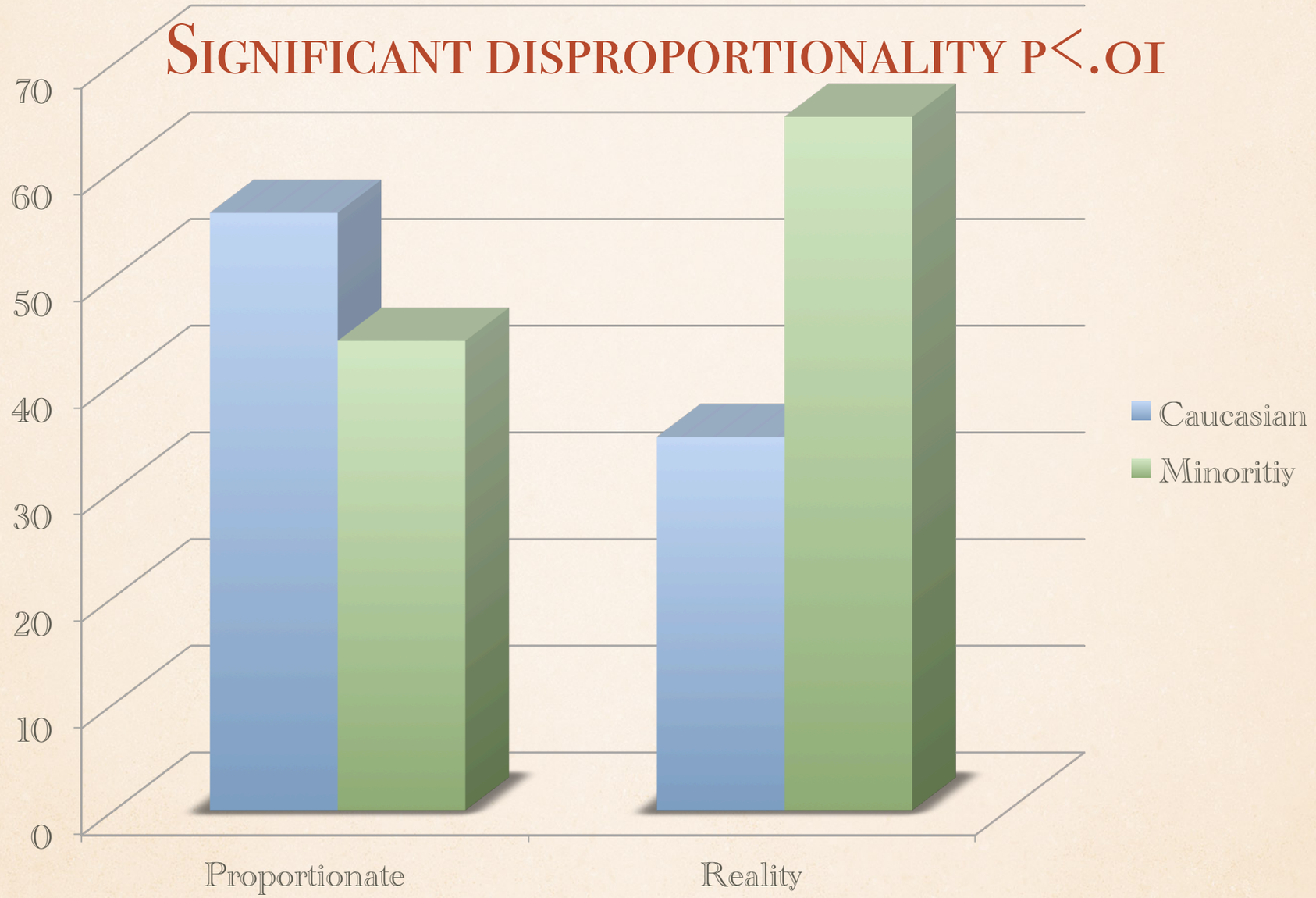
1. Ethnicity is ambiguous. Compared Caucasian to minority.

2. Handicapping category arbitrary. All handicapping categories combined

GATE 1-REFERRAL

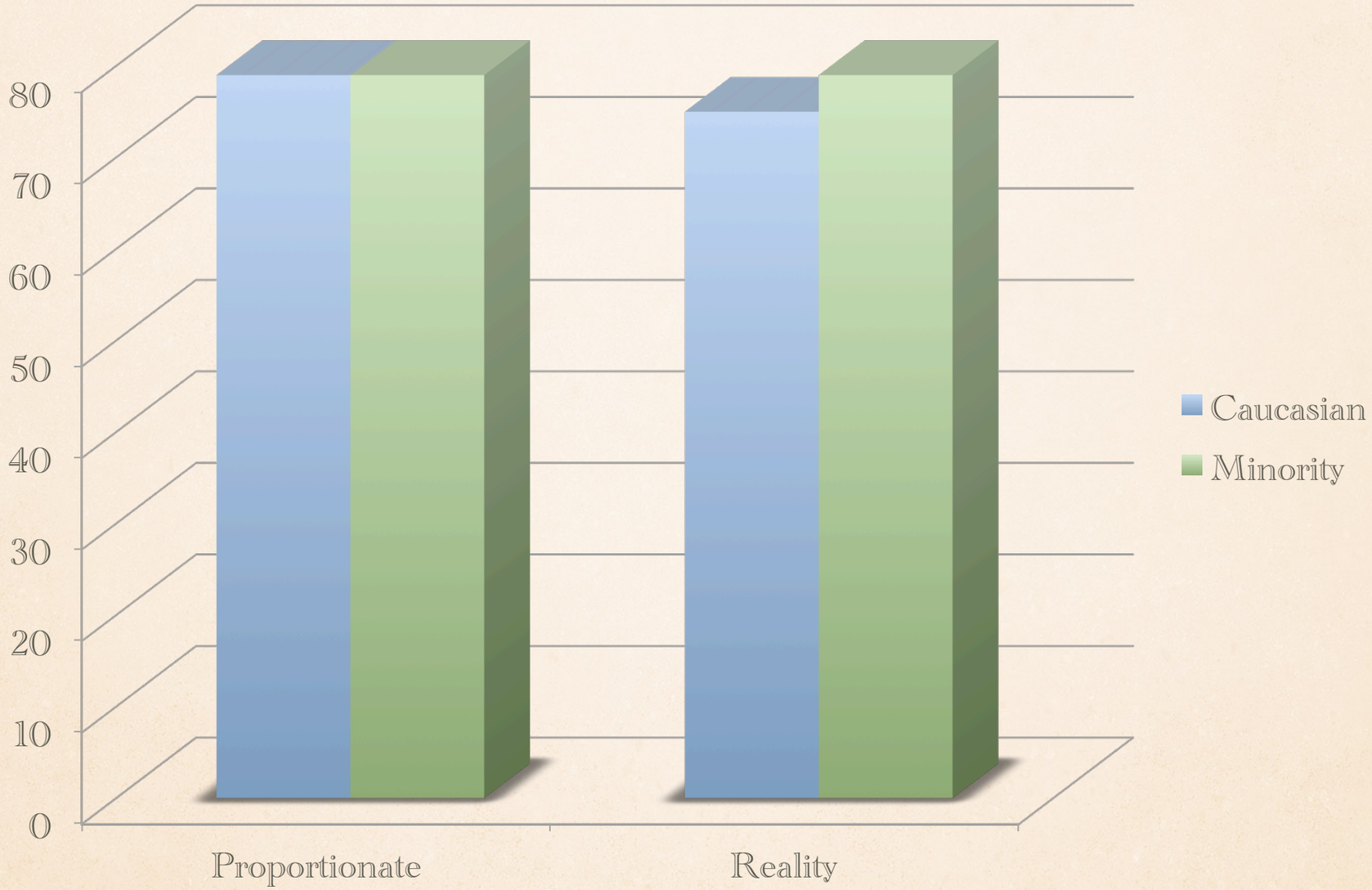


GATE 2-DECISION TO FORMALLY ASSESS



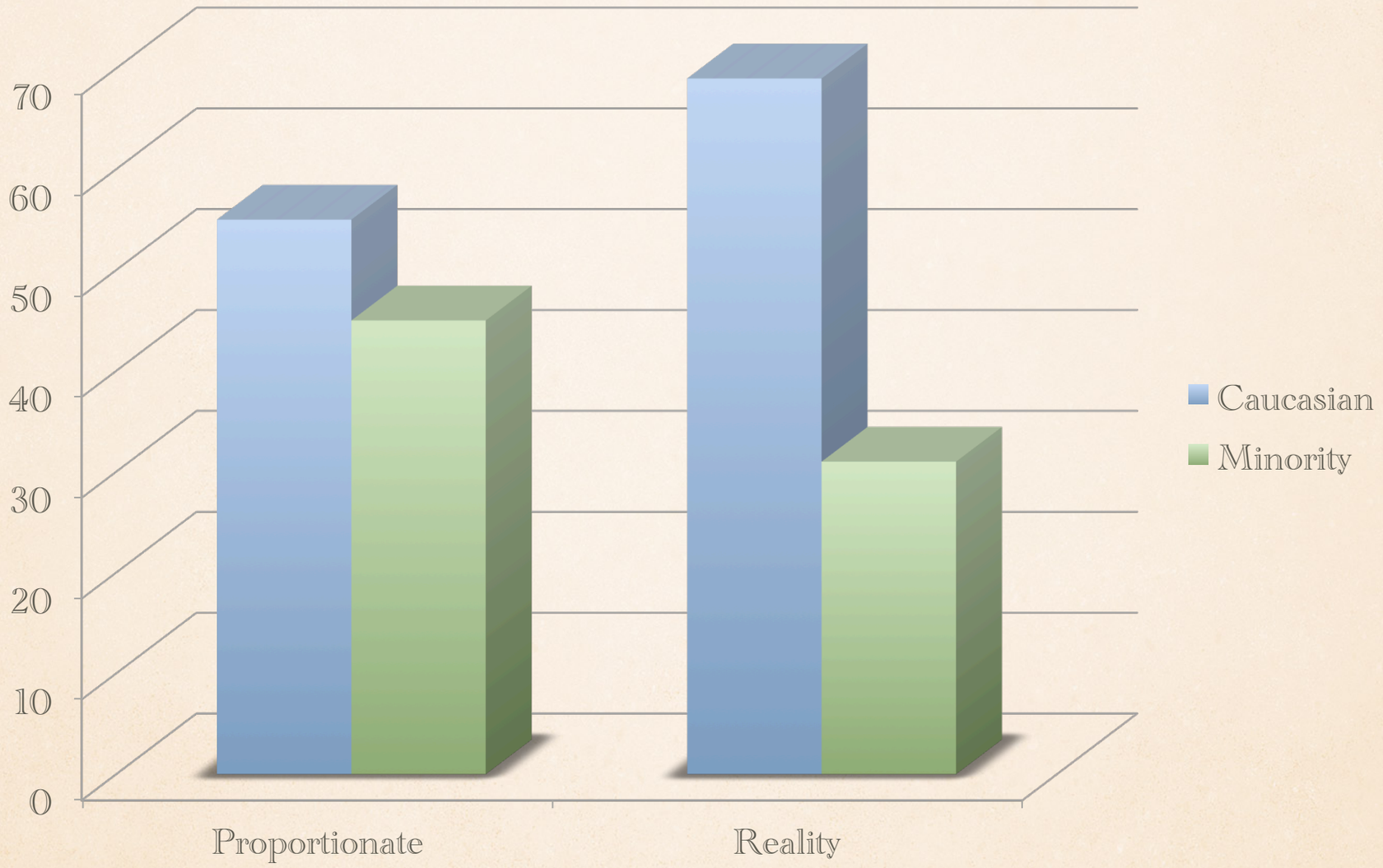
GATE 3: ELIGIBILITY

No difference in eligibility rates



GATE 4:LIKELIHOOD TO EXIT

Significant disproportionality: p<.01



STUDY TWO: GOING FORWARD TO THE PAST

Could our decisions to test and to exit be impacted by subconscious stereotypes?

PROJECTIVES

Projecting personal unresolved conflicts on ambiguous images

DO WE INTERPRET IDENTICAL DATA IN DIFFERENT WAYS DUE TO ETHNICITY OF STUDENT?

Every subject received two scenarios

one referral; one exit

All data identical (except ethnicity of student)

RESEARCH QUESTION I

Is there a significant difference in the proportion of Latino, vs. White, vs.Black vs. Asian students who are viewed as appropriate candidates :

-FOR FORMAL ASSESSMENT?

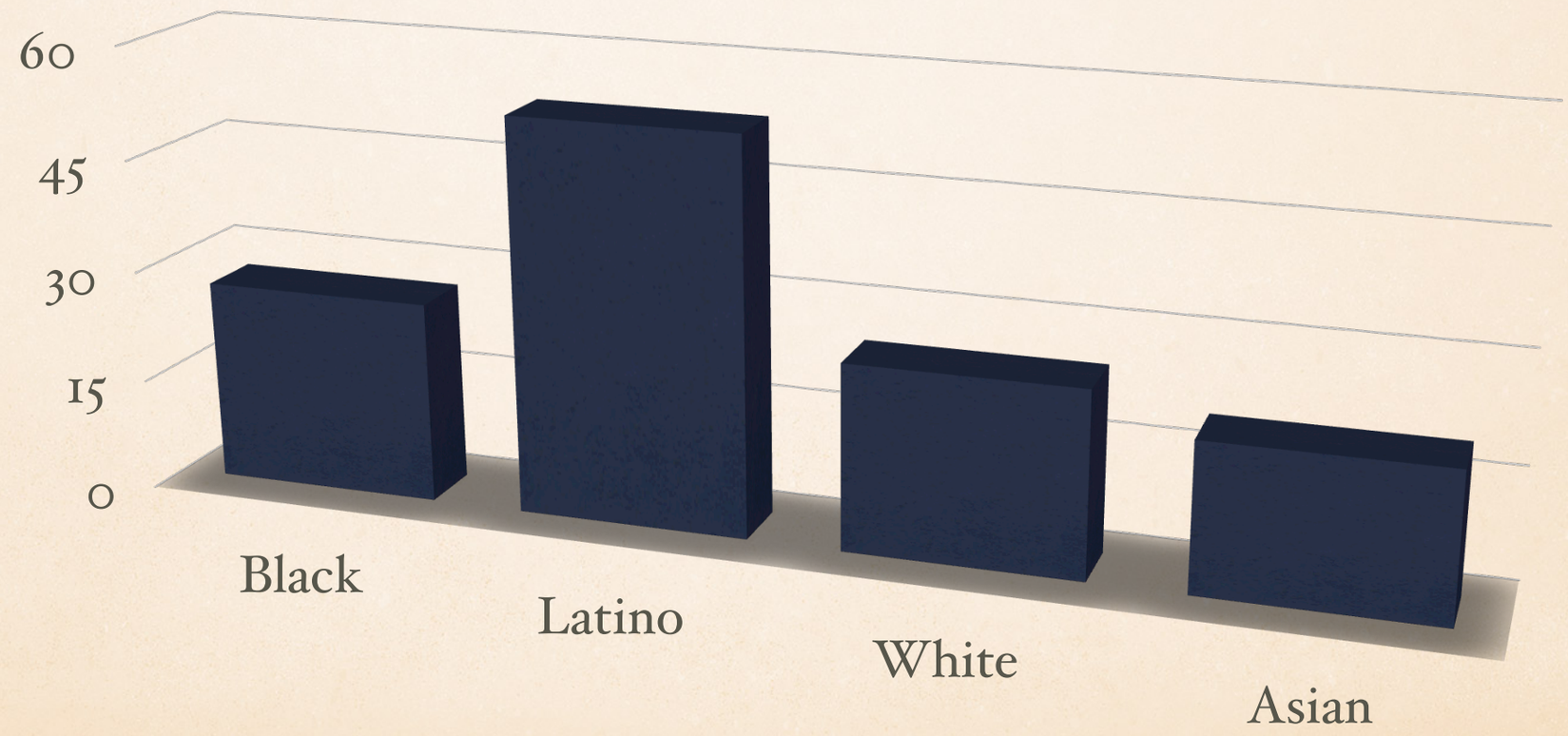
-FOR EARLY EVALUATION WITH INTENT TO EXIT FROM SPECIAL EDUCATION ?

RESEARCH QUESTION II

Are the factors contributing to the decisions different for the differing ethnicities?

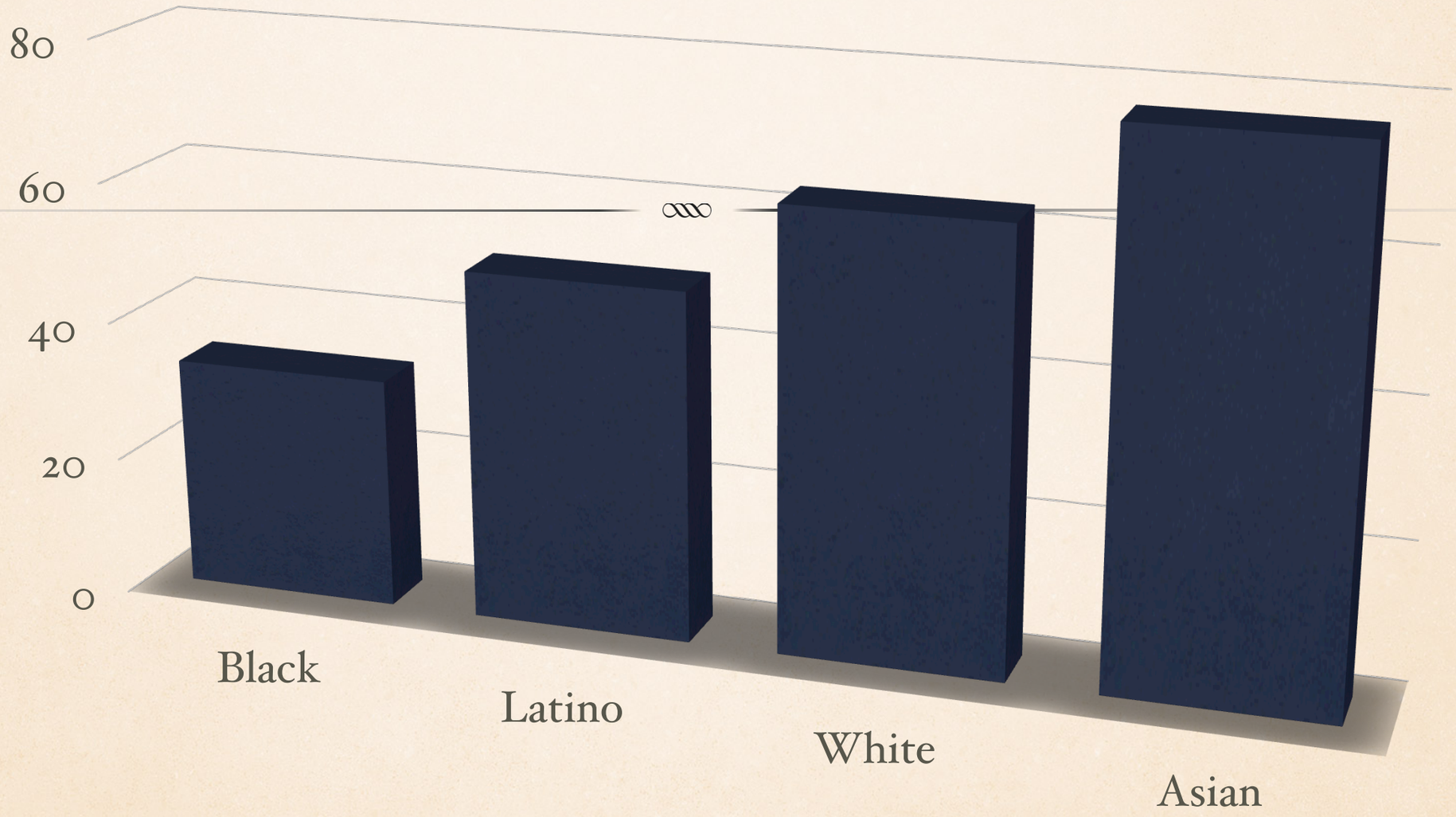
ETHNICITY AND REFERRAL FOR FORMAL SPECIAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

When looking at identical data



ETHNICITY AND EARLY RE-EVALUATION FOR EXITING

When looking at identical data



KEY FACTORS AFFECTING REFERRAL AND EXIT FROM SPECIAL EDUCATION

Progress Data

Background Data

WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO SAY HERE?

If a student is Black or Latino, we go beyond the objective data before making a decision–we pay attention to the fact that there is a single mom or that they are being cared for by a non-English speaking grandma, or that they have ADHD or are not very motivated. And what is worse, we are very likely to not push to exit them when the data says that we should.

GOING FORWARD TO THE PAST: WHILE OUR INSTRUMENTS MAY BE OBJECTIVE

Our Decision-making is subject to subconscious stereotypes

PSYCHS MUST KNOW BETTER, RIGHT?

Scenario study extended to Washington School Psychologists

126 WA. Psychologists responded to same scenarios;

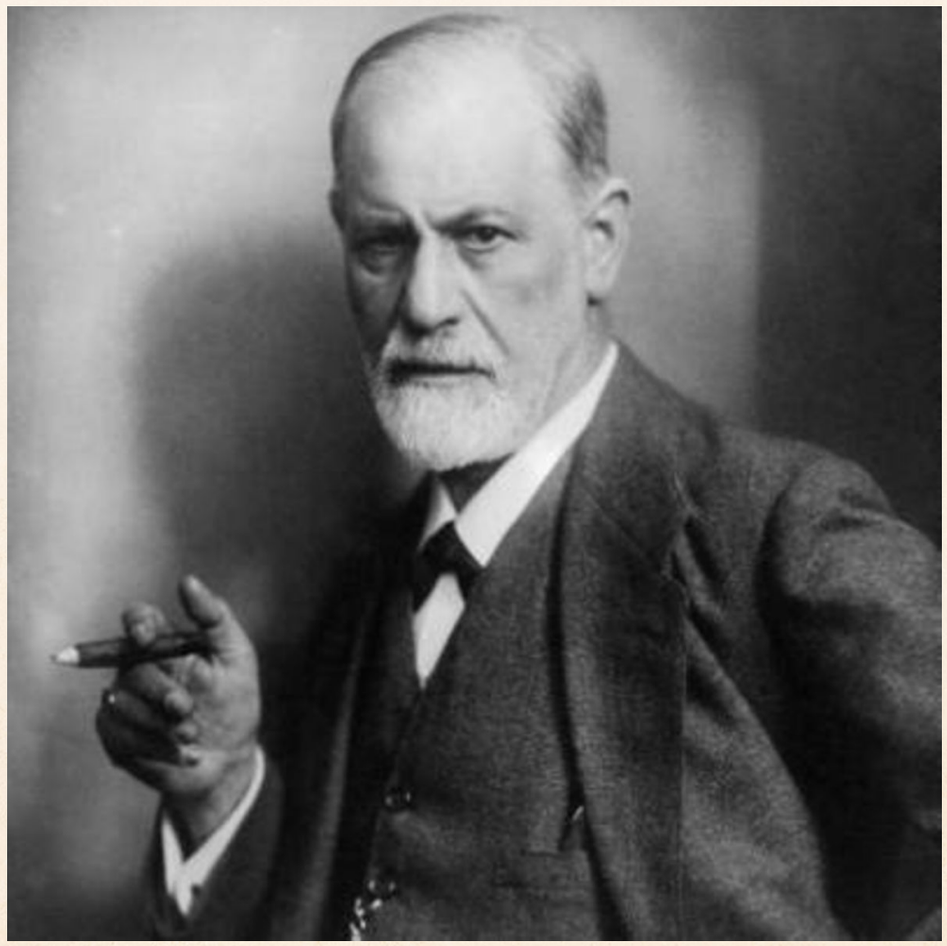
-Hypothesis: Psychologists focus on disability and objective data;

There will be no difference between ethnicities

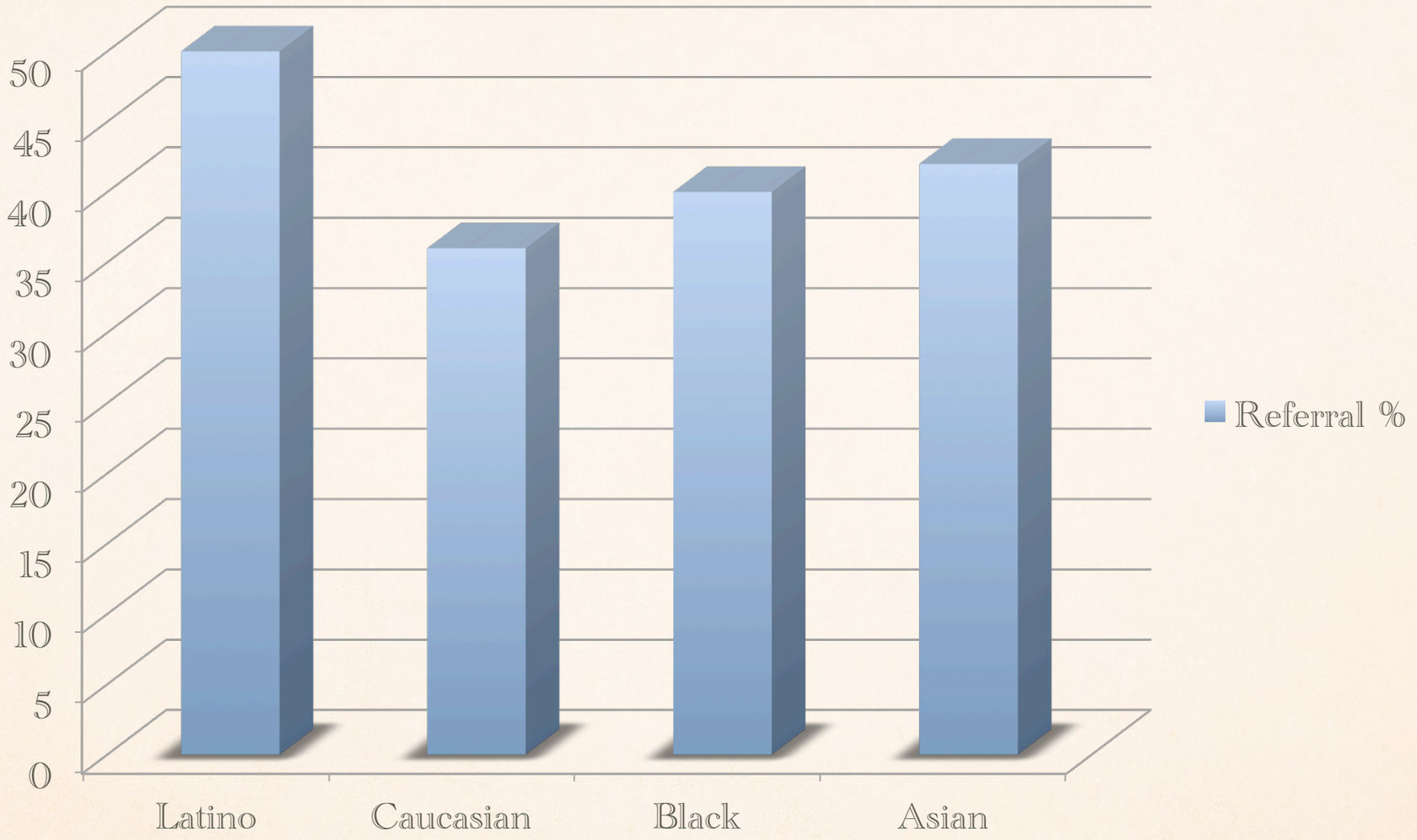
in either referral or early evaluation to exit

PSYCHS MUST KNOW BETTER, RIGHT?

Scenario study extended to 125 Washington School Psychologists



SUBJECTIVE DECISION-MAKING AMONG WA. PSYCHS



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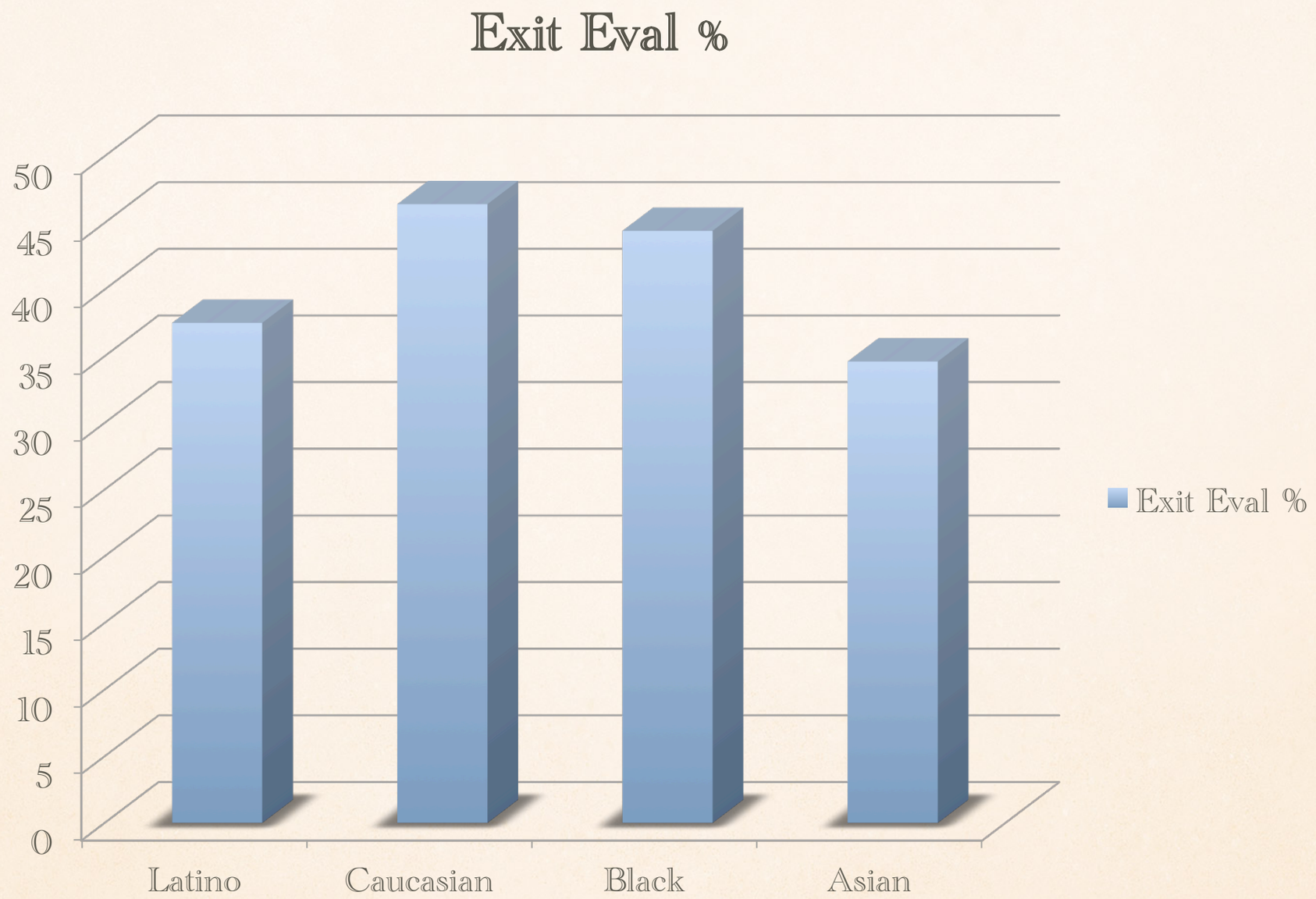
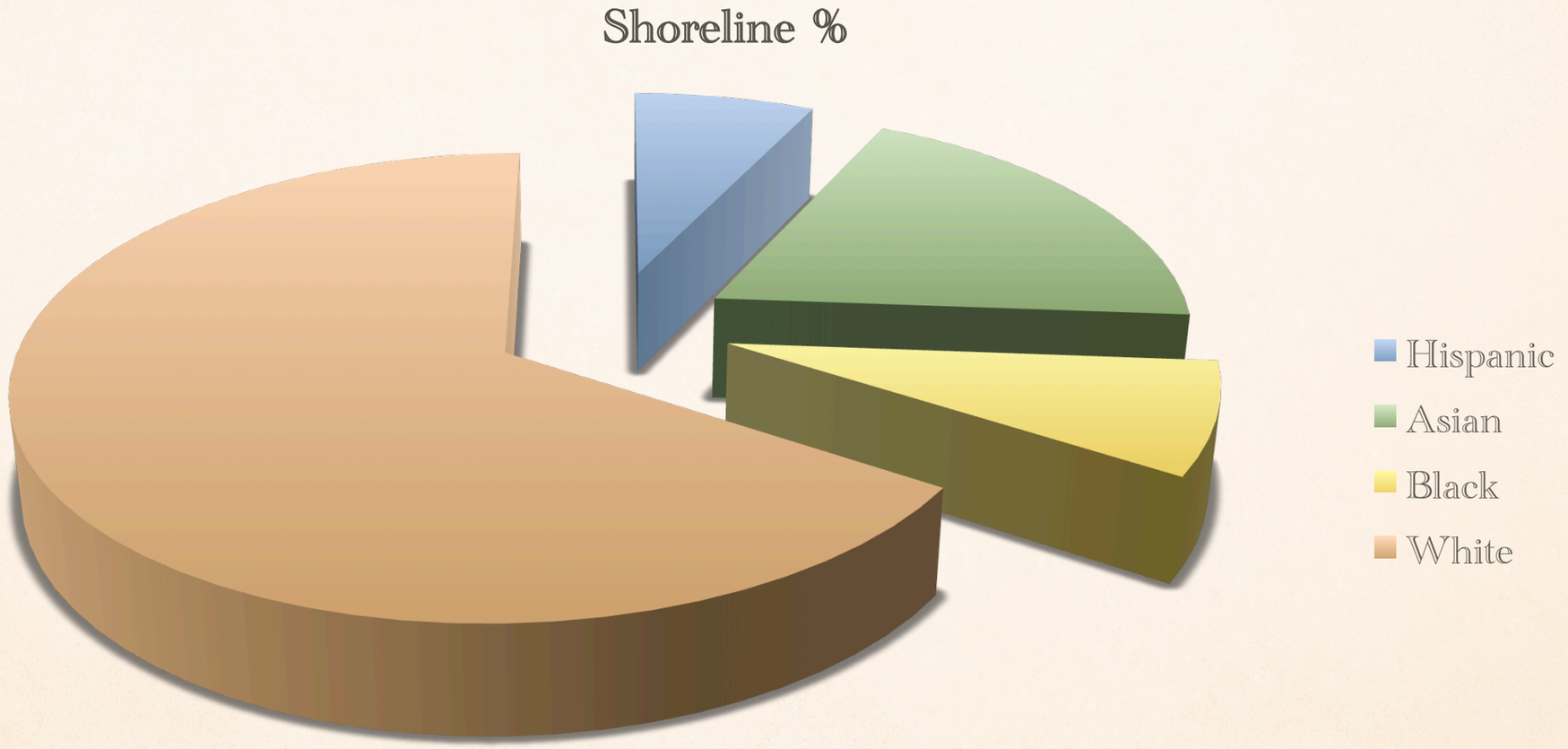


IN SHORELINE-LATINO AND BLACK STUDENTS NOT EXITED; STATEWIDE: ASIAN STUDENTS NOT EXITED

WHAT IS GOING ON?

- "When teams are dealing with students of a population that they are lacking in knowledge of and lacking in trust that the family and community can support the student, they err on the side of continuing to provide the support of Special Education."

WHAT'S DIFFERENT BETWEEN SHORELINE AND THE STATE?



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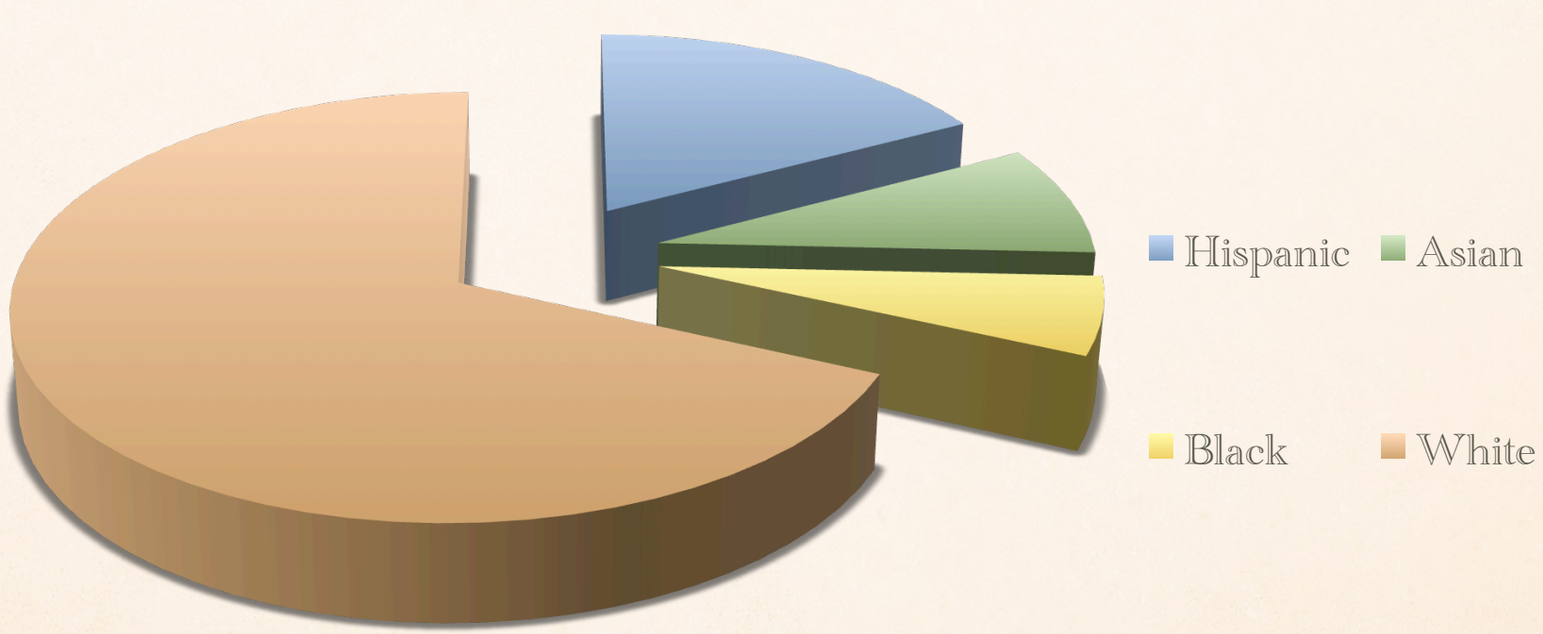

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WHERE TO FROM HERE?

- Increase team awareness that subjective stereotypes interfere with our interpretation of objective data

- Clarify purpose of SpEd with staff and teams-its not to ‘help kids’ but rather support equal access given disability

- Develop or strengthen Multi-tiered Models of System Support so that SpEd is not the ONLY path to graduation for some

- Develop criteria and process for initiating exit from Sped

THE ELEPHANT IN LIVING ROOM: AN ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESIS

- Maybe its not the subconscious stereotype that is leading to the retention of some students in the Special Education classroom.

- Maybe our SpEd curriculum or instructional style is simply not reaching some populations (or we don't think that its reaching them)