

An Examination of the Underrepresentation of African Americans in Advanced Placement
Courses

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ABSTRACT

Since desegregation, a variety of studies have been designed to assess the prevalence of the achievement gap (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). Only recently have studies on this topic focused directly on the underrepresentation of African American students in accelerated and Advanced Placement (AP) courses. In 2006, African American students comprised 14.1% of the school-age population in the United States, but only 6.5% of the AP students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). This underrepresentation of African-American in AP classes is just as alarming as the overall achievement gap addressed by NCLB

College Board (2012) data shows that the racial gap at the academic top continues to increase. The growing academic disparity between African Americans and Caucasian Americans has gained the attention of not only the federal government, but also social science researchers. Since 2000, there has been an increase in research on the achievement gap; in the past five years, researchers have focused more and more on the underrepresentation of African American student in AP courses.

The underrepresentation of African American students can lead to the false belief among these students that AP is not intended for African American students (Ford & Whiting, 2007). Teachers and peers can label non-AP students as lazy and incapable of achieving success in a challenging AP curriculum. These types of labels have a negative impact on the group, giving them a false idea of academic inferiority (O'Connor, 2006).

It is important to understand why African American students who are eligible to participate in AP courses either do or do not participate. What factors influence their decision? The research questions centered around asking African American students to express their perspectives about why there is an underrepresentation of African American students in AP

Courses. The interview questions challenged the participants to identify the problems that were prohibiting African American students from enrolling in higher-level courses.

DEDICATION

To my brother, Andre Maurice Williams, I hope that you are proud of the person that I've become. You have always been the motivating factor that has driven me to continue to improve the lives of young people.

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The decision to pursue this topic stemmed from my experience as an African American student in AP courses and as an educator observing the continued lack of representation decades later. I welcomed the challenge and the struggle of trying to identify the perceptions that are preventing equal representation in advanced courses in our secondary schools. It is my hope that this study sparks further research and that the representation gap is eventually eradicated.

Experience has always been my best teacher. I've maintained faith throughout my life and I know that my steps have been led by a higher power. I've been extremely fortunate to have extremely supportive family members, friends, and mentors that constantly pushed me forward, especially during those times when I questioned my abilities.

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CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) brought attention to the achievement gap that exists between minority and Caucasian students in the United States. In particular, the act highlights the need to increase the number of African American students in Advance Placement (AP) courses. The lack of diverse learning environments in our nation's educational system, and the negative stereotypes of African-American in society have necessitated a focus on underrepresentation of African Americans in AP programs. African American students make up 16% of the nation's K-12 population, but only 8% of the students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2010) the overall K-12 population numbers for all other racial groups are proportionally represented—or overrepresented. The purpose of this qualitative research study is to identify factors that discourage African American students from enrolling in AP classes. Results from this study can inform possible strategies for school personnel to help increase the representation of African Americans in AP courses.

This chapter begins with background information about the academic disparity between African American and Caucasian students in the United States, followed by information about the history of the AP program. Next, it provides an introduction to the current study, including the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, potential significance of the study, and definitions of terms. The final section provides an overview of how the rest of the dissertation is organized.

Academic Disparity Between African Americans and Caucasians in the United States

Over the past decade, the federal government has sought to decrease the existing achievement gap between African American and Caucasian American secondary students. In 2001, former President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind (NCLB), requiring all students to meet certain academic standards regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or academic ability. NCLB requires that student performances on end-of-year assessments increase annually and that 100% of students pass their state's end-of-year assessments by 2014, thereby eliminating the achievement gap between Caucasian and African American students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). President Bush said of NCLB, "these reforms express deep belief in our public schools and their mission to build the mind and character of every child, from every background, in every part of America" (U.S. Department of Education NCLB Overview, 2010).

Since desegregation, a variety of studies have been designed to assess the prevalence of the achievement gap (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). Only recently have studies on this topic focused directly on the underrepresentation of African American students in accelerated and Advanced Placement (AP) courses. In 2006, African American students comprised 14.1% of the school-age population in the United States, but only 6.5% of the AP students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). This underrepresentation of African-American in AP classes is just as alarming as the overall achievement gap addressed by NCLB.

College Board (2012) data shows that the racial gap at the academic top continues to increase. The growing academic disparity between African Americans and Caucasian Americans has gained the attention of not only the federal government, but also social science researchers. Since 2000, there has been an increase in research on the achievement gap; in the

past five years, researchers have focused more and more on the underrepresentation of African American student in AP courses.

AP courses increase the attractiveness of applicants seeking acceptance into institutions of higher education in America (Ford et al., 2008). Colleges and universities weigh these courses heavily during the admission process because of the rigorous curricula and end-of-year assessments associated with them. The end-of-year AP exams can be useful predictors of students' abilities in a variety of subject areas. According to the College Board (2012), AP exam scores accurately predict how well a student will perform in similar courses at the collegiate level. Furthermore, students scoring a three, four, or five on an AP exam (on a one to five scale) can earn college credit in over 90% of America's four-year institutions (College Board, 2010). AP courses allow students to gain an advantage before entering college and give students the preparation needed to be successful in higher education.

The underrepresentation of African American students in AP classes might lead one to conclude that AP courses are not intended for students of color (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005), but that conclusion is not entirely valid. The underrepresentation of African Americans in AP courses shows that African American students are neither taking advantage of the academic opportunities provided to them nor being provided with enough opportunities to succeed at the highest academic levels in secondary schools (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). The disparity in representation between other minorities and Caucasian Americans is either minuscule or nonexistent. Although African Americans are frequently compared to Latino/Hispanic Americans in academic research, recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau show that the Advanced Placement representation gap between Hispanic Americans and Caucasian Americans has been eliminated and the equity gap has been significantly reduced (College Board, 2012).

Yet, a stereotype persists that AP courses are not intended for African Americans (Ford & Whiting, 2007).

Underrepresentation not only is detrimental to African Americans, but it also affects students of other races. The psychological effects of underrepresentation can be detrimental to educational culture at the school, district, and even national level. The nation is becoming increasingly diverse. By 2020 America's racial and ethnic minorities will make up the majority of the U.S. population (Harris, Brown, Ford, & Richardson, 2004). If noticeable underrepresentation of African American students continues, it will be difficult to combat the misconception that African Americans are not meant to participate in AP courses.

The lack of African American students in upper-level courses reinforces the negative stereotypes of laziness and lack of ambition that have plagued the African American community for generations. The continuation of these negative stereotypes lessens the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement and the individual sacrifices that were made to ensure the future provided equal opportunities for all students.

The homogeneous populations in top high school courses contribute to the stereotypes that portray African Americans as incapable and uneducated. Researchers have recently turned their attention to trying to understand this phenomenon. Is the underrepresentation caused by voluntary resistance, institutionalized behavior, or both? The representation gap at the AP level widens the achievement gap at the top academic level between African Americans and other racial groups, particularly Caucasian Americans.

History of Advanced Placement

The AP program is the result of funding provided by the Ford Foundation after World War II. The initial purpose of the program was to increase the quality of curriculum provided to students at the secondary and higher education levels (College Entrance Examination Board, 2004). To this end, the Foundation financed researchers from premier institutions at both levels (Rothschild, 1999) to create a college-level curriculum to challenge high school students. The Ford Foundation wanted to provide a more demanding curriculum for capable high school students that would ease the transition into higher education (College Board, 2010). To entice students to take these courses, college credit was given to students who achieved certain benchmarks on the end-of-year examinations.

Secondary school teachers and top students alike recognized the benefits of this program and started participating in AP courses. Teachers anticipated teaching the brightest and the best, while students realized that they would have an opportunity to earn college credit prior to entering college. As more students matriculated into this program, schools began to offer a wider variety of AP courses. Today, 37 different AP courses are offered (College Board, 2010).

The mid 1980s and early 1990s saw more minority students participating in these advanced level courses. Inner-city and other low-income districts started to offer AP courses, giving all students the opportunity to challenge themselves with more difficult curricula. Even after the implementation of these programs—and the explanation of their benefits—the population of African American students remained miniscule (Ford et al., 2008). African American students with the strongest academic backgrounds were taking advantage of these educational opportunities, but the majority of the population resisted these courses because of the assumption that AP classes were for those “other students” (Ford et al., 2008).

To combat this disparity, Congress passed the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, the sole purpose of which was to identify and serve traditionally underrepresented populations, particularly African American and students of low socio-economic status. Unfortunately, this act did not change the existing perceptions. From the perspective of African American students, AP was still seen as for “others.” Table 1.1 below shows the nationwide percentage and average exam score of African American students who took AP courses in 1995, versus the percentage and average score of their Caucasian counterparts.

Table 1.1

African American vs. Caucasian Participation in AP Program in 1995.

Race	Number of Students Taking AP	Average Score on AP Exam	Percentage of AP Population
African Americans	11,919	2.28	2.84
Caucasian	277,086	3.12	66.07

Data from College Board of Education (2012)

Table 1.1 shows the disparity in students participating in AP programs and the difficulties associated with recruiting and retaining talented African American students for these courses. Table 1.2 shows that very little has changed over the past fifteen years. The struggle to recruit and retain talented African American students for the AP program continues, even though parents are more educated and students understand the opportunities provided by this program.

Table 1.2

African American vs. Caucasian Participation in AP Program in 2012.

Race	Number of Students Taking AP	Average Score on AP Exam	Percentage of AP Population
African Americans	81,215	1.89	8.0
Caucasian	515,901	2.97	57.1

Data from the College Board of Education (2012).

The two tables above show that as African American participation has increased, the group's average score on the AP exams has decreased. Although the percentage of non-white participants in this program has increased, African American students are still severely underrepresented. The low percentage of African American participants in the program, and the low average exam score, make it even more difficult for school personnel to convince African American students to enroll. NCLB has attempted to focus on and combat this problem. NCLB in Title 1 Part G, addresses the lack of diversity in AP in that it directly states:

The purpose of the 'Access to High Standards Act' is to demonstrate that larger and more diverse groups of students can participate in Advanced Placement programs and to provide greater access to Advanced Placement and pre-Advanced Placement courses and trained teachers for low-income and other disadvantaged students. (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

To address the underlying problems of racial and ethnic disparity in AP participation, programs for educators and students began to emerge: Advanced Via Individual Determination (AVID), AP Challenge, Pre-Advanced Placement, and Summer Institutes are just a few examples. These programs target African American students who have the potential to achieve

at the top academic levels by providing mentoring, skill building and organizational material, information about the programs, and encouragement from peers and adults. In sum there programs were established to give talented African American students the opportunity to succeed.

Statement of the Problem

The underrepresentation of African American students can lead to the false belief among these students that AP is not intended for African American students (Ford & Whiting, 2007). Teachers and peers can label non-AP students as lazy and incapable of achieving success in a challenging AP curriculum. These types of labels have a negative impact on the group, giving them a false idea of academic inferiority (O'Connor, 2006).

It is important to understand why African American students who are eligible to participate in AP courses either do or do not participate. What factors influence their decision? The research questions centered around asking African American students to express their perspectives about why there is an underrepresentation of African American students in AP courses. The interview questions challenged the participants to identify the problems that were prohibiting African American students from enrolling in higher-level courses. Once these factors are identified, future research and practice can consider how to manipulate these factors in order to increase participation of African American students.

Purpose of the Current Study

The purpose of this study is to identify factors that discourage African American students from enrolling in AP courses. The ultimate goal is to offer school personnel new strategies for increasing interest, participation, and success in AP programs among African American students.

Potential Significance of the Study

The data promises to promote a better understanding of the factors that contribute to African American students' decisions not to participate in AP courses by collecting the lived experiences and perspectives of these students. It also promises to add to the literature on underrepresentation. The results of this study can assist school leaders in understanding why students of color avoid accelerated and AP programs. Teachers and administrators can then create programs to ensure that the demographics of their AP programs are diverse and are a reflection of their schools and communities.

There is a great need for this study at this moment. As previously established, the underrepresentation of African American students in AP courses can reinforce negative stereotypes of African American as lazy and lacking of education. This thought process can create a belief among African American students that AP is not intended for them (O'Connor, 2006). The effects of these stereotypes are not limited to the African American students; the entire student body is affected, because they start to link the concept of "smart" with "non-African American." Having historical negative stereotypes reinforced in a public setting is damaging to the mindset of any young student. The majority of U.S. school aged children spend 8 hours a day in public schools for 13 years of their lives. If negative stereotypes about African Americans are being reinforced there, it will have a lasting impact on the cultural perception of

African Americans and their intellectual capabilities. “The internalization of negative stereotypes damages ‘character’ by causing low self-esteem, low expectations, low motivation, self-doubt, and the like” (Steele, 2010).

Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions:

1. Among African American students who are eligible for AP participation but not enrolled, what factors most influenced their decision not to participate in AP courses?
2. Among African American students who are eligible for AP participation and enrolled, what factors most influenced their decision to participate in AP courses?
3. How do the factors identified by eligible, but not enrolled, African American students compare with the factors identified by eligible, enrolled African American students?

Assumptions.

The following assumptions undergird this research study;

1. African American students are aware of the Advanced Placement program and the benefits to enrolling in these courses.
2. Students are capable of understanding the factors that impact their motivation for enrolling or for not enrolling in AP courses and can respond to questions that reflect that motivation accurately
3. African American student’s academic abilities are equal to other racial groups

Limitations.

1. The data for this study was taken from one district, using five of their high schools.
2. The data was gathered during the beginning of the school year and attitudes may differ during other months of the school year.
3. Several of the schools are application schools, which may account for the differences in student's responses for enrolling and not enrolling in AP courses
4. African American students in the district studied come from a variety of cultural, socioeconomic and family backgrounds, which may account for possible differences in responses.

Theoretical Framework

The recognition of multiple realities is necessary when studying the experiences, motivations, and lived experiences from the perspectives of those who live it (Milligan, 2005). The theoretical framework must allow the researcher the opportunity to compare the lived experiences of the eligible but not enrolled African American students and the eligible and enrolled African American students.

Interpretivism, achievement theory, and attribution theory was the foundation used for this study. These theories will allow the researcher an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the perceptions about underrepresentation of African Americans in AP classes based on information from students who are enrolled in AP and students who are eligible but not enrolled.

Interpretivism.

According to Milligan (2005), “truth is a matter of consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors, not correspondence with an objective reality” (p. 25). When interpretivists gather and analyze data, they realize that the daily interaction of people, the social structures that they assign or are assigned, and their daily interactions must be taken into account to have a full understanding of their responses. Commonalities exist across different assigned social structures and ethnic groups that are rarely shared (Milligan, 2005).

In the school community, a student’s constructed reality can be developed from a variety of experiences, structures, or interactions. Interpretivists seek to understand the construction of this reality and seek to answer how and why this reality exists (Milligan, 2005). To gain a true understanding of their perception, it is important to fully understand the students’ reality.

Stereotype Threat Theory.

Understanding a group’s reality means also understanding the stigmas that society has assigned to the group. Stereotype threat is a factor in people’s lives that can contribute to personal and societal problems and that can lead to increased pressures in everyday life.

“Stereotype threat is a situational predicament as a contingency of a group’s identity, a real threat of judgment or treatment in the person’s environment that goes beyond any limitations within” (Steele, 2010, pp. 59-60). Stigmatized groups have an understanding of these perceptions and stereotypes that other members of society believe about their group. These perceptions put the group’s ability under a level of scrutiny that forces the stigmatized group to feel a conscious or subconscious need to disprove the stigma or stereotype (Steele, 2010). Individuals within the stereotyped group feel obligated to prove to others that the stereotype is false. The effort to

prove this generalized stereotype to be incorrect can result in a reduction of performance because of stress and pressure not to confirm the stereotype (Steele, 2010).

The continuous societal message of a group's failures negatively impacts the group because individuals internalize the negative stereotype. Internalization or "psychic damage" (Steele, 2010, p. 46) results from the tendency of society to focus on the deficiencies of a certain group. African Americans whose goals are to succeed academically, especially at the highest levels, must disprove the stereotype that African Americans do not have the intellectual ability to be academically successful.

This research hinges on Stereotype threat theory as the conceptual basis that allows for an investigation into why African American students perceive that they are underrepresented in AP courses. The literature review identifies multiple factors that cause the internalization of the stigma that African American students are not intellectually capable of achieving academically. This focuses on the conscious and subconscious reasons for enrolling or not enrolling in AP courses.

Attribution Theory.

Attribution theory expands on achievement theory by incorporating cognitive and self-efficacy theories (Weiner, 1985). Students not only are internally driven by previous experiences but also begin to justify failure and success by internal and external factors (Mkumbo & Amani, 2012). This theory also postulates that the explanations that individuals give for their causes of success or failure can be stable, unstable, controlled, or uncontrolled (Weiner, 1985).

A stable cause would have a repeated outcome of a behavior, even if the behavior is performed in different situations (Mkumbo & Amani, 2012). An unstable cause would have different outcomes. Internal and external factors can be perceived as being controllable or uncontrollable. Controllable factors are effort, situation, and attendance. Uncontrollable factors are personality, abstractness of material, and task difficulty (Mkumbo & Amani, 2012).

Attribution theory postulates that people will innately interpret their environment positively to make themselves feel as positive as possible about their ability and their self-image (Weiner, 1985). They will continuously praise their ability and their success as internal factors and are driven by their internal motivation. When they are not successful, it is the fault of the external factors, over which they had no control. Unsuccessful individuals continuously attribute failure to the external, uncontrollable factors, such as bad luck (Weiner, 1985). Attribution to external factors becomes ingrained in the psyche of unsuccessful individuals, there by shutting down the internal drive to try difficult tasks because of the fear of unstable, uncontrollable factors (Weiner, 1985).

According to attribution theory, students who experience success begin to identify academic success with their effort and ability. Their academic self-esteem remains high even after failure. Failure is not their fault. External forces led to the unsuccessful attempt (Weiner, 1985). These individuals become high achievers because their confidence has been built by the success of trying difficult tasks (Milligan, 2005).

Lower-performing students are similar to unsuccessful individuals (Weiner, 1985). They attribute their failure to external, uncontrollable events and lack the confidence to take the chances necessary to be academically successful. They are deterred by the possibility of failure because they have internalized uncontrollable, unstable external factors. They have made

external factors into internal factors. This transformation encourages low academic self-esteem and complacency (Weiner, 1985). They no longer attribute their success to their own hard work and knowledge, but instead attribute their success to external factors such as good luck (Weiner, 1985).

This theoretical framework helped in the analysis of the data collected and in gaining a better understanding of why eligible African American students are for or against self-enrollment in AP courses.

Definition of Terms

For readers to clearly understand this study, it is necessary to define terms that have been used and will continue to be used throughout this research. The following terms are defined to avoid confusion and ensure the intended meaning of each term is clear:

- *Acting black*: behaving in a way that is consistent with black stereotypes. It is widely believed that students of color resist academic achievement because it is not associated with African American identity; these students want to “act black” (Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004). This belief suggests that students of color choose social popularity amongst peers over academic success, because any success may lead to ridicule and being accused of “acting white” (Howard, et. al., 2012).
- *Acting white*: behaving in a way that is consistent with white stereotypes. It is widely believed that students of color equate success in school with Caucasian Americans (Tucker, 2008). This term is used to suggest that, among their peers, students of color who are successful in their studies are “disowning” their own racial identity and acting like Caucasian Americans (Tucker, 2008).

- *Advanced Placement (AP)*: a high-level program that was created to offer high-performing students the opportunity to participate in courses that offer curricula equivalent to general-level college courses. The intent of this program is to prepare students for college-level coursework (College Board, 2010). In recent years, college admissions boards have been heavily considering AP courses when predicting students' ability to achieve at their universities.
- *African American*: people of color whose ancestors are of Sub-Saharan, mostly West African descent. This group will also be referred to as black or black Americans.
- *Caucasian American*: this term refers to individuals of the majority race in America. Their ancestors commonly came from western and northern Europe. This group will also be referred to as white or white Americans.
- *Critical race theory*: a theory that seeks to explain the discriminatory practices within institutions that put individuals of color at a disadvantage. This theory was developed through examination of ethnic and racial relations that are “based in law, sociology, history and education” (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004) and examines the equal treatment of all ethnicities within the previously described areas of society. This study will use critical race theory in viewing the inequalities experienced by African American students in high-level secondary school courses.
- *Deficit thinking*: the idea that some students, particularly low-income or minority students, fail in school because they and their families experience deficiencies that impede academic achievement. Such students, perceived by teachers as underachievers, are often treated as underachievers regardless of their true potential. The expectations for these students decrease because of the teachers' labels.

- *Lived experience*: this term refers to the first-hand account and perception of living as a member of the study's population.
- *Opportunity gap*: a disparity in opportunity between different groups of people. In the context of this study, this term refers to the disparity in programs and other support that are available to African American students and those available to students of the majority race (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). This difference in support affects both groups' chances to succeed at the AP level.
- *Stereotype threat*: "Stereotype threat is a situational predicament as a contingency of a group's identity, a real threat of judgment or treatment in the person's environment that goes beyond any limitations within" (Steele, 2010, pp. 59-60). In the context of this research, the term refers to the risk that African American students in low-level courses will confirm negative stereotypes about their race, thereby contributing to their underrepresentation in AP courses.
- *Tracking*: the grouping of students into homogeneously organized classes by perceived instructional level. When tracked, students are often labeled for the rest of their academic careers. This type of grouping makes it difficult for students of different tracks to be equally represented in AP programs.

Organization of This Dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation consists of four chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on factors that account for the underrepresentation of African American students in AP and gifted education classes. The literature review focuses on external, internal, and institutional factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of African American students. Next, Chapter 3

presents a description of the study's methodology. Afterwards, Chapter 4 provides the study's results. Finally, Chapter 5 integrates the results, discussing their limitations and implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review seeks to document factors identified in previous research that contribute to the underrepresentation of African Americans in AP and other gifted programs. The first section discusses the procedure used to collect and analyze the literature. The subsequent literature review will consist of four parts. The first part presents a review of the literature on external factors, with the focus on “acting black,” “acting white,” peer influences, adult support, and the responses to external factors and oppositional culture theories. The second part will focus on theoretical ideas of societal factors, with special focus on critical race theory, stereotype threat, and the opportunity gap. The third part will focus on institutional factors that contribute to the lack of representation. Finally, the fourth part will explore the literature on internal factors of African Americans. A summary will follow the four factors.

Review Procedure

In order to identify the literature on which to base a list of factors that contribute to African American underrepresentation, it is important to have criteria for accepting and reviewing material. The researcher reviewed recent dissertations acquired by query searches in the ProQuest Dissertation and Thesis database on the University of Virginia library website with the focus on African Americans and education. The results uncovered dissertations that have similar questions and focus on similar ideas, but either the target population was Hispanic Americans or the focus was on minority students’ lower scores on the AP exam (rather than participation in the AP program). Although this search yielded very little on the initial topic, it did provide reference pages to examine. The researcher used these reference pages to identify important researchers in the field of gifted secondary education and African American students.

After receiving minimum returns from the initial searches, the researcher used key words specific to African Americans and the underrepresentation in AP courses that were gathered from the reference pages from previous searches. The databases used were Educational Research and EBSCO host in the ERIC database. The key words for this search were “African American” and “Gifted Education.” The majority of the results were articles and studies that had been published in the past 10 years. The older articles rarely focused specifically on African American students. The researchers’ attention was on the minority community as a whole and their lack of representation in honors programs. This review of the literature determined that materials published after the year 2000 focused on the increasing underrepresentation of African Americans at the honors level and more specifically at the AP level. The researcher then decided to focus primarily on material that is younger than 1998.

After implementing the date restriction in the Educational Research and ERIC databases, the researcher realized that he needed to add information that might yield better results. The review of the dissertations, peer-reviewed articles, and referenced journals helped determine the most cited researchers in the field. It also helped distinguish between opinion pieces and empirical studies. Opinion pieces are of interest, but for the purposes of this literature review, peer-reviewed scholarly empirical studies are necessary.

Browsing the list of articles published in the past 10 years, the researcher realized that the majority of these articles were opinion pieces. Few empirical studies were available, and the search process had to be reexamined. Expanding the date limitations to include the 1990s and 2000s was essential to gathering more relevant empirical articles. Making this change resulted in an increase of key words and experts in the field. The search provided the studies that people in the 2000s were using to support their opinion pieces.

The initial key words “African American” and “gifted education” yielded thousands of articles, but the implementation of the date, peer review, referenced, and empirical studies restrictions decreased the number of opinion pieces and eliminated the need to browse articles that could not be used for this review. These new key words yielded factors that could be researched in greater detail. Factors that did not result from empirical research, dissertations, or peer-reviewed material were mainly excluded from the criteria. Factors that were introduced in opinion pieces were used as key words for initial searching purposes, but if they did not also result from empirical research, they were discarded.

A resource that was valuable in the search for relevant studies was the reference lists from dissertations and articles. The reference pages in many cases were filled with other research studies that could provide possible factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of African Americans in advanced-level courses. The reference pages of dissertations and peer-reviewed articles identified prominent researchers on the topic of underrepresentation of African Americans in AP. As each reference page was reviewed, the names of certain individuals continued to appear.

Reviewing materials based on the results of these searches, the reference pages of similar dissertations and empirical studies helped to develop a short list of relevant research and experts in the field. After using the educational databases to procure studies, a Google search was done to learn more about the experts and to find more texts written and published by these individuals. These Google searches yielded contact information and the universities with which researchers were associated. Their Curriculum Vitae were vital resources. This strategy led to a wider search of these researchers’ texts.

External Societal Rationale

Studies examining African American representation and achievement in gifted programs reveal findings that implicate the school, neighborhood, and family environments as major contributors to the lack of academic success (Ford et al., 2008). African American students who succeed in school are continuously dealing with factors that other races rarely know exist (Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004). The African Americans community that has not always had access to or felt welcomed within educational institutions (Ford et al., 2008). The negative perception of education in the African American community leads students who are capable of meeting the academic requirements and qualifications for advanced studies to prefer studying in the lower classes to avoid ridicule and isolation (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008).

Acting White. Researchers posit that students in the African American community believe that certain academic characteristics such as speaking standard English, earning good grades, avoiding trouble, and achieving in gifted programs are not representative of the African American community (Henfield et al., 2008). These behavioral characteristics are often considered “white.” When students of the African American race portray these characteristics in school, they are often ridiculed and said to be “acting white.” According to Fordham and Ogbu (1986) “generations of black children have learned a lesson that has appeared to have emerged in black community that defines academic learning in school and ‘acting white’ and academic success as the prerogative of white America” (p.177). Acting white insinuates that African Americans must embrace the ideas of whites in order to be academically successful because inherently they are not capable of such achievement (Tucker, 2008). This mentality harms not only intelligent African American students but also the African American community as a whole.

The accusation of “acting white” can be detrimental to the academic experience of gifted African American students (Ford et al., 2008).

Tucker’s assessment of what occurs in schools suggests that academic and racial socialization are not mutually exclusive and play an important role in determining which group succeed or fails. Tucker (2008) finds that “Learning the school curriculum and learning to follow the standard academic practices of the school are often equated by minorities with learning to ‘act White’ or as actually ‘acting White’ while simultaneously giving up acting like a minority person” (p. 13). In order to avoid being ostracized by their peers, African American students stray away from behaviors that are associated with the white community and resultantly fail to achieve at high levels academically (Tucker, 2008).

When researchers compare the academic performance of African Americans with other minority groups, such as Asian immigrants, the question that often arises is, Why are these other students successful, but blacks are not? Many researchers believe that the answer relates to whether one’s ancestors came to this country voluntarily (for example, as a political refugee or to find work) or involuntarily (as a slave, which is the case for African Americans). Asian and immigrants and other so-called “voluntary groups” view the academic structures of America’s public educational system differently than African Americans, who are the “involuntary group” (Tucker, 2008). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggest that “Black Americans are an example of caste-like minorities, involuntarily, and permanently incorporated into American society through slavery or conquest. They were brought to America as slaves and after emancipation were relegated to menial status through legal and extralegal devices” (p. 178).

Beyond slavery, the U.S. educational system of public education can historically be described as a system that perpetuated systems of social inequality. For example, the system of

educational segregation was in place for centuries in the U.S., and the creation of public education did not eliminate this segregation. African Americans in the U.S. were repeatedly reminded by the White majority that education for blacks was not possible and that African Americans were ignorant and not meant to be intellectual equals (Tucker, 2008). The involuntary group suffered separate and unequal educational facilities. When the desegregation of society occurred, African Americans already dismissed education and the benefits of academic success (Ford et al., 2008). In contrast, minorities whose ancestors voluntarily came to this country do not have the history of educational oppression that is ingrained in the black community. They see inequalities as an obstacle, not a deterrent, from gaining an education (Tucker, 2008). African Americans have been taught since the early days of segregated schools that education and academics do not hold a reward for them (Tucker, 2008).

Henfield et al. (2008) investigate the idea of acting white in depth. Their research focuses on a group of twelve gifted African American students from southeastern and midwestern schools who were in their early high school years. Henfield et al. used biographical questionnaires to gather information about the students' background and used interviews to go into greater detail about their experiences. The researchers used a systemic process to ensure that authenticity and trustworthiness were prevalent. They used the qualitative process of open coding, axial coding (that is, combining open codes), and contacted students repeatedly (Henfield et al., 2008).

The themes that resulted ranged from the social ramifications of taking AP and gifted courses to the navigation of the social and institutional conditions of public education. Administrators, in particular, are provided information that shows why intelligent African American students lean toward social acceptance rather than academic success. These results

illustrate that students take into account the stigma that is associated with giftedness when determining whether to challenge themselves academically.

Interviews provided students the opportunity to express their feelings and thoughts about being African American and gifted. The small sample of dialogue between interviewer and students suggests that the students were willing to go in-depth about their experiences in these courses as gifted African Americans. The researcher focused on questions that gathered information about students' perception of gifted programs and the responses of their peers and the adults of the building. The limited sample of interviews and responses showed that the interviewer gave the respondents the opportunity to expand on responses from previous questions.

Further analysis of this research brings attention to the researchers' lack of focus. They gather information to explain the social and institutional problems that African Americans face and the impact of these problems during the students' years of gifted and AP placement. The authors explain the problems that students face, but they are not as clear when trying to explain the factors that lead to certain decisions. They do not explain how social and institutional problems might impact the decision making of students. During the discussion and future recommendation sections, the authors could have explained this further when constructing their recommendations, especially for practitioners. The study lacks detailed explanations of the themes that resulted from the interviews, which would help practitioners and administrators understand what type of programs to put in place to support African American students who are capable of taking these higher-level courses.

The stereotype of acting white is also a point of focus in Tucker's (2008) dissertation focusing on the underachievement of African Americans at the gifted level. Tucker focuses on

Ogbu's idea that oppositional culture is evident no matter the socioeconomic class of the African American student. Tucker's research shows that academic achievement has never been associated with the African American community and that assimilating to academic achievement will lead to negative peer interaction (Tucker, 2008). Acting white is equivalent to joining the enemy and African American students that decide to assimilate face opposition from their peers and members of community (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Acting Black. A parallel idea identified in the community of researchers is the idea of "acting black." Similar to "acting white", African American students "acting black" assumes that one must disown his or her community and assimilate to be academically successful.

The debate in the literature over the past decade about black youth avoiding academic success because of their fear of ridicule and being labeled acting white, remains unresolved and continues to be a rarely discussed stereotype that exist (Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004). A phenomenon or stereotype that researchers have addressed more frequently in recent years is the idea of acting black. Henfield et al. (2008) and Peterson-Lewis and Bratton (2004) reports that acting black has five dimensions:

1. Academic/Scholastic
2. Aesthetic/Stylistic
3. Behavioral
4. Dispositional
5. Impressionistic

These characteristics of acting black lead successful African American students to believe that academic success and achievement are racially inappropriate and their success is

going against their race (Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004). Successful African American students have to deal with an inner struggle between what they know is right and what will increase their association with peers. This idea of having to decide between being a part of one's race or being academically successful only exists in the African American community.

Acting black crystallizes the idea that African American students are more concerned about style, impression, disposition, behaving a certain way, and anything opposite of acting white (Ford et al., 2008). This resistance to academic achievement exists because black students believe that the hard work associated with academic success is a waste of their time. Many blacks eschew academics because they do not see for themselves the possibility of obtaining the same opportunities or resources that are associated with academic success by the majority (Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004). Conforming to educational and societal norms does not guarantee employment after successful completion (Ford et al., 2008), especially in the communities of most African American students.

This negative perspective at the secondary level creates isolation of African American students in AP or honors courses. Students are faced with a choice between being successful or being accepted by their peers. These students often find themselves trying to please both their peers and teachers by displaying behaviors associated with acting white and acting black (Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004). The desire to be popular, have friends, and be involved with peer activities while avoiding rejection, alienation, and isolation often influences students' decisions. For black students at the secondary level, being successful in school and participating in higher-level courses is not as important as it is for their white counterparts (Ford et al, 2008).

Peer Influences. The previous subsections gave an overview of the stereotypes of acting white and acting black and the impact of these stereotypes on the academic decisions of intelligent black students. The aforementioned research not only focuses on the prevalence of the stereotypes such as acting white and acting black, but also *why* they are so prevalent. Black students have a fear of separation from their peers and are concerned that AP and gifted classes are not meant for them or that they do not belong in these classes. Henfield et al., (2008) states:

It is interesting that many of these common explanations have racial underpinnings...ethnic minority students perceived that “giftedness was equivalent to whiteness” and that the glaring scarcity of ethnic minority students in gifted education programs is “likely to intensify the psychological damage that segregated schools had on minority children”(p.445) .

The desire for normalcy, the fear of rejection by friends, and the sense of never being accepted in the gifted programs by classmates or teachers is a dilemma that students of the African American race alone must weigh when deciding whether to display their academic talents (Henfield et al., 2008). The sense of educational inferiority by African Americans has led gifted and non-gifted students alike to believe that “normalcy” is having students of color in lower-track classes and that only whites and minorities who favor white culture belong in the gifted and talented programs. Black students pigeonhole themselves when they attach a stigma to their own identity and believe that academic success is “abnormal” (Henfield et al., 2008). An African American student in the Henfield et al. (2008) study expressed peer influence this way:

Henfield: What do you think will be more difficult for you in high school: Being a gifted student, African American student or a male student? Please explain.

Carlos: Being a gifted student, because people would make fun of me.

Henfield: Do they make fun of you now?

Carlos: No, most of my friends don't even know that I am gifted.

Henfield: How do you manage to keep that from them?

Carlos: They never ask, so I never tell them.

Henfield: How do you think they would respond if you told them?

Carlos: They wouldn't believe me.

Henfield: They don't think you are smart?

Carlos: No.

Henfield: Do you do things to make them think you're not all that smart?

Carlos: Not really, they just think that I wouldn't be a person to be gifted.

The student expressed concern for being ridiculed, a sense of loneliness, and a desire for life to remain normal. African American students' lack of academic self-worth and low self-esteem causes students to project their mentality onto others who are able to succeed at the highest level (Henfield et al., 2008). Angela, a participant in the study cited above, adds "because there are more normal kids than gifted kids...the normal kids will not accept you for being gifted. In fact they try to bring you down and call you 'dumb'" (p.442). This negative academic mentality allows peers to influence African American gifted students' decision to avoid participation in gifted programs.

Adult Support. Previous Henfield study focused on the social interaction among peers and the effects that negative peer interactions may have on black student representation in gifted or honors classes. Although the importance of peer interaction plays an important role in the lives of African American gifted students, adults can also positively influence students'

educational outcomes. Two studies, Herbert (1998) and Ndura, Robison, and Ouchs, (2003) address the importance of the adults in the lives of these gifted students has been neglected (Hebert, 1998). In his research about adult support, Hebert used a case study of two minority male students who were both high ability and who had similar upbringings. These students were chosen from a larger ethnographic study that investigated the experiences of gifted black men in the inner city (Hebert, 1998). Herbert found that adults such as parents, teachers... played an important role in these young men lives.

When asked, gifted students state that their parents are the most influential adult figures in their lives (Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003). Although there are parents who had negative experiences as students, there are parents of black students who hold high academic aspirations for their children and encourage them to pursue every academic opportunity that exists, no despite their own personal experience that they may have had during their school years (Hebert, 1998). These positive expectations and aspirations are fuel to many black students enrolling and remaining in gifted and AP programs (Ndura et al., 2003). A caring, encouraging, and mentoring adult, especially a parent, can create a positive experience for African American students when the expectation of being a gifted black student is negative (Hebert, 1998). The importance of parents cannot be understated. Their support and understanding of their child's plight can be the difference between entering and succeeding at the AP level and being influenced by peers to work below their potential and remain in regular education classes. The support by adults for these students is essential to break the bonds of ignorance and hatred that exists in black students for their gifted peers (Hebert, 1998).

Parental and adult support through mentors, teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators increases when there is higher socioeconomic standing and parental education.

According to Ndura, “there is a favorable relationship between family income and AP class enrollment” (Ndura et al., 2003, p. 31). When these factors are included, the social pressures are increased and the ridicule that is associated with giftedness is greater. A strong belief in self is often a driving force to succeed, but when a student is constantly ridiculed and experiences negative behavior toward his/her giftedness, the belief in self can deteriorate if adults do not support students (Hebert, 1998).

Responses to Societal Influences. The reactions to these societal influences range from academic disengagement to gifted identity distancing to outright denial of giftedness. The research by Henfield, Moore III, and Wood concentrates on these reactions and how educators’ lack of observation often allows labeling of these students as incapable of success. The recruitment and retention of gifted African American students is essential to ensuring a diverse classroom and learning experience (Henfield et al., 2008).

According to Henfield et al., (2008, p. 434) “racial identity development functioning can have a significant impact on academic achievement of gifted African American students.” Students’ adult identities begin to develop during their journey through secondary education, and in order to achieve their goals and to avoid negative experiences they develop actions or inactions in response to their social, economic, and home environments.

Academic Disengagement. African American students may respond to negative societal influences through academic disengagement. Academic disengagement is a mechanism that gifted students use to avoid embarrassment or ridicule inside of the classroom. Whether in an AP or honors classroom, academic engagement may result in embarrassment if students do not understand the material being taught (Henfield et al., 2008). Angela, a participant of the

Henfield et al (2008) study, stated, “instead of asking a teacher for assistance with class assignments, I would rather sit there the whole class hour and figure it out by myself.... I would put my head down if I was not able to understand the problem” (p.441). This reaction, the result of relying on oneself to navigate the perils of ridicule by African American peers and classmates and the lack of support from adults, can be viewed as “academic disengagement.”

Distancing from Gifted Identity. Another reaction African American students may employ to limit ridicule is to distance themselves from their gifted identity. By ridiculing and stereotyping other gifted students, African American students remove the focus from their own gifted ability. One student in the Henfield et al. study stated, “I am smart, but I’m real, being gifted does not change me...sometimes they [nongifted African American students] get the wrong idea about the gifted program and think everybody is a nerd” (p. 442). This disassociation from their giftedness gives the African American students the confidence that they will not be ridiculed or associated with giftedness by their peers.

Deflection of Giftedness. The final reaction to negative social pressures is African Americans’ deflection of gifted ability. This reaction of withholding information about their gifts or refusal to take gifted classes is a common response by gifted black male students (Henfield et al., 2008). The stigma associated with giftedness is avoided, and students are able to enjoy social interactions with their peers without the risk of being ridiculed. This strategic behavior keeps African American students socially and emotionally safe. Playing sports helps gifted black students deflect their gifted ability, and it helps other black students to be comfortable with their own ability. The higher the skill-set in the athletic arena, the more willing peers are to accept the intelligence of the student. One student in the Henfield et al. (2008) study

stated, “I play sports with most of them and I am very athletic...they know me as smart Carlos and come to me for help” (p.442). Such reactions often prevent the ridicule that is sometimes associated with giftedness and allows gifted students the opportunity to create an identity that includes their gifted abilities. Gifted students have to portray a dual personality and present that personality based on the appropriate environmental setting. The fear of being exposed as a fraud by their peers and experiencing the ridicule associated with the gifted classification can be devastating to the academic experience of the gifted African American (Henfield et al., 2008).

Henfield’s research yielded results that focus on two major themes: negative social ramifications of enrolling in AP and gifted courses, and navigating the social and institutional conditions of public schools. The study presented student narratives and provided information for practitioners, but the work cofounded to themes that could possibly be considered separate. Addressing the two ideas separately (i.e., acting black and the development of responses to societal influences) would have allowed the researchers to provide information that might be more valuable to the practitioner. The researchers focused on the broad topics that prohibited African American students from taking AP but did not provide enough analysis to thoroughly disengage how acting black or the lack of social acceptance prevents African American students from enrolling in AP courses. The researchers contributed to our initial understanding of these important ideas and themes, but further analysis could have yielded more in-depth descriptions.

Henfield et al. introduce the themes of navigating society and coping mechanisms for being African American and gifted. The researchers provide examples from the participants’ interviews describing the experience of being a black student. These mechanisms are important in the development of African American students and their quest to participate in gifted or AP programs.

Oppositional Culture.

This body of empirical research suggests the presence of societal factors that contribute to the lack of achievement and representation of black students in higher-level courses.

Researchers agree that this lack of representation can be attributed to a range of factors, from peer influence to socioeconomic standing. Conversely, researchers who disagree with oppositional culture theorists focuses on the successes of African American students who are enrolled in AP courses and their beliefs in academic success (Tucker, 2008). They suggest that acting black and avoiding acting white is an excuse for academic failure, not a real cause of academic failure (Tucker, 2008). The excuse allows one to avoid the expectations associated with participation in AP or honors courses and the success associated with these expectations.

The oppositional view posits that blacks are similar to any other race. Blacks understand that education both leads to the American Dream and provides the income level necessary to achieve success (Tucker, 2008). According to the oppositional view, underachieving to avoid ridicule is considered preposterous and ignorant (Tucker, 2008).

Recent research on oppositional culture focus on the cultures, climates, and structures of schools and their importance in the shaping of students' experiences with external pressures (Diamond, Lewis, & Gordon, 2007). Researchers who challenge oppositional culture show that that negative peer relationships are not unique to black or white children, but that the majority of high-achieving students experience negative peer pressure (Diamond et al., 2007). According to the research, black students actually experience more positive peer pressure than negative peer pressure for their academic achievement (Diamond et al., 2007). These researchers question whether African American students are disproportionately affected by negative peer pressure and whether negative peer pressure explains the underrepresentation at the gifted and AP levels.

This group of researchers embraces the American ideology that education is equal for all students in all environments and that “success” or the “American Dream” means the same to all races. Still others argue that the connection between long-term success and academic participation continues to be nonexistent in the African American community (Tucker, 2008). Tucker suggests that, the African American community rarely highlights role models who have profited from academic success. Furthermore, when these role models do become successful, they distance themselves from the black community, and consequently education is seen as insignificant (Tucker, 2008). In sum, the oppositional view challenges the American ideology that the educational system provides an opportunity for all and instead examines the societal factors, such as the lack of role models and the unequal opportunities for African Americans and their community. In other words, oppositional culture theorists would argue that the educational system perpetuates social inequality instead on eliminating it.

A rebuttal against the oppositional view is found in an empirical study presented by Diamond, Lewis, and Gordon (2007). Their work addresses the idea that oppositional culture is an excuse that should be used less to describe the underachievement and underrepresentation of African American students in the top classes. In order to support this argument, the study examined oppositional culture, its history, and how it is being used to explain underrepresentation and underachievement. They explain the research that shows that oppositional culture is prevalent and is contributing to the failures of black students.

Diamond et al. decided to replicate a combination of studies to disprove the idea of oppositional culture. Their questions address this idea and the impact of oppositional culture in American public schools. They use a mid-sized suburban school that has a diverse population and a long history of academic success. The school is the product of a substantial budget that

allows for state-of-the-art facilities. The student population is a mixture of black, white, and Latino students. The students were selected to participate in the study through purposeful sampling. The final sample included 70 students (42 African Americans and 28 whites). The students were in three different categories: high, moderate, and low achievers. The authors and graduate students conducted the interviews using a standard protocol. They used focused questions to gain information on students' school experiences, their educational aspirations and expectations, their perceptions of race and opportunity, and their beliefs about peer dynamics (Diamond et al., 2007).

Diamond et al. used NVivo to help create different codes and themes to analyze the results. They initially created case, topic, and descriptive nodes. NVivo was used to gain broader themes and codes. Their results showed that African Americans are not suffering from oppositional culture. In fact, the researchers found the opposite. They found that African Americans and Caucasian Americans received equal negative peer pressure, and that in some cases African American students received praise and encouragement from their peers for success. They found that oppositional culture was irrelevant for all levels of achievement among black students. The interviewees showed that African American students are interested in academic achievement. Their findings contradict the researchers of oppositional culture.

Diamond et al. provide a strong argument that oppositional culture is not prevalent and has limited impact on African American students. The participants attended a similar school to those from Ogbu's work. Diamond et al. argue that there is little to support the results of Ogbu and other oppositional culture theorists. The limitation of this work is that the findings cannot be generalized because the study was done in a highly funded school with the budget and resources to encourage all students to participate in AP and gifted programs. The school's funds may be

used to create programs to prepare and help all students. Also, the research was done with a population of students with limited differentiation in the income levels of the families. These students come from wealthy, college-educated families that support education and understand the importance of a good education. Although Ogbu's work was conducted at a similar school, the study occurred at a different time. The anti-establishment movement by gifted black students was at its peak during the late 1980s to early 1990s when Ogbu conducted his study (Diamond et. al., 2007).

Finally, Diamond et al. focus on 10th and 11th graders. Interviewing all grade levels in the high school would have given a better description of the school environment and the prevalence and effects (if any) of oppositional culture. They missed the experiences of 9th grade students (who are trying to find their place in the hierarchy of high school) and 12th grade students (who have already established their position in the hierarchy). These perspectives could have provided different results for this article.

Societal Factors

Opportunity Gap.

Previous subsections focus on the unwillingness of black students to enroll in gifted programs because of peer, economic, and adult relationships. The existence of these factors has a visible effect on the enrollment of blacks, but there are other factors that may not be as evident. The opportunity gap is the gap that exists between privileged schools and underprivileged schools (Ndura et al., 2003). Privileged schools have the funds to provide extra opportunities for students that suggest that academic success is the norm. The likelihood is that students in privileged schools will understand the value of a good education because their community is

filled with examples of individuals who are successful because of academics (Ndura et al., 2003).

Most schools that are majority black are located in the inner city. These schools do not have the same financial means to provide the extra programs and support that are needed to ensure academic success for all students (Ndura et al., 2003). The school's budget is usually based on the local and surrounding community's property taxes. In these communities, the schools do not have the diversity of AP courses that their wealthier counterparts have, nor do they have the teachers to provide the AP curriculum (Ndura et al., 2003). As AP enrollment increases nationwide, black students' average AP exam scores are decreasing and black students remain underrepresented (Ndura et al., 2003). The opportunity gap largely accounts for this underrepresentation because the resources are not equal, nor are the opportunities provided for black students to succeed and develop social capital that can improve their community (Ndura et al., 2003).

The empirical study by Ndura, Robinson, and Ochs (2003) focused on the denial of opportunity and equity to African American students in secondary education. The authors discuss the unequal funding and resources that are provided to schools of minority majorities. The study was quantitative and examined the impact of adult influences. The sample that the researchers used consisted of students from a mid-size diverse school district in a western state. There were 10 schools with a total of 15,000 ninth- through twelfth-graders. The researchers used the teachers to distribute the surveys and collected them through inner-office mail of the school district. Of the 10 schools, 8 had their students respond to the survey.

The results from these surveys allowed the researchers to examine in greater detail the economic factors that contribute to the number of AP courses being offered in schools and how

many African American students were taking the courses. The researchers did a basic analysis of the economic and ethnic breakdown of AP enrollment, but did not do any statistical analysis to determine how these two factors influence African American representation and achievement in AP classes. Their analysis section did not provide information that can be used to support actions to improve the representation of African Americans in AP classes. This lack of statistical analysis may create discussions and recommendations leading to misappropriation of funds for programs that will not work.

The second shortcoming of the study was relying on teachers to distribute the surveys to the students. Having teachers distribute the surveys without proper training could mean that students were not given proper directions about the survey. The researchers relied on the teacher not only to give out the surveys, but also to collect and mail them through inner-office mail. This was a mistake because the students were not ensured confidentiality. The teachers, school personnel, and mail personnel had the opportunity to review these surveys. This lack of confidentiality for the students could skew the results of the surveys. The lack of training for the teachers could make the students apprehensive about taking the survey and create results that were not valid. Major issues are present because of the researchers' inability to secure confidentiality for the students and the lack of training for the distributors of the survey.

The researchers provided recommendations for administrators, teachers, and parents to improve their interactions with African American students. The authors state that the need for adult interactions and economic status plays a major role in the school experience of African American students.

Stereotype Threat.

“Stereotype threat is a situational predicament as a contingency of a group’s identity, a real threat of judgment or treatment in the person’s environment that goes beyond any limitations within” (Steele, 2010, pp. 59-60). Stereotype threat is an unrecognized factor in our lives that can contribute constantly to personal and societal problems and that can lead to increased pressures in everyday life Steele (2010). African American students are stigmatized as intellectually inferior and incapable of achieving at the gifted level. When students are in these courses they have the pressure of disproving the stigma. “Schools have inherited a social organization from the larger society and from its own history that might well place black students under downwardly constituting pressures that might have the power to interfere directly and indirectly with intellectual performance” (Steele, 2010, p. 28).

Improving the community is difficult when intelligent members of the community are chastised for their academic gifts. Opportunity gap explains the unequal funding, facilities, and resources available to the African American population versus their wealthier counterparts. The external societal factors that threaten black students are stigmas placed on the entire race. These factors are the results of longstanding stereotypes in our society. Osborne and Walker (2006) state:

when there are negative stereotypes about the intellectual capacity of certain stigmatized groups, members of that group suffer aversive consequences; group members who are most strongly identified with the stigmatized domain in question (e.g., intellectual or academic ability) are those most likely to suffer (p.563).

This idea is based on preconceived stereotypes that are associated with race or acting white/acting black (Tucker, 2008). The stereotypes placed on the African American community

and African Americans' own beliefs about achievement and academics force students to internalize negative perceptions or stereotypes of their academic capabilities (Ford et al., 2008). These preconceived notions and stereotypes have no positive outcomes for the African American student. If students internalize the idea of negative self-worth, they will create an environment where academic underachievement is the norm for all members of the race. The stereotyping of a whole race causes its children to have no positive future outlook for their academics and achievement (Tucker, 2008). This idea is similar to individuals who are highly identified with their work and those who are not. Highly identified individuals take pride in their work, have a high sense of self-worth, and believe that their abilities will help them produce a greater product. In contrast, an individual with lower identification will perform worse (Osborn & Walker, 2006).

The idea of self-worth and the investment in the work to gain a certain outcome is similar in academics. The common assumption is that students who are invested in their academics will gain a positive outcome and receive praise for their success. The opposite is true in the African American population. African Americans who invest in academics and believe in positive results often receive ridicule and disownment from the peers of their community. Osborne and Walker (2006,) state that “the more a student of color is invested in academics, the more likely that student is to experience stereotype threat (anxiety is significantly increased due to the effects of the negative group stereotype)” (pp.566-7). Being stigmatized as academically disinterested leads to frustration and added pressure for African American students in gifted classes because they do not want to confirm the stereotypes associated with their ethnicity (Steele, 2010). Fighting this stereotype leads to poorer performance for gifted African American students because of the added perceived pressure of dispelling the group stereotype (Steele, 2010).

This threat is likely to destroy students' self-worth and motivation to do well in school because their identification with academics leads to greater ridicule. Black students will eventually (after enough ridicule) work to rid themselves of this aversive situation by any means necessary, even to the extreme of dismissing their identity as gifted or withdrawing from association with their community (Osborn & Walker, 2006). Dismissing one's identity leads to decreased enrollment of African American students for AP and honors courses (Tucker, 2008).

Tucker's (2008) literature review examines the ideas of oppositional culture, critical race theory, and other theories that contribute to oppositional culture. A main theory addressed is the prevalence of stereotype threat in public schools. Stereotype threat theory focuses on the stereotyping and perception of African American students by adults, institutions, and other students. These stereotypes are strictly racial and impact the academic self-esteem of African American students. The ideas that are addressed in this research focuses on performance, achievement, and representation in AP and gifted courses.

Tucker's literature review provides a variety of references to help the reader understand the negative impacts of stereotype threat and the individualized consequences of this phenomenon on African American students. These references give different perspectives and ideas about the phenomenon and its prevalence in our society. Stereotype threat adds pressure to African American students because they care about dispelling the negative academic stereotype associated with their ethnicity. Caring about not confirming these stereotypes adds pressure to try to prove ones ability to the point where African American AP students over try (Steele, 2010). They have internalized these stereotypes and therefore they perceive stereotype threat and pressure even when others do not (Steele, 2010).

Critical Race Theory

Stereotype threat, opportunity gap, and societal external factors are all addressed by critical race theory (CRT). This theory is founded on the premise that:

Institutions, including schools, maintain the status quo through policies and practices that oppress minority groups, including African Americans...from the CRT perspective, the school system is racist from the onset and purposely excludes institutional practices that do not protect white privilege (Tucker, 2008).

The idea of white privilege and opportunities to succeed sparks the conversation about whether individual self-worth and determination can or will lead to success for the African American student. According to CRT, the national public education system, referred to as the institution, is to blame. But to limit blame to just the institution perhaps assigns white privilege and the developed system too much credit.

External societal factors also contribute to the development and continued success of white privilege and its institutional practices. Ridicule and mockery of individuals who attempt to succeed only enhance the power of white privilege. The practices of the institutional agent and schools lead to the creation of programs that perpetuate discrimination and limit the opportunities and success of African Americans. However, the institution is not totally to blame because African American students continue the stereotyping practices of said institution, which makes it easier for the perpetuation of discrimination to continue (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004; Tucker, 2008).

CRT focuses on the institution's practices of limiting opportunities for African American students. Instead of providing equal and adequate access to the top levels of secondary education, resources and classes are limited and curriculums are less rigorous, especially in

inner-city districts where African American populations are denser (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). Given the negative attitudes toward education and expectations for academic failure with institutional practices, the underrepresentation of black students in AP classes does not seem so shocking (Tucker, 2008).

Institutionally, according to CRT, the schools contribute and often blatantly encourage the destruction of the black students' self-worth and culture by refusing to respect the importance and differences of culture (Tucker, 2008). To force assimilation, the institution creates rules and regulations that reinforce the power of the privileged white. Reactionary responses rejecting this idea can be the reason for ridicule from black students of gifted peers. Conforming to this institutionalized system is detrimental for the entire black race, but conforming is not a way to force change. According to CRT, degrading black culture creates a system of continued stereotypes and empowers the white privileged institutions more (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). Instead of the low enrollment of blacks in gifted and AP classes, there needs to be an increase to force change and inevitably destroy the institution of public schools that is set up to limit the success of African American students (Tucker, 2008).

Critical Race Theory examines the lack of availability of AP and gifted courses for black students and its impact on African American students and community. Solorzano and Ornelas have studied the effects of this lack of availability on the African American community. Their research (2004) examined the unequal representation of African Americans and Latinos in gifted and AP courses. The introduction to their study guides the reader through different court cases that show the importance of AP and the limited ability of African American and Latino students to benefit from these courses. Their introduction to this research also explains the tenets of CRT and how CRT conceptualizes minorities and gifted education.

Solarzano and Ornelas' purpose was to gather more information regarding the institution of public education and its practices that seek to maintain racial and ethnic discrimination by denying minority student's access to AP and gifted courses. This quantitative research examined 780 high schools in the California high school system that each had a minimum enrollment of 500 students. The researchers controlled for both the size of the school and the number of available AP courses. This provided information on AP class ratio. The data came from the California Department of Education and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The researchers were able to gather descriptive information about the school, its AP courses, and ethnic enrollment.

These researchers used their results section to describe the inequalities that are evident when there is a lack of access and enrollment in AP classes. These results support the theory of CRT and the prevalence of racial discrimination in one of the largest school districts in the country. The information gathered from this study supports the idea that a systematic practice is in place that denies equal opportunity to minorities.

This research is written in a manner to help the reader understand the problems that exist for minorities when trying to access gifted education. However, the researchers do not give a description of their independent and dependent variables and the factors that they are comparing. Although the researchers provide recommendations for practitioners, without a more detailed methodology and results description it is difficult for Solarzano and Ornelas to show support for their recommendations. Their description of CRT helps the reader realize the impact that racial discrimination has on African Americans' access to AP and gifted programs.

Institutional Factors

Societal issues that lead to the underrepresentation of black students in AP courses was the focus in previous pages. They examined how interactions and overt and covert racism can affect the psyche of African American students who are pursuing academic success. Recent research shows that students recognize the importance of education, but external factors encourage failure (Henfield et al., 2008). The next section will focus on institutional factors and their effect on the black community and its students. These are the factors that those in power have put in place to maintain the status quo. These factors are not easily observed or recognized, but nonetheless are detrimental to the academic success and representation of African American students in AP courses.

Tracking. African American students are overrepresented in lower-level courses and underrepresented in upper-level courses (Archbald, Glutting, & Qian, 2009). Tracking allows the institution of public education to determine the level of academic ability of students and typically continues to keep students in this academic “track” throughout their academic careers. This tracking arrangement hinders students from demonstrating their abilities and often discourages them from advancing to more challenging coursework (Archbald et al., 2009). Recent national polls estimate that 80-85% of all high schools have a tracking or ability level system (Archbald et al., 2009).

Because the majority of black students are in the lower-level tracks (Archbald et al., 2009) and 85% of our nation’s schools use tracking (Archbald et al., 2009), underrepresentation of black students in AP courses is to be expected. This is not the fault of black students, but the fault of a system that does not give equal opportunities for success to all students regardless of

race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic standing. Research suggests that once tracked, especially at the secondary level, students rarely move to a higher track and are compelled to stay within that track (Archbald et al., 2009). The common rationale for tracking is the homogeneous academic levels provide teachers and students the opportunity to utilize academic time more effectively (Archbald et al., 2009). The continued use of tracking fosters self-hatred and loss of academic self-esteem in African Americans, which in turn continues to perpetuate underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted and AP courses.

The quantitative study from Archbald, Glutting, and Qian (2009) focus on tracking and attempts to determine the factors that lead to the disproportionate number of African Americans tracked to the lower academic levels. The researchers explain the use of title modifiers, giving a title to the tracked levels, to group students according to ability level. Tracking systems are supposed to resemble merit-based selection and be based on performance. However, in reality students are assigned to different tracks based on judgments by school personnel, who often make these assignments regardless of a student's performance. The authors stress that the argument against tracking is based on concern over unequal and unfair treatment of African American students.

The population was drawn from a high school in a community of 35,000 people with diverse economic and racial backgrounds. The students were individuals moving from eighth to ninth grade. The researchers used four consecutive cohorts ($n = 1,010$ total students over four cohorts). The choice of four cohorts ensured that the sample was representative and the results could be generalized. They studied three different factors that they hypothesized would predict placement: eighth grade end-of-year grades, state assessment scores, and racial classification. The students were assigned to one of three levels: general (low), middle and honors (high).

Archbald et al.'s analysis used direct-entry logistic regression (Archbald et al., 2009). The researchers tested whether black and white students had an equal probability of being tracked at all three levels. In order to answer this question, they controlled for end-of-year assessment scores and final grades.

The author's results section describes their process and the statistical outcomes measuring end-of-year assessment scores, final grades, and race. They use regression analysis to summarize variables predicting low academic track. They calculate the odds that racial classification would determine the tracking level for African American students.

The study results indicate that race is not as much of a predictor for tracking as previous research suggests. The authors concluded that the idea of race-driven tracking is the result of African Americans' traditional difficulty in society and the educational system. The limitation of this research is the population. This study only examined an area with two middle schools and one high school. A larger sample in a larger school system may yield different results.

Deficit Thinking. Henfield et al. (2008) introduce the concept of deficit thinking to describe how educators view African American students. In their study, described earlier, 12 students were interviewed to identify the challenges that black students encounter in their pursuit of high achievement. Through their analysis of the interviews and surveys, the researchers identified factors that help explain the underachievement of African American children. In particular, they conclude that educators lack high academic expectations for African American students. The students commented on the teachers' low expectations and the stereotypes that teachers and other adults in the building exhibited when encountering these students at the higher academic levels. According to the researchers, educators exhibit "deficit thinking"; that is, they

focus on the students' weaknesses and expect that all individuals of a group have similar abilities.

Deficit thinking reinforces the idea that African American students are intellectually incapable of achieving at the higher levels of academia (Henfield et al., 2008). In other words, according to deficit thinking black students do not have the intellectual capacity to achieve at the highest levels. This institutionalized idea gives teachers an excuse to focus on the students' deficits instead of their academic strengths, or assets (Moore et al., 2005). This type of thinking enables teachers to maintain the status quo and focus on the deficits of the students, instead of the deficits of the school or district, to explain underrepresentation. The low expectations that exist in the minds of teachers impact their students' feelings about being in gifted courses. Henfield et al. (2008,) explain that in their study, "students experienced differential treatment in the classroom by their teachers and one student spoke of instances where her teachers repeatedly discouraged her because they had low expectations of gifted African American students in general" (p.439).

These types of experiences, lower expectations, differential treatment, and the perception of intellectual inability by individuals who are supposed to encourage success, affect African American students' mindset. Academic success does not become a priority, and the pressure to give in to social factors begins to make sense because the institution discourages the academic success of African American students. The failure of schools to change the status quo and diversify academic curriculum in order to reach all cultures demonstrates the prevalence of deficit thinking in public education (Moore et al., 2005). Deficit thinking is an overt racist or discriminatory practice that discourages African American students from achieving. This

practice excludes multicultural practices and makes students of color feel that their culture does not matter (Moore et al., 2005).

Deficit thinking can be viewed as institutional racism. The effects on African American students can be devastating. The creation of a negative educational environment that reinforces the stereotypes that African American students are not capable of achieving at the highest levels encourages negativity and low expectations. Recognizing the true academic potential of African American students then becomes more difficult because an environment of underachievement has been established (Moore et al., 2005).

Internal Factors

External forces were the focus of the previous sections. Research has determined that these forces may have an effect on African American students' academic success and underrepresentation in AP and honors courses. These factors contribute to the environment and academic culture in secondary public schools that stereotype African Americans as academically inferior, especially at high academic levels. This section will discuss research on the internal motivations of students and their expectation of self, as well as focus on how these two factors contribute to the underrepresentation of African American students in AP and other high-level programs.

Motivation. Whereas external factors are largely uncontrollable by students (i.e., determined by others), motivation is an internal force. It is the desire to achieve because of something within. Whether African American students enroll in higher-level courses ultimately is determined by the students' own decisions (Grantham, 2004). The external factors listed above could have an impact on the final decision of a student, but the motivation to do one's best

resides inside. African American students may be underrepresented in AP and other high-level courses because they do not want to participate in these courses. They lack the motivation to work past the external forces and strive to do what is best for themselves (Grantham, 2004). Grantham (2004) identifies three factors that influence the decision whether to participate in gifted programs: participation competence expectancy, participation outcome attainment expectancy, and value of participation outcomes.

Participation competence expectancy describes the student's self-belief and its effects on decision-making. External factors aside, it is the mental and emotional well-being of students that determines whether the students will take the risk of participating in AP courses. Students must decide between social isolation and institutional stereotypes on the one hand and maintaining the norm of underachieving on the other hand. The risk associated with gifted participation is high, and participation competence expectancy is essential in this decision (Grantham, 2004).

Participation outcome attainment expectancy focuses on the rewards of gifted education (Grantham, 2004). Individuals who succeed academically do not remain in the African American community to show the value of education. In order to motivate black students to participate in gifted programs, they must see representations successful African American adults who attribute their success to academics and African American students have to believe that there is a positive, rewarding outcome for their effort (Grantham, 2004). Effort to achieve at the highest level must yield worthwhile reward for anybody to be motivated to participate. The rewards of an education are not represented, stressed, or highly accepted in the African American community; therefore, motivation to participate in gifted courses is low.

A sense of accomplishment and importance must be present in the decision to enroll in AP, or black students will view participation in AP classes as unnecessary. Participating in AP classes must be seen as a means to an end and must provide students with a challenge that will prepare them for their next goal in life (Grantham, 2004). Motivation is a key factor in whether students decide to be a representative of their race in AP and other gifted programs.

Grantham (2004) uses a case study to examine the motivation of African American men. This subgroup is the most at risk for underachieving or refusing to participate in advanced academic courses. Grantham explores the motivation of an academically successful African American young man and his drive to be successful. The research that Grantham examines explains the varying ideas of researchers about student motivation and what influences this internal drive. Grantham uses the Participation Motivation Expectancy-Value Model to help develop his study and to understand black male motivation.

The research questions of this study pertain to why African American males participate in AP and gifted courses. Grantham sought to understand African American males' belief in their own competence and their abilities and desires to succeed. To gain greater understanding, 4- to 5-month period. He describes the student's daily schedule and experiences. The major limitation of this study is that it is a case study of only one individual.

Although limited, the detailed information about the young person provides practitioners ideas regarding programs that are necessary to help improve the representation of African American students in gifted programs. In order to improve representation, Grantham suggests that mentoring programs and peer groups will help in the retention and development of African American young men in AP courses (Grantham, 2004). Programs like these will help the young men feel that taking the class is worth the effort.

Expectations of Self. Expectations of one's self and the necessity to achieve at the highest level are also internal motivators that were identified as important when determining the reasons for underrepresentation. External factors create stereotypes and perceptions that presume African Americans are inferior academically. Individuals use these stereotypes to explain why African Americans are not equally represented in AP courses (Grantham, 2004). The underlying message conveys that black students are not supposed to be as intellectually able as their white counterparts (Grantham, 2004).

Expectations drive the educational values of African American students. When students value the educational system and have the motivation to ignore the stereotypes and institutional practices that promote underachievement, they do so because of their inner drive and expectations that academic success is possible.

Summary

The research has helped to identify many possible reasons for African American underrepresentation in AP and gifted programs. The social pressure to act black and not act white is one external factor. Oppositional culture has been explained as a major contributing factor to the underrepresentation of blacks by researchers such as Ford, Grantham, Peterson-Lewis, and Bratton. Their results find that oppositional culture affects students and is a contributing factor to black students' decision not to participate in AP and gifted programs (Ford et al., 2008). These researchers adamantly believe that this culture is relevant to underrepresentation because of the stereotypes that are associated with acting black and acting white (Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004).

Hebert and Tucker state that the support structures within the community, home, and mentor relationships are part of oppositional culture. They focus on the lack of parental and adult support for these gifted students and stress the lack of a community that encourages and applauds academic success (Hebert, 1998). This addition to oppositional culture expands across all interactions experienced by African American students in the academic setting. Relationships with adults in the building and surrounding neighborhood encourage or discourage African American students to challenge themselves. Stereotypes, acceptance from peers, and oppositional culture are plausible factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of these students in AP and gifted programs.

Researchers like Diamond, Lewis, and Gordon (2007) stress that underrepresentation is a voluntary phenomenon and that all gifted students face the same pressures as African American students. Their work stresses that African American students have the same opportunities and in some cases are supported more by their peers, the administration, and the teachers of the school (Diamond et al., 2007). Researchers like Diamond stress that voluntary underrepresentation is more prevalent than oppositional culture in secondary public schools. They use national surveys to support their idea of voluntary underrepresentation. Diamond et al. (2007,) states, “the surveys show that African American students were more likely than their peers to report that their friends think it is ‘very important’ to ‘study hard and get good grades’”(p.675).

Social and institutional factors are also discussed as reasons for the underrepresentation of African American students in AP and gifted programs. These factors are beyond the students’ control. Research on critical race theory, stereotype threat, and opportunity gap focuses on the school environment and the virtual impossibility of escaping the institutional structures. Researchers such as Osborne and Walker (2006) and Ndura, Robinson, and Ochs (2003) use

their theories to explain that underrepresentation is beyond the control of the black student. Unequal practices, such as tracking, are put in place to ensure that black students are not represented equally in AP and gifted programs. Students are discouraged from participating in these courses because black students do not see these classes as the norm or as inviting (Archbald et al., 2009).

To the debate between these researchers about what factors actually contribute to the underrepresentation of black students supports the need for more research. Most of the research focuses on small populations of students or national surveys. The research rarely focuses on students from several schools with diverse demographics. The majority of the research uses qualitative methods to probe the ideas of the students. Several studies use quantitative methods to probe the ideas of the students. Several studies use quantitative methods to gather information. To gather the best information about the factors that contribute to underrepresentation, a mixed-method study is necessary. Gathering the thoughts of a large sample of African American secondary students in several different schools with different demographics will yield greater information. Using interviews will help the researcher gain a better understanding of the underrepresentation of African American students in AP courses.

CHAPTER 3 : METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the structure of the study, the role of the researcher, the research design, the details of the study, and the data analysis method used. The first part of this chapter introduces the researcher and his experiences prior to deciding to pursue this study. The researcher's role is followed by the research questions and the research design. Next, I describe the methodology and research design that was used to conduct this study. In the third section of this chapter, I introduce the study as well as the demographics of the population, the sample, the research tool, and the data collection tool. Finally, I present the method that was used to analyze the data.

Researcher's Role

My experience as an African American male, former Advanced Placement student, a high school educator, and a high school administrator influenced my decision to study this topic. I have always believed that it is an educator's responsibility to educate children in their care and to give them an equal opportunity to improve and grow academically, regardless of socio-economic standing, race, ethnicity, or religious affiliation. It is the educator's responsibility to identify and set aside preconceived stereotypes, expectations, and bigoted ideas and to give all students an equal opportunity to be successful.

Although my experience with AP courses occurred a long time ago, this topic interested me because I wanted to learn about the perceptions and experiences of the current generation of African American students. In this research, I sought to give these students an opportunity to voice their lived experiences and to explain their decisions of choosing to enroll or not to enroll in AP courses.

I chose a qualitative study design because a qualitative study would allow the students tell their own story by being able to freely and openly express their academic and AP courses experiences. Narrative research design was used because I wanted to collect personal stories and experiences from eleventh and twelfth grade students who were eligible to enroll in AP courses but their lived experiences affected their decision to enroll (Creswell, 2005). I used constant comparative analysis because it allowed me the opportunity to analyze consistently and to make adjustments to the instrument as I collected the narrative data.

I came this study as an African American male who had successfully previously completed high school AP courses but also experienced numerous layers of discouragement, low expectations, and outright discrimination while attempting to enroll in Advanced Placement. I felt that my experience with AP could have been entirely different had it not been other factors that tested my resolve on a regular basis. For example, as the only African American male in my AP courses it was clear to me that the institution did not encourage African American involvement in AP. As a student, I perceived that staff members discouraged me from enrolling in these courses with words such as “you’re not ready”; “it might not be the class for you”; and “why would you want to take that course.” While in the course, I perceived that the teachers persistently berated me in front of my peers, publically questioned my ability, and publically questioned if I belonged in the course. I felt singled out not because of my academic ability but also because I was the only Black male in the course. I did not have a voice or an outlet. I had to accept the reality and deal with it independently.

Later on, as an educator in secondary schools, I witnessed the continual lack of representation of African American students in AP courses. I encountered many capable students who chose to enroll in less rigorous classes instead of challenging themselves in

Advanced Placement courses. In an attempt to understand why this phenomenon exists, I researched ways to increase student enrollment and retain these students in the AP program. In this search I rarely encountered research that focused on the lived experience of the students themselves or research that included the student voices. To that end, my story had not been told.

My educational and professional experiences motivated me to study this phenomenon. My roles in this study were manifold. These roles included to be: a good listener, an engaged researcher, and an empathetic African American who had experienced discrimination in AP courses as a high school student. My previous experience in AP motivated me throughout this study to be mindful and respectful of the lived experienced that was unique to these students. My own experience provided the impetus for this research but I wanted to understand if their experience was different. Thus, during the research, I conducted myself as an outsider that listened and observed while the students explained their lived experiences.

Indeed, I wanted to allow the students to express how they were impacted, why they were motivated or discouraged, and how they remained motivated or discouraged. To avoid biased and leading question because of my personal history, I asked the students to explain their lived experiences and why they chose to enroll or not enroll in AP courses. As the researcher, I sought to ensure that I allowed the student the opportunity to explain and express their feelings and opinions. I consistently conversed with my content expert, Dr. Holly Hertberg-Davis, about the collected data. It was a repetitive process. We reviewed interview questions and necessary changes throughout the process. I wanted to make sure that my negative experiences did not taint my interview questions or analyses and to ensure that I did not use leading questions.

In this qualitative study, I targeted one urban school district and its African American students, both those eligible and enrolled in AP courses and those eligible but who chose not to

enroll in AP courses. I wanted to capture the narratives of both of these groups of students to understand what factors encouraged and discouraged AP participation among students with similar abilities in similar settings.

As a graduate assistant I assisted in a study that targeted African American students who were in college and their recollections of their experience in Advanced Placement courses. In conducting my literature review I located a study similar to the study that I planned to conduct. This study targeted Hispanic American students and their lack of representation in Advanced Placement courses in a predominately Hispanic American district (Milligan, 2005). I initially decided to use Milligan's study as a model because it focused on allowing the students to voice their lived experience. A great deal of recent research,(Ford et al. 2008, Henfeld et al., 2008, Tucker, 2008) focused on the potential reasons for the underrepresentation of African Americans in AP courses but did not focus on students' perspectives. High achieving African American students' voices are largely missing from this literature. Their voices, experiences and personal narratives have the potential to clarify any misunderstandings of their perceptions.

Research Questions

I determined that a qualitative study would be best to answer the following research questions:

1. Among African American students who are eligible for AP participation but not enrolled, what factors most influenced their decision not to participate in AP courses?

2. Among African American students who are eligible for AP participation and enrolled, what factors most influenced their decision to participate in AP courses?
3. How do the factors identified by eligible, but not enrolled, African American students compare with the factors identified by eligible, enrolled African American students?

Research Design

For this qualitative study I used the narrative research design to gather the voices of African American students' enrolled in and African American students eligible to enroll in a AP course. For students not enrolled this study focuses on their decisions not to enroll in AP courses. I interviewed 11th and 12th grade students in three types of schools, application, comprehensive, and charter public schools located in an urban district. I used interviews to collect data because they allowed students to voice their lived experiences and their perceptions about AP courses. These students were all either enrolled in AP or students who could have enrolled but chose not to.

Throughout this narrative research design I used the constant comparison data analysis procedure, which allowed me to continuously analyze the data, change the format of the interview questions, and to add interview question throughout the data collection process as different themes emerged. "Constant comparative generates and connects categories by comparing incidents in the data to other incidents, incidents to categories, and categories to other categories" (Creswell,2005, p. 406). I chose to interview sixteen students from various socio-economic, religious, family, and academic backgrounds to help develop my understanding of

African American students' decisions to enroll in AP. As stated earlier, interviewed students were academically eligible and enrolled in AP courses and academically eligible but not enrolled by choice. This narrative research design gave students the forum to voice their academic perceptions and experiences.

Demographic Characteristics of Selected Schools

To maintain anonymity, the school district will be referred to as North Public Schools (NPS). NPS is an inner-city school district that consists of public, application, and public charter schools. The district's secondary schools are racially diverse, still some schools are overwhelmingly (ninety percent or more) African American. The district utilizes a lottery system to diversify their schools racially and socio-economically. It also gives families opportunities to apply for schools outside of their assigned boundary (neighborhood) schools. NPS has four select schools that have application processes for their specific programs. Two of the NPS's application schools are nationally ranked blue ribbon schools. Their comprehensive schools have magnet programs that require an application and their charter schools allow entrance via the lottery.

The goal of NPS is to provide its students with a 21st century global education. They seek to provide this education through diverse high-level and rigorous programs that academically challenge and prepare students for the next level. NPS is located in a racially and economically diverse area. The area attracts a diverse population because of its many colleges, university, and employment opportunities. NPS attempts to provide ample AP courses to ensure that their students have an opportunity to be globally competitive upon graduation.

Site Selection

Each high school in this urban district has autonomy over their school's Advanced Programs and curricula. Application schools require that students challenge themselves from entrance to graduation. Students know that they are enrolling in a school to engage in a rigorous learning experience. The comprehensive high schools offer magnet programs and have designed their curricula and academic cultures to encourage students to take a range of classes. Students are expected to enroll in higher level courses and have a variety of AP and International Baccalaureate (IB) offerings to choose from. The public charter schools have different requirements and origin philosophies.

There is frequent conversation in this district about the lack of minorities in higher level courses, particularly African American students. The district is a majority minority school district that educates 46,396 students, 9,900 of which are in grades 9-12. The district has eleven public high schools, seven comprehensive schools and four application schools. This district also has five networks of charter high schools. As stated, the sample included students who attended an application, comprehensive, or a public charter school.

Table 3.1

Percentage Distribution of Students enrolled in the NPS, School Year 2013-14.

Student Population Characteristics	SY 13-14 Percentage
Black	68%
Hispanic	16%
White	12%
Other	4%
in Special Education	15%
with Free/Reduced Lunch	76%

The study was conducted during the school year of 2014-2015 in NPS. I created a sample that represented multiple schools in all three genres: application, comprehensive, and charter. This sample allowed for more diverse voices and experiences.

Advanced Placement in NPS varies from school to school. The district did not have a mandated course guide that all schools must follow. The application schools in the district offered more Advanced Placement courses because the students were expected to challenge themselves academically. The comprehensive schools offered magnet programs to attract high achieving students as well. The high achieving students participated in the magnet program and were offered a smaller course guide of Advanced Placement courses. The charter schools in NPS were established on a certain philosophy and offered a smaller course guide of Advanced Placement courses compared to their public school counterparts. Students in the selected schools attended as a secondary option to their boundary school or because they were interested in the philosophy of the school.

Advanced Placement in all NPS secondary schools offered students the opportunity to enroll in classes similar to college level courses. According to the College Board (2015), “Advanced Placement Courses allow students to build the skills that they will need throughout their college career. They allow students to learn what to expect in their next stage of their academic career. Students get a chance to dig deeper into these subjects.”

The advantages of Advanced Placement courses are explained on the College Board’s website and NPS’s website. NPS’s website states “that every student who wants to take an Advanced Placement class can take an AP class.” In addition, both sites make it clear that AP prepares students for college through rigorous curricula and that students can earn credit for college introductory classes (College Board, 2015). With respect to grades and GPA, the classes also carry a higher weight than similar courses that are honors and standard level. This higher weighting scheme allows for a higher student grade point average (GPA).

NPS is a majority minority school but the representation of African American students in Advanced Placement courses does not represent the African American student population of NPS. In some schools African American students are the minority in Advanced Placement courses. This study sought to gather the student’s perspectives and understanding of the factors that contributed to the lack of enrollment in Advanced Placement by African Americans. I sought to gather student voices in order to recommend change that would decrease the underrepresentation of African Americans and lessen the disparity between African American students and their peers.

Participants

Participants were selected from a population of students who attended high school in the NPS district. The criteria for selection involved a variety of factors. Based on the research question, the sample focused mainly on African-American students high achieving academic students who all met the prerequisites to enroll in Advanced Placement courses. Also, because I was also interested in why AP eligible students did not enroll in AP courses, the sample included African-American students who chose to enroll in AP and students who chose not to enroll in AP.

Other factors for inclusion were based on the students' likelihood of exposure to AP courses and time factor to fulfill of the course requirements. Since the majority of students were advised to take the opportunity to adjust to the high school setting and rigor before enrolling in AP courses, the sample for this study included African Americans students in their junior and senior years of high school. In addition, NPS high schools provided a wider variety of AP courses for students at these grade levels. Moreover, the participants would have had two years to fulfill AP academic requirements.

The sample was narrowed further based on NPS procedural application access and student's availability. To begin the study, NPS required that I go through a research application process; the application requested that I provide details about the study and the benefits of the study for the district. As an administrator in this district, I was asked to request permission from each high school's administrator before submitting my research. I met with each administrator and informed them of the purpose of the study, reasons for choosing their campus, and the targeted population. I then had to submit a letter and the research application to the NPS Research Review Board after receiving verbal and written approval from targeted schools'

administrators. NPS is targeting increased African American graduation rates and believed that this study could provide valuable information to help improve their course offerings and student supports.

The final sample consisted of sixteen students that attended three different types of high schools; an application school (7), a comprehensive school (2), and a charter school (7).

Among the sixteen eligible to enroll in AP courses, nine enrolled and seven did not. The sample does not include any eligible but not enrolled students from comprehensive schools. I was not able to receive permission from these students and their parents to participate. I worked with the school counselors of comprehensive schools to identify and recruit students to participate, but we were unsuccessful in our attempts. The participating students were chosen via selective, purposeful, and snowball sampling, all of which occurred when students were asked to recommend classmates or peers that fit the criteria (Creswell, 2005). NPS students are divided between public and charter schools; thus I felt it important to draw a sample from both systems. The students resided in all parts of the city; some of the students commuted more than an hour daily. Forty percent of the NPS students attended application schools; thirty percent of the students used the lottery; and twenty percent remained in their boundary comprehensive school.

I initially contacted principals of ten schools: application, comprehensive, and charter. Every school responded to my request and they were interested in the study and the potential data, but many forwarded my request to an assistant principal or a school counselor where the correspondence eventually ended. The schools that were the most interested were consistent in their responding to my requests. They held meetings to consider the request and later followed through by selecting the students. The principals of these schools put me in contact with a school counselor or the head of academics, all of whom showed interest in the study, as well.

Even with the assistance of the assistant principals and school counselors, my sample was limited to sixteen students because of the difficulties in identifying students who fit the criteria of academically eligible to enroll but not enrolled. NPS did not keep data of students who were enrolled in Advanced Placement courses and those who were academically eligible and not enrolled. The chosen schools did not have a database with this information either. In addition, when identified it was difficult to encourage these students to participate

The counselors and administrators immediately contacted African American Advanced Placement students and scheduled days and times for when the students could be interviewed. I met with each student and explained the details of the study, the details of the interview, and why they were being asked to participate. Students younger than eighteen were asked to return a signed parental consent form approved by the University of Virginia Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences (Appendix A). The consent form specified the details of the study, why their child was chosen, how the information would be collected, the approximate time involved, the risks involved, and the confidentiality of their child's participation. Students younger than eighteen were not allowed to participate in the study until they returned the parent form. Students eighteen and older were asked to sign a similar consent form approved by the University of Virginia Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences.

Data Collection and Instruments

I used interviews throughout the research to collect students' individual lived experiences and perceptions. Each school was different because of the location, student socio-economic status, and their status as an application, charter, or boundary school. I used an interview protocol from a similar study (Milligan, 2005) in conjunction with the literature review to help

formulate my interview questions. I asked experts to review and critique the prepared interview questions. I wanted to ensure that they were general and non-leading questions appropriate for 11th and 12th grade high-level students. I wanted to ensure that students would have the opportunity to express their lived experiences without being led to answer the questions in a certain manner. Milligan's research and interview questions focused on Latino American students and their lived experience. I analyzed her interview questions and this research's literature review to formulate similar interview questions that were relevant to African American students in an urban school district and community (Appendix B). I submitted the research questions to my content experts and adjusted the questions as recommended.

To guarantee validity of the interview question, the researcher conducted a pilot test using students outside of NPS. These students were interviewed in person and with the use of a videoconferencing tool such as Skype or Google Chat.

The pilot test provided valuable information about the interview questions, order of the questions, intensity of the questions, and the length of the interview. The use of the pilot group served to validate that the interview questions were relevant for African American students academically eligible to take Advanced Placement courses. Again, students in the pilot test did not attend a school in NPS.

I decided to use the constant comparative analysis that allowed me to constantly compare the narratives. The interviews were initially analyzed for codes and categories. I then compared each narrative to new data in order to identify new codes and categories and eventually themes. This constant comparative analysis allowed me to answer the three research questions. Throughout the analysis process, I constantly compared narratives of each student and included

field notes to ensure that I included body language and initial responses to questions that might not have been captured on the digital recorder.

All interviews occurred during non-instructional time, after school, during advisory period, during study hall periods, or during a student's planning period that did not necessitate the students' presence at the school.

The first set of interviews focused on the first research question: Among African American students who are eligible for AP participation and enrolled in the courses, what factors most influenced their decision to participate in AP courses? I decided to focus on these students first because they were easier to identify. While working with administrators of other schools, I was able to specifically request for African American students in Advanced Placement courses. The administrators were able to look at the rosters of the AP courses and then identify students who fit the criteria. They were then able to speak to the students about the study and allowed me to meet with the group to go into further detail.

Validity and Confidentiality

Before conducting the interviews I applied to the University of Virginia Institutional Review Board for Social and Behavioral Sciences (UVA IRB-SBS) to obtain permission to conduct the study of the underrepresentation of African American students in Advanced Placement. I sought to obtain permission to conduct the study from North Public School's Research Review Board after gaining permission from UVA IRB-SBS. After receiving permission from NPS, I sent a consent form to the parent and/or guardians of all of the students who agreed to participate in the study and who were younger than eighteen. Students who were older than eighteen signed the consent form prior to participating in the interview.

The researcher at his home personally secured the information obtained during this study. I also expressed to the students that their names and interviews would remain anonymous to ensure that all participants felt protected and were able participate freely. I assured them that their information and their participation in the study would not impact their academic standing.

To ensure confidentiality throughout the process, I made sure that all handwritten information and recorded interviews remained locked in a secure closet at my residence. These materials were in my personal possession when they were not locked away.

To guarantee validity of the interview protocol, the researcher conducted a pilot test using students outside of NPS. These non-NPS students were interviewed in person and with the use of a videoconferencing tool such as Skype or Google Chat.

The pilot test provided valuable information about the interview questions, order of the questions, intensity of the questions, and the length of the interview. The use of the pilot group served to validate that the interview questions were relevant for African American students academically eligible to take Advanced Placement courses.

I digitally recorded each interview and transcribed each one verbatim. Participants had the opportunity to review their interviews to make sure that I had captured their statements accurately. Each participant was given a new name to ensure anonymity. Detailed notes were taken before and after the interviews that described body language, excitement, and facial expressions.

According to Cresswell (2005) “Qualitative inquirers triangulate among different data sources to enhance the accuracy of a study. Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or method of data collection” (p. 252). I regularly compared interviews of students from different views points, compared interviews

from the beginning of the study to the end of the study to ensure the accuracy of the themes, and member checked with several of the students to ensure that transcripts were accurate and that the themes from their interviews were accurate. I also conferred with my expert, Dr. Holly Hertberg-Davis, who read different interviews, member check my codes, categories, themes, and overall analysis throughout the process. We conversed regularly and discussed the indicators and codes evident in different transcripts and examined if these differences necessitated changes in the interview questions.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the qualitative data occurred in three steps: noticing, collecting, and thinking (Seidel, 1998). Qualitative data is not linear and therefore must be collected and analyzed from different angles. In-depth analysis of the collected data helped me notice particular indicators and codes that led to the development of different themes (Seidel, 1998). Seidel (1998) suggested that, “the process of qualitative analysis is iterative, progressive, recursive, and holographic—characteristics that challenge the researcher to notice more, learn more, and collect more. Because qualitative analysis is not a linear process, the three steps move seamlessly throughout the analysis” (p.2).

Throughout this narrative design I used the constant comparative analysis method to analyze the data. This method allowed me to compare indicators to indicators, codes to codes, and themes to themes within each transcript, to students of each category, and to students of other categories throughout the collection process (Creswell, 2005). Constant comparative method allowed me to analyze the data of each participant and then to eventually move to broader themes that helped me develop a theory supported by the data (Creswell, 2005).

Throughout the analysis process I repeatedly reviewed and analyzed each transcript, searching for unique indicators that formed codes. I constantly compared these indicators and codes to similar interviewees to develop themes supported by the data. According to Creswell (2005), “Constantly comparing indicators to indicators and codes to codes eliminates redundancy and develops evidence for categories” (p.406). The intent of this data analysis was to identify themes that add depth to the narratives (Creswell, 2005). According to Creswell (2005) the narrative researcher, “include the following when constructing their story or some else’s story; interaction (based on individual’s feelings), continuity (a consideration of the past that is remembered), and situation (information about the context, time, and place within a physical setting)” (p. 482).

I was able to instantly analyze this data because each interview was recorded via a digital voice recorder. During each interview I took field notes that described the participant’s body language, facial expressions, as well as each participant’s reactions to certain questions and revelations. I was particularly observant to revelations that induced excitement or interest in the students. I used these notes to help develop follow-up questions and to also support my code schemes. These notes helped to support veracity and genuineness of the students’ answers.

Each interview was transcribed immediately after the interview. This allowed me to review the interview immediately and begin coding the transcription while the interview was memorable and fresh. After coding several interviews I began to compare and contrast the indicators and codes with the hope of being able to develop themes. Initially the transcripts of AP students were compared to other AP students. Non-AP students were compared to non-AP students. After developing themes for each of the categories the codes and themes of each category were compared to each other. Again, this constant comparison led to a review and

changing of some of the interview questions to ensure that subsequent interviews allowed participants to provide more in-depth answers and reflections.

As Seidel (1998) states, “analysis is a breaking up, separating, or disassembling of research materials into pieces, parts, elements, or units. With facts broken down into manageable pieces, the researcher sorts and sifts them, searching for types, classes, sequences, processes, patterns, or wholes. The aim of this process is to assemble or reconstruct the data in a meaningful or comprehensible fashion” (p.3).

A narrative research design along with constant comparative analysis allowed me to analyze the students’ interviews and utilize the students’ narratives to identify the underlying issues that are leading to the underrepresentation of African American students in AP courses. This design allowed me the opportunity to look for patterns, differences, and similarities that lead to generalities across the entire population (Seidel, 1998).

CHAPTER 4 : RESEARCH FINDINGS

The underrepresentation of African American students can lead to the erroneous belief among these students that Advanced Placement is not intended for students of their complexion (Ford & Whiting, 2007). Teachers and peers can label African American students as lazy and incapable of achieving success in a challenging AP curriculum. These types of labels have a negative impact on the population, giving them a false idea of academic inferiority (O'Connor, 2006). It is important to understand why African American students eligible to enroll in AP courses either do or do not choose to enroll.

I used interviews to give all students the opportunity to express the factors that encouraged or discouraged them from enrolling in AP courses. This qualitative study allowed the students the opportunity to express their true feelings and their lived experiences, and enabled the researcher to hear authentic voices and opinions. The academically eligible students were able to identify factors that encouraged or discouraged their enrollment and the perceived factors that may have encouraged or discouraged their peers' enrollment.

The data gained from these interviews helped to determine the students' sense of identity and their decisions regarding AP courses. The interviews revealed keys to Advanced Placement enrollment disparity. The lived experiences of 1) eligible and enrolled and 2) eligible but not enrolled African American students provided the researcher data that will answer the following questions:

1. Among African American students who are eligible for AP participation but not enrolled, what factors most influenced their decision not to participate in AP courses?

2. Among African American students who are eligible for AP participation and enrolled, what factors most influenced their decision to participate in AP courses?
3. How do the factors identified by eligible, but not enrolled, African American students compare with the factors identified by eligible, enrolled African American students?

Introduction of the Students

Application Schools.

Application – Enrolled in AP Courses

Larry, Ronald, Lee, and Dasia

Application –Not enrolled in AP Courses

Lonnie, John, and Dionna

Larry, Ronald, Lee, and Dania were students who voluntarily enrolled in Advanced Placement courses. The course selection at their application high school was extensive, and any subject in which they were interested could provide them multiple AP courses from which to select. They applied to the school because of its academic standard, rigor, and expectations, as well as their goals after graduating high school. Larry describes his reason for taking AP courses:

I got really good grades throughout elementary and middle school and I never really had any trouble with school so it was kind of easy, it came natural to me. I found out about AP courses once I got to high school and I learned that it can basically help in college and you won't have to take that course in college.

Larry goes on to discuss the necessity of AP:

I mean, I like APs. They're challenging...they prepare you for college. You learn more advanced stuff that most likely you're going to use in college, so it teaches me how to work hard, It teaches me how to work hard at a young age instead of you know waiting to college, because a lot of people wait until college and they don't learn until college, how to have good study skills. You learn it an early age when taking AP.

Each of these students had previously enrolled in at least two AP courses prior to the interview, and each student was enrolled in at least two at the time of the interview.

The application school does not have a prerequisite for taking an AP course. All students have the opportunity to enroll in any Advanced Placement course. The school is the top academic public school in NPS, and all of its students are expected to achieve at the highest level.

Larry

Larry was a senior who had been a student in NPS throughout his academic career. Larry was a young man that was certain about his future. He resided with both of his parents; his father was a counselor in the school district. His parents put Larry in a Montessori for his elementary years, and then he enrolled in an NPS middle school:

Montessori is like a different learning environment, I don't know how to explain it. It is not like traditional grades, like they don't do grading. You are just promoted. I went to middle school and then attended this high school. This high school is difficult. You've got to get used to the work. Gotta know how to balance your time. I mean, I could be doing better but I procrastinate a lot.

Larry was extremely confident throughout his interview and uninterested in what his peers thought about his enrollment in AP classes. He knew that to be successful he had to be educated. His family firmly supported and encouraged his academic pursuits:

There is an influence by my parents...my father says that I should take at least one AP course a year. He's a guidance counselor so he knows that AP will boost your GPA and also how challenging the course can be. He knows that some people don't take APs their whole high school career and they have it easy in high school. He wanted me to be challenged.

He understood that being academically smart in the Black community was not necessarily the norm. Larry referred to how he was prepping for the future and that he should not be criticized for his pursuits regardless of his race:

My parents always remind me that I have it easy, that this is going to be the best days of my life. When I go to college I just want to get it all. I want to learn the struggle before it actually gets really difficult and I have nothing, no one else, because in college you have really no one else to hold your hand, you're all by yourself.

Ronald

Ronald was extremely confident and self-aware of his situation. He revealed that his family was not very educated but that they instilled the importance of education in him and his siblings at a young age.

My dad had college experience but did not graduate. He understands what it takes to get into college and he is more interested because I am his last child. He really does his

research and stuff. He always says, 'I'm going to college and I'm going to succeed.' I feel I'm going to do it.

Ronald was very aware of the steps necessary to be successful in high school and college. He was cognizant of the stereotypes that existed for African Americans in education, especially those that lived in low socio-economic areas like the ones in which his family resided. Ronald talked a lot about the community and the impact that it had on its residents, especially smart African American men. He was passionate about the needs of his community and how a better community could create a better society:

In my community, I live in an area that is not one of the best in the area and the schools are not that good. When I meet people and tell them where I go to school they are always like, 'What? Black people go there?' Some people don't even know the school. With the community they don't expect the youth to demand anything. They just expect to whatever they're given, they take it. Their neighborhood high school is what we are given and unless you demand something better which is applying to the other schools you just accept what you have.

Dasia

Dasia's parents strongly supported her and she was able to persevere because of her strong family and her strong relationships with staff members at her middle school. Dasia's mother realized that her neighborhood schools would not provide her children with the education that she felt was necessary to create a firm educational foundation. Dasia was enrolled in a charter school and transitioned back to public school for high school. Her transition was not

smooth because of how easily she excelled in middle school. Dasia stated, “Transitioning to high school was not that easy. At my old school I used make straight A’s, which is really why I think I got into this high school. And when I came it wasn’t as easy as I thought.”

Dasia’s parents continued to encourage and motivate her to be the first person in her family to graduate from college. She acknowledged relying heavily on her parents’ support and encouragement.

Lee

Lee came from a well-educated family. All of his family members attended college. His family emphasized education throughout his academic career and school was not struggle for him:

I got really good grades throughout elementary and middle school. I’ve never really had any trouble with school so it was kind of easy and I didn’t put that much effort into my work. It kind of came naturally to me. Then I came to high school and I really didn’t have trouble transitioning.

Lee had family support throughout his school experience and their expectations have always included academic success. Lee exhibited a demeanor of someone much older throughout the interview. He presented himself as a very mature high school senior, ready to move on to the next stage of life. He was engaging and personable throughout the interview but serious when discussing stereotypes and the impact they have had on his life. He is the product of a single family home and one of the oldest siblings.

Larry, Ronald, Lee, and Dasia were confident students who viewed education as essential to ensuring success. They were involved in many activities but felt that academics was the highest priority.

Application School and Not Enrolled. Lonnie, John, and Dionna were eligible but chose not to enroll in Advanced Placement courses at an application school. They had to have similar qualifications to those of the students who did choose to enroll in AP courses enroll. Each of the students had to take a math, reading, and writing placement exam, interview, maintain a 3.0 in middle school, and be proficient or advanced in their end of year assessments. The students applied to the school for its academic rigor and because of their goals for high school. They like their AP-enrolled peers had to take the Pre-AP course.

Lonnie

Lonnie presented himself as a self-assured, very confident, and self-aware high school senior. He was a student-athlete throughout high school but chose the application school for its academic standards. He presented himself as a carefree, stress-free individual excited about where he was in life and his next step after high school. He was the captain for the basketball team and was rated as one of the best players in the metropolitan area. He strongly believed in academics but did not believe that Advanced Placement courses were necessary to be successful. Lonnie experienced several high schools throughout his career because his parents decided to move several times. Lonnie stated, “I came to this district because I thought that I would have a better chance of getting an athletic scholarship in basketball, and also I would receive a better education from this school rather than the previous school that I attended.” Lonnie’s parents completed high school and had some college, but neither holds a bachelor’s degree. They

permitted him to choose his own courses. He is the youngest of three children in his family, and his two older siblings set a precedent for academic success. He initially first learned of AP courses from his sisters and from the school's bridge program.

John

John presented himself as a very hesitant and quiet student during the interview. He displayed the posture and body language of an uncomfortable and nervous individual. Once the interview began he opened up about his upbringing and his school experiences. He talked about having to move to several schools and experience different instructional approaches at each of these schools. He spoke of the absence of equality and sufficient instructional personnel at several of his schools and how he lacked the foundational skills to be prepared for the curriculum at the application school that he attended. He eventually felt comfortable enough to talk about how his disability started to impact his educational pursuits during his middle school years:

I've been in this district my whole life. I moved around to several schools, but in elementary and middle school I got good grades. I was good, I was smart, and well spoken, I had good grades. And then later in middle school it got kind of rough. That's when my ADHD and my attention disability started to surface. I really struggled with it.

John is a product of single-family household. His family lives in a low socio-economic area. None of his family members attended college.

Dionna

Dionna was a senior at an application school. She was the product of a two-parent home in one of the lower socio-economic areas of the city. Neither of her parents attended college, and no member of her immediate family attended college. She was extremely soft-spoken and shy

during the interview. She constantly tried to ignore certain questions, but eventually went more detail about her experiences in life and at school. She stated that she felt as if she had been a strong student prior to entering her application school, but she no longer felt that she was performing well:

I was a straight ‘A’ student throughout elementary and middle school. After I got to this school it was a struggle times two because the curriculum that was supposed to prepare me in elementary and middle school was not being taught here. I felt extremely unprepared to be a student at this school.

Comprehensive Schools.

Comprehensive – Enrolled in AP Courses Tina and Terrance

Tina and Terrance applied to the magnet programs at their neighborhood (boundary) schools and were accepted to these programs. Their neighborhood school was open to all students who resided within its defined boundary. The students who attended these schools lived within walking distance or a brief bus or train ride. The magnet program was open to all students throughout the school district. Boundary schools developed magnet programs to attract the best and the brightest to their schools. Tina and Terrance decided to attend their boundary school. They both were selected and encouraged by their school personnel to enroll in AP classes and Tina and Terrance felt strongly about the value of these classes. Tina and Terrance stated:

I think AP courses help you gauge your strengths and help you gain college credits if you can pass the end of year test.

I didn't really like it to begin with because of the summer work but once I got into the groove of the course and in the classroom, I actually started to love it. It's actually real fun. It's like a great experience for everybody.

Tina

Tina experienced several different types of school throughout her academic career because her family moved often. She was initially reserved, and her body language suggested distrust and uncertainty, but, as she started talking, she began to open up. She became more interested in the conversation once the topic of school inequality was discussed. Her body language became more positive and welcoming, and she wanted to talk about her experiences and AP classes.

Terrance

Terrance, an 11th grader, grew up in a one-parent household. He initially struggled as a high school student during his 9th and 10th grades: "Ninth grade was little rocky when I transitioned from middle school. I didn't do very well that year and the beginning of my 10th grade year." His mother was aware of Advanced Placement and the value of the courses. She communicated to her son about the classes and how they could help. "My mother knew about AP because of my brother, so she told me about them." He did not take the classes because he wanted to or because his parents requested that he enroll. "I didn't know of any requirements to enrolling in Advanced Placement. I was just kind of put in one because my grades from 10th grade were pretty decent...my schedule was made up for me."

Terrance seemed to lack confidence in his abilities. He came across as aloof, not concerned with the world around him. He is a video game aficionado and often lives in the

virtual world. He rarely talked about the bigger picture after school but recognized that college was the natural next step.

Charter Schools.

Charter – Enrolled in AP Courses
Dani, Sam, and Kayla

Charter–Not enrolled in AP Courses
Maria, Rick, Michael, and Jack

Dani, Sam, and Kayla, all seniors, chose to enroll at a charter school for their high school experiences. The charter schools in this area specialize in a specific style of teaching and claim to offer a different experience from the neighborhood and application schools of NPS. The charter schools offer a variety of Advanced Placement courses, as well as mandatory courses because of the program for the charter school. These students had various reasons for enrolling in the charter school, ranging from being in private school their entire life and wanting to remain in a smaller school environment to parents thinking that their neighborhood schools were not attractive options and the best education for their child would be a charter school.

Dani

Dani presented herself as certain of her future. She understood the work necessary to ensure success until later in her high school years.

The bigger picture in life is being successful. It's too hard to be out there and just be broke for one. Money is the capital of the world. Education is too. I'm a big reader, I like reading books and watching movies and fantasizing about this life that I want. When I read these fictional stories and I'm like, 'Oh man I could see myself there in 10-20 years.' ...I barely passed all of my classes, I never stayed back but I just made it up until

last year when I was finally like, ‘I need to get it together, I want to go to college and further my education

Her parents enrolled her in private schools prior to applying to the charter school. When she applied to the charter school she was initially unsure about the move and did not take it seriously. She lacked confidence because of the course load and the demeanor of the students. “When I was at private school it was smaller and they were more focused on each student because we were paying for the education. When I got here, I perceived the students to be smart, everyone in their own way. Just being in a different type of environment my studies slowed down all the way to a stop.”

Samaria

Samaria (Sam/Sami) was a 12th grade AP student. She came from a single-parent household that resided in a low socio-economic, crime-ridden area of the city that could be difficult to navigate on a daily basis. Her family had been in this area for generations and has not ventured far from the neighborhood in which she resided. She perceived that the elementary and middle schools that she attended did not prepare her for the academic rigor of her charter school: “In elementary and middle school I went to the neighborhood school and they didn’t have honor classes or things like that. I was just in regular English, math, and science. I never got the experience to get into an honors course or knew what the criteria were to get into an honors course.” She applied to this charter school because she had an older relative that attended the school and because of its reputation.

Samaria was aware of what it takes to reach her bigger picture. She was taking “AP Chemistry because I want to major in forensic science so I need all of the science credits that I

can get.” She was a reflective and realistic, as well. She knew that she is capable of doing more and producing a better product in school. “Right now I’m not doing so well, but I know that I’m capable of doing the work, it’s just that my attendance and the way that my teacher teaches is like he teaches like a professor.” She still had a vision of future success, however.

Kayla

Kayla, a 12th grade AP student, also lived in a single-parent household. Her parents and extended family were not college educated. Her mother encouraged her to outpace her own limited educational experiences. “My mother pushes me hard to be better than her. She wants me to make something of myself. To do things that she didn’t do.”

Kayla attended public schools during her elementary years but her mother decided that charter schools were a better option for her daughter for middle and high school:

My mom considers charter school better than public schools. She says that the teachers in charter schools care about the students more than teachers at public schools...she thinks that there is a lot more drama over there on that side of the city that we live. She doesn’t want me to get mixed up with a lot stuff like that, so she wants me to come here.

Kayla appeared to be very mature. She initially seemed irritated and disinterested in the interview. She became more revealing of her experiences as the interview continued. She was confident and understood that college was her next step in life. She wanted to do better in life than her mother, including getting out of the area in which she resided. Kayla was perceived as being self-motivated and believed that she would be successful in life.

Charter School and Not Enrolled. Maria, Rick, Michael, and Jack were academically eligible Advanced Placement students who chose not to enroll. These students all chose to

attend a charter school for their high school experience. According to the founding charter of the school, the charter school offered a variety of AP courses as well as mandatory courses that were part of the core curriculum,. These four students decided to enroll in their charter school they perceived that these schools offered a better opportunity, a stronger educational foundation, and program attractiveness. The charter schools advertised themselves to be better alternatives to comprehensive neighborhood schools because of their program foundation and their educationally focused culture.

Maria

Maria was in the 12th grade. She had been at her charter school for seven years. She came from a family that was not college educated. Her family resided in one of the lower socio-economic areas of the city, and her family members believed that public schools in her boundary area were not providing a sufficient education. She lived in a single parent home, with a mother busy trying to provide a home for her family. Her mother was extremely involved in her academic life, even with her busy schedule. “My mom is a big part of my life...my mom always picks the schools I go to. She picked this school for me. It’s just that she’s so busy all of the time that she doesn’t have enough time to be on my back all of the time.” Maria was unsure of her ability and reserved about the school when she first enrolled:

When I first got to this school I did not like it. I just felt like it was too much to manage and that I was never going to live up to the same capability as my classmates because I noticed that they already had learned some of the stuff that I was not exposed to. They had learned Latin and some other languages like Chinese and French, but I was way off track. I was in a public elementary school so we didn’t learn any of that so I was just kind of thrown off.

Maria was not as attentive as the other interviewees. She was comfortable, but her body language reflected nervousness. She spoke quickly and had asked to repeat certain questions midway through her answers. Maria had an idea of her future and she also had a desire to attend college. She believed that this school was preparing her to be successful, even without Advanced Placement classes.

Rick

Rick was an 11th grader who was extremely calm and collected. He was an athlete for his school. He took his time to answer the questions and once he became more comfortable with the interview, he began to open up and provide personal answers. He was the product of a two-parent home; his mother attended and completed college. He was a resident of the city for his entire life and had attended the charter school for five years. He grew up in a middle-class area of the city but associated with young men who resided in lower socio-economic neighborhoods. In his group of friends, he was the only one that had both parents at home. His mother made sure that he attended a school that was to be a good fit for Rick:

My elementary schools were a great experience for me diversity-wise, at least, because I went to two schools. My mother had a problem with the education at one school, so she moved me to another. At the second school I received more exposure to more demographics. I was more exposed to other races and cultures and stuff and then I came here, and it was about the same.

Rick admitted that the transition from elementary to his current school was extremely difficult. “I think that the transition from coming from elementary to middle to high school, for

me at least, was rough because just workload wise it threw me off just from having maybe one or two homework assignments to six.” Rick was transparent about his academic struggles and how he might not be ready for the next step; however, he knew that it was necessary to reach his ultimate goal of becoming a video game designer. He had insight about the plight of African American males in society and seemed more engaged in the conversation when we began to discuss the impact of society on African American representation in AP. Rick was initially reserved, but then slowly he revealed his true personality. He had a worldly view, based on experience with and observation of his peers. He showed confidence and spoke passionately about the African American stereotypes and the impact of stereotypes in the African American community.

Michael

Michael, an 11th grade student, was one of the best athletes in his school. He grew up in a public housing area of the city. He lived with his mother and never met his father. His mother was a strong influence in his life and constantly told him that he could do amazing things in life:

My mother was telling me that I could be better than where I come from, from a young age. I started not to believe it as I got older because of the people I hung around and things. And the things they were doing and the things I saw while I was growing up. But then I started to believe her when I got to high school and hung around different friends. They would tell me that I could be something. That I’m actually intelligent. That I should be doing better things.

Michael had an amazing story to tell. He was candid about his experiences and how he was not the best student that he could be, but he had recently turned his life around because he

wanted more in life and some of his friends had recently been incarcerated. He admitted to feeling that he was not ready for AP. He knew what AP was but chose not to enroll because he did not think that he belonged. He had a plan for his future and knew that AP was a means to that end. He turned his life around because of a strong mother and his will to be successful. He used his friend's experiences to motivate him to be successful. He displayed confidence and poise throughout. He was entertaining and engaging. He was excited about the opportunity to tell his story.

Jack

Jack was physically imposing, articulate young man. Jack was an 11th grade student-athlete and had been a student at his charter school for two years. He lived in a single-parent home with his mother and grandmother. Both of his parents were college educated and his mother was a graduate of Harvard University. His grandmother was college educated as well. Both his mother and grandmother had multiple degrees. His mother and grandmother were educators. "My grandma started a school; my great grandma was a teacher, now my mom owns the school that my grandma started."

Initially he resisted his mother's and grandmother's insistence that he study hard and do well in school. Throughout the majority of his academic career he chose not to study hard and did not take school seriously, as he neared the end of high school, however, he started to change his focus:

My mother and grandmother made me feel like they were putting too much pressure on me but right now I kind of had an epiphany at the beginning of this year that I need to work hard if I want to do well in life. So I'm starting to feel where they're coming from

now...I want to go to college, then become a lawyer and hopefully, maybe, get on the Supreme Court.

His perspective differed from that of many of his peers. He believed in hard work and that hard work equaled success, regardless of race and socio-economic standing. He was confident in this belief and chose to change his habits to reflect his beliefs. He showed confidence throughout the interview and was excited to explain why African American students were not taking Advanced Placement courses. He was interested in expressing his opinion because he knew that he had a different background and perspective than most of his peers.

Factors

During this constant comparative analysis I answered each research question about the factors that contributed to eligible students' decisions to enroll or not enroll in Advanced Placement courses before I compared the characteristics of the two groups. The analysis of the students' narratives revealed four themes. The themes revealed were Internal, Racial Identity, School-based, and Family.

It is clear from listening to the stories of these sixteen students that throughout their academic lives they have encountered different narratives about African Americans and their role in higher-level academic courses. The narratives have been spoken and unspoken and have been reinforced by society, school-based personnel, peers, and family members. In analyzing the students' stories, four themes emerged that impacted their perceptions of themselves as students and shaped their perceptions about Advanced Placement courses: internal, external, school-based, and familial that contributed to the positive and negative identity development of these

students. The next sections of this chapter focus on each of these factors (internal, external, school-based, and familial) identified by the students' narratives and the impact that each factor has had on the students' lived educational experiences, their perceptions associated with scholarly African Americans, and their notions of why African American students are under-represented in AP courses.

Eligible and Enrolled.

Application – Enrolled in AP Courses
Larry, Ronald, Lee, and Dasia

Charter – Enrolled in AP Courses
Dani, Sam, and Kayla

Comprehensive – Enrolled in AP Courses
Tina and Terrance

Internal. For the purpose of this study, internal themes refer to an individual's drive to succeed. Intrinsically motivated themes were prevalent throughout the interviews of students eligible and enrolled in Advanced Placement courses.

The students from all high schools referred to a need for AP courses in order to be successful in college. Larry stated, "AP is a good opportunity to get exposed to college courses. I do think that they should be optional like they are." They understood that Advanced Placement contributed to a better GPA, possible college credit, and a rigorous college preparatory education. The students also consistently mentioned the need to prove that they in particular and that African Americans in general belonged. Finally, the majority of the students mentioned that Advanced Placement courses were only interesting if they were interested in the topics. Dasia stated, "I want to get as far away from history and writing and all of that if it's possible. I'm like more into math and science."

African American students remain severely underrepresented in Advanced Placement courses. The enrolled AP students knew this statistic because of the College Board's description, as well as the representation that they saw in their classes. Eight out of the ten enrolled students stated that it was important to enroll in these courses to ensure that African American students are represented. Lee stated, "Racially it is maybe four African Americans including myself and the rest would be Caucasian." They wanted to prove that African American students were just as capable as their peers. As Ronald stated:

Intelligence has nothing to do with race. Intelligence is how much you can learn, how much you take and absorb and to be able to use it in the real world. Any race can do that. It shouldn't be about a race thing. It should just be off the numbers and facts...It seems like white people create the books and the tests and stuff. I don't know if that means all white people will get it because all people aren't the same. They do create a lot of stuff we learn. In a way they're ahead in that aspect but intelligence should just be based off of the numbers. It shouldn't be a race thing.

The students also wanted to prove to themselves that they were capable of achieving at the highest level. Lee stated:

For me [education] was really easy. I feel like a lot of things come easy to me, like I'm a fast learner and it's easy for me to sort of grasp concepts. I didn't find anything particularly hard where I needed to study, until I got into AP classes.

Larry, Ronald, Lee, Dasia, and Kayla mentioned that it was important that they proved that they were capable of achieving at the Advanced Placement level. Each student mentioned

the difficulty of transitioning from classes that they normally excelled in to classes that were rigorous and challenging. They were intrinsically motivated to prove to themselves that they were capable of achieving at AP academic levels. The four students who attended AP classes in an application school expressed the need to prove that they were capable.

With the exception of the Kayla, the students at the comprehensive and charter schools did not mention having to prove that they were capable. The diversity at the application schools were different than the comprehensive and charter schools. The comprehensive schools were comprised of over eighty percent African American students. The charter schools also were majority minority schools, but the application schools were more diverse and had more non-minority students than the comprehensive and charter schools.

The application schools' selection criteria were based on the student's merit and ability. The selection process was more demanding, and it led to Larry, Ronald, Lee, and Dasia feeling the need to prove that they were capable. The students who applied were applying to schools that represented the best of the city. These students had to prove that they belonged. In contrast, access to comprehensive and charter schools was based on a school lottery and did not require an application in order to enroll. Ronald from an application school discussed his classroom behavior:

It's like, I always raise my hand and I talk in my AP classes and both teachers tell me that I'm really good to have in class. I noticed that from the other people doing such things, it's mostly white people...not really Black people. I know I like to talk but I always want to know why they [Black students] don't participate. When another race participated, they're doing more than our [Black] race.

All of the students who were enrolled in Advanced Placement courses mentioned that such courses were tied to their future. All students mentioned that they had plans to attend college. Dani stated:

Like now, you have to have at least a high school diploma to even work in the food industry now.

It's too hard to be out there and just be broke for one. Money is the capital of the world. Education is too because...I want to be happy with myself, my career, with my life choices. I don't want to look back and have any regrets.

The students stated that life is about doing what one enjoys and college is the next logical step to reaching that goal. Having an attractive transcript and GPA is the best way to prepare one for college applications. The students recognized that Advanced Placement courses improved their chances for admission to colleges, and also prepared them for the rigor of college coursework. Larry stated:

Advance Placement courses prepare you for college. You learn more advanced stuff that most likely you're going to use in college. Yeah...what you're going to learn in college, so it teaches me how to work hard. It teaches me how work hard at a younger age, because a lot of people wait until college to learn how to work hard and have good study skills. You learn it at an early age, taking APs.

All students mentioned that it was important to be prepared for college and that Advanced Placement courses gave them the training to be successful in college courses. The

students emphasized that AP is a more advanced class than honors classes and provided one with a foundation that other classes lacked. Larry believed in this foundation:

I think that it was worth the extra work. I think it challenged me a lot and it challenged me to get a lot more work done. I think that challenge was healthy and something I needed to see because I think it's going to better prepare me for difficult courses in college that are going to require a lot more work and a lot more effort.

The students' interest in AP courses stemmed from their interest in the subject as well. Some students had a variety of courses from which to choose, while other school course offerings were minimal.

Larry, Ronald, Lee and Dasia all stated that they had a variety of AP courses from which to choose and took courses in which they excelled and showed interest. Dasia took classes that would better her skills:

AP English Language was, I would say easy but I feel like it was a class where it wasn't a simple A or F. It was about if you knew how to write and what you like to write about so I found that interesting. It wasn't hard, but it wasn't like easy easy, writing isn't my thing but it was cool. I love math and it is easy to me so I decided to take AP Calculus.

Students in the comprehensive and charter schools did not have the luxury of being able to select from a wide variety of courses. In the comprehensive schools, students were selected to take AP courses by an administrator or counselor based on their success in honors courses. Terry stated, "I was forced to be in an Advanced Placement course because my grades were good. My schedule was made up for me." Tina stated, "I got signed up for the AP class...I

guess it's based off your grades and what you got the previous year and if you're capable of succeeding in the class." After being pushed into AP courses, the students realized that they enjoyed the courses and looked forward to other AP options. Tina stated, "Well, it was just like, well I can challenge myself and um, take them...they are pretty easy too if you pay attention. You just get more work that you have to do but it's pretty easy." Terry stated, "So far I like it. I was in AP English first...now I'm in AP Psychology. I like AP Psychology; it's really fun."

The students who attended the charter schools mentioned experiencing similar placement as the students in the comprehensive schools but they also had experiences similar to the application school students who had larger course offerings from which to choose. The charter students did not have as many course offerings as the application school students. However, once students in charter schools were identified as strong students, they could choose an AP course in which they were interested. Jackie wanted to learn other subjects besides her preferred math courses:

I like math...I'm good at science and health and stuff like that. I chose to take English AP because I think it's that I'm more interested in learning about all of the authors. We read Mark Twain Books and stuff. I've never read any of them. People who have told me about, so I wanted to get to read them and improve my writing.

The students of the comprehensive and application schools were initially encouraged and cajoled to enroll in Advanced Placement courses because of their ability and grades and to ensure that they had the opportunity to experience the higher level courses. These students began to enjoy the challenges of AP coursework and decided to enroll in additional AP courses. The students who were enrolled in Advanced Placement courses realized that they had an

opportunity to challenge themselves academically and to enjoy courses that prepared them for their next step in life, college.

The students in the application, comprehensive, and charter schools expressed that they were motivated by the opportunity to prove that African American students were capable of achieving at the highest level, that they were driven by the bigger picture of life, and that they had interest in the content of the AP courses. The students at the application schools had more courses from which to choose; unfortunately this did not erase the problem that such classes remained, in some cases, of little interest. They all realized the benefits of the courses and knew that it was important to prepare academically for the next level of education.

Racial Identity. For the purpose of this study, racial identity refers to students identifying that they are of African American descent and recognize stereotypes associated with their race and the role that their race plays in education.

Students from each school type mentioned that race was a factor that impacted their reasoning for pushing themselves academically. Dasia, Terry, Tina, Ronald, Lee, Kayla, Jackie, Sam, and Dani each mentioned that they felt the pressure to do well for African Americans as a whole, that African American culture often devalued academic education, that acting Black and acting White was prevalent in their classes and elsewhere, and that having like-minded peers was instrumental in remaining focused and positive.

Eight of the nine Advanced Placement students felt pressure to perform well because of their race. The students indicated that they needed to do well because they represented their race in their courses. They felt that they were not being judged as individuals but as representatives of the African American race. Ronald stated:

I think it's very hard, because most people feel like they're stuck. I guess because now they think like, 'we can't get out of where we're at so we're stuck.' I guess they want other people to be where they're at. They trying to bring them down to make them think like, 'well, since I'm doing this it's not right.' I guess they start dropping out and doing all of that because of what someone said. I don't think it's hard [to be a minority in AP], because I'm strong, I'm strong willed.

The nine students often referred to being successful as the anti-stereotype. These students acknowledged that they encountered stereotypes regularly and they must be successful to change the negative academic perceptions of the African American race. As Dasia stated, "The stereotype of that like, most African American kids, or people in general, are just not that bright or smart or whatever."

The application school students identified this pressure more frequently because their schools were the best of the best and they were competing with a more diverse demographic. Lee recognized the pressure of being black and academically intelligent in his school:

I don't think it's said or discussed but I think the teachers give more attention to those students who they think will do better on the AP test at the end of the year. They kind of single people, different people out...calling on or more than one student or a specific group of students more than other students. I've perceived it kind of racially. It's like a racial divide somewhat in AP between the Black students and the white students to the other minority students.

All of the Advanced Placement students admitted to being impacted in some way by their culture. This culture characterized their neighborhoods and the schools they attended. The neighborhood plays a role in developing the student and the person. Dealing with stereotypes associated with a race or community can have a major impact on a young person's development. The students enrolled in AP courses identified community culture, peer culture, and school culture as major factors that motivated them to participate in Advanced Placement courses.

The students enrolled in AP courses decided to use their environment to push themselves to be successful and to strive for more. Dasia stated, "In my community it is difficult to be Black and smart. I think it's kind of hard." Other students went into more detail and described how the community destroys the spirit of its people and leave them without hope. Ronald and Sam described their community's impact:

I'd say it seems as though Black people aren't demanding their education as much as they should be. Then, the numbers prove that too. How many Black people in the US are in college and take AP courses and pass AP courses? In the [Black] community they don't expect the youth to demand something, they just expect you take whatever they're given.

A lot of students in the neighborhood have personal issues that they go through daily...Sometimes they are not in a good mood because of what going on with your home problems. It can throw you off track. Some students will miss days or some people just won't show up. I think that why most African Americans don't want to do Advanced Placement, because they are discourage [by their situation].

Kayla, Lee, Ronald, Jackie, Samaria, Tina, and Terry recognized that their home environments impacted many students' decisions not to enroll, but they used it as a motivating factor to enroll in AP courses. Kayla stated, "I want to show them [community members] that even though we look like we're not smart, or even though we come from a bad neighborhood, there are still smart people in the neighborhood." The environment was not a deterrent but rather a factor that motivated students to work harder in order to transcend their environment.

Stereotypes are prevalent throughout American society. Hence, enrolled Advanced Placement students were not immune to experiencing the stereotypes associated with intelligent African American students. As mentioned earlier, intelligent African American students felt the pressure to be the anti-stereotype and to represent the race in a positive manner, but they risked being stereotyped as acting White. The students had to deal with representing the race and portraying intelligent and positive African Americans while also, in some cases, trying to navigate difficult living environments and neighborhoods. All AP students in this study had to deal with being accused of acting White. Lee, Larry, and Kayla stated:

If you're a Black person in the majority white class your peers perceive you as smart. They also judge you because some people think of smart as being white, like if you're smart you're trying to be white which is just ignorance because if you're smart, you're smart. It's intelligence.

I think some people might assume you're a know it all or something like that or you know too much or you might be snobby or something because you're taking Advanced Placement classes or you might be soft [physically weak] because you're in Advanced Placement.

They don't expect African American students to be smart. The ones that kind of dress in like Jordan's [fashionable sneakers], baggy pants, and everything. Things you see on African Americans every day. They don't expect some of us to be smart. They say, 'Oh you're smart where are you from?'

This idea of not being expected to be smart was mentioned in every interview with Advanced Placement students. The students' body language became a little more assertive. The students acted as if the expectation of not being smart because of race was ridiculous, yet they acknowledged that it existed and that in their lives changing perceptions of African Americans was a motivating factor.

Acting White was a stereotype that was mentioned in every enrolled student's interview. These stereotypes ranged from trying to be somebody different because they were intelligent to being stigmatized for the items of clothing that they wore or the way that they spoke. These students had to deal with this pressure daily but refused to allow it to affect them because their focus was on a bigger picture that involved attending college and beyond. Ronald, Dasia, Samaria, Jackie, and Kayla defined their experience of being stereotyped as acting White:

It's like being smart is the equivalent of being white. I don't know where that comes from like ...dumbing yourself down is the equivalent of being Black.

Like, there is also this concept of talking White versus talking Black. The Black people tell me I talk white and white people tell me I talk Black. What does that mean?

People tell me, you trying to act white or you trying to be white. Like sometimes here because I talk properly they say, ‘Oh you are trying to talk white,’ or, ‘You, you talk like a white girl.’

A lot of my friends make fun of me sometime for the way that I talk. I really don’t use ain’t and stuff like that or like the regular slang that they use know. They are like, Jackie, why are you talking like that? And I’m like, how am I talking? It made me have a social shock. I was like, ‘Mom, my friends keep calling me white. What’s the deal?’

That seen as a White person thing, talking and having discussions and working stuff out without physical violence. It’s seen as a white person thing whereas fighting is for Black people.

Within their peer groups, students sometimes felt like outsiders, going against their race because they were intelligent, took school seriously, and attended school regularly. Ronald stated:

The Black people don’t even show up to school, let alone on time. Then the dropout rate. There already aren’t a lot of Black people in school. We’re already at the disadvantage because we definitely don’t have the numbers.

These students experienced the stereotype that being smart equated to Whiteness, and this reference impacted their day-to-day lives. The students noted that the media had an impact

because it often reinforced stereotypes. The media negatively portrays Black people, especially young Black people. Dani stated it clearly, “I’m out here trying to prove everybody wrong.”

Within their classroom environments the students also realized that there was a different dynamic that they encountered. In their community they were shunned for being different, for being African American and intelligent, for taking education and school seriously, for being the anti-stereotype, for acting White.

School Based Factors. For the purposes of this study, school-based refers to the schools that the students attended. The eligible and enrolled students’ narratives revealed that the school had a major impact on their decision making. The students indicated that having supports within the schools helped them understand Advanced Placement, how courses impacted their current transcripts, GPAs, and how particular courses could impact their future plans. Every enrolled student identified a person within the school who influenced their decision to enroll in AP courses.

All of the enrolled students identified that one of the main motivators for taking Advanced Placement courses was being introduced to Advanced Placement and its benefits. Nine of the ten enrolled students stated that the schools used bridge programs, Pre-AP, summer Pre-AP, and AP description assemblies to provide students with necessary information to make an informed decision. Terrance, Lee, and Dasia described how they were steered toward AP enrollment:

A letter was sent home all of the students in IB [International Baccalaureate] courses and from there they [the school] told us about AP courses as well.

I learned about AP once I got to my high school and I learned that it can basically help you in college and you won't have to take that class if you do well on the test at the end of the year, once you get to college.

At our school, it is strongly encouraged that you take an AP...Like most AP courses I wanted to take except for the Pre-AP course. I was not interested in that subject but all students had to take it.

In addition to attending schools that promoted Advanced Placement and that explained the benefits and rewards of the courses, students were influenced by the relationships that they built with certain staff members. All of the students were able to identify a staff member who proved to be instrumental in encouraging them to take an Advanced Placement course or who kept them motivated during a difficult time in the class. Many of the students were able to build a personal relationship with a staff member who identified them as a prospective AP candidate and pushed them to be better. Dasia, Kayla, and Terrance explained:

I found about AP back in eighth grade...and then my high school counselor knew I was math, like she understood where I was coming from, and so she talked to me a lot about taking AP math courses.

My English teacher promoted it because she thought my writing was really good and she said that I could help myself in my writing because there's some aspects that I could probably work on. She thought that I could push myself in doing it.

My principal encouraged me; she was talking to me about some of the classes. Also my AP teacher right now. She's always telling me, "you have good writing, you basically understand a lot. You understand it. You should challenge yourself. You should move forward to another AP course."

The data from the eligible and enrolled students' narratives revealed that these students were motivated by a faculty member in their respective school. Whereas some students were encouraged to enroll in AP courses others were drafted into these courses based on an administrators' review of the students' previous grades. Nonetheless, the role of the school personnel is important in increasing the number of African-Americans in AP courses.

Family. The eligible and enrolled students all identified family as being extremely important to their wanting to enroll in Advanced Placement courses and to having aspirations to be successful after high school. Parents were instrumental in creating a foundation for academic achievement. Some parents put their children in private schools and others were involved in school and course enrollment decisions. Moreover, some parents were educators and able to supply professional guidance. All enrolled students identified their parents as a major influence on their schooling. Larry, Ronald, Jackie, Lee, Kayla, and Dasia had involved parents throughout their academic careers. Their parents wanted to make sure that their children attended schools that would provide a solid foundation for future success. Dasia and Lonnie explained their parents' involvement:

My mom considers public charter school to better than [comprehensive] public schools. She says that the teachers care more about what we're [students] doing and more about our education.

For about eight years of my life my parents had me at a Montessori. That's like a different learning environment. I don't really know how to explain it... They taught me friendships, communications, and what I need to do [academically]. Now I know how to, if I need to, get help. If I'm trying to do something, now I know how to take my time with stuff instead of rushing through my work... My father works in the school system. He told me about AP. He said that I should try and take as many AP courses as I can think I can take.

The investments at the beginning of these students' academic careers paid dividends in high school. The students recognized that their early experiences helped them become successful later on in Advanced Placement courses.

Some parents were not involved in picking schools but were instrumental in constantly encouraging their children to enroll in AP courses and providing them with knowledge about AP and its benefits. Larry's father was an educator and informed his child of Advanced Placement benefits prior to high school. Kayla's mother pushed her to take AP because she was aware of the benefits.

My mom pushed me to take it [AP] because I was really skeptical in taking it. I didn't know if it was going to be too hard or something... She makes sure that I read all of the things assigned to me. She helps me go over some of the stuff.

Other parents were not aware of the benefits of AP but encouraged their children because they expressed interest in an AP course. Dasia and Samaria stated:

I think that they are really proud of me, just like I am because AP is optional and like, I decided to take an AP class, especially in math, it's something that I want to pursue and I think that they're happy about that.

My mom told me, 'Sami, you are capable of doing what you want. When you set your mind to something you're always able to complete the task, even when it's difficult. You always find some solution to get help or just resolve the issue.

All of the enrolled students perceived success as attainable through education, especially Advanced Placement courses. All of the students' narratives indicated that they felt supported by school-based staff and their families. Nine out of ten students admitted that stereotypes exist within the school building, amongst their peers, and in the media but they used the negativity to drive them to be the anti-stereotype of society. According to the student narratives, the students wanted people to know that African Americans were capable of academic success.

Eligible and Not Enrolled.

Application –Not enrolled in AP Courses
Lonnie, John, and Dionna

Charter–Not enrolled in AP Courses
Maria, Rick, Michael, and Jack

During this constant comparative analysis, I answered each research question about the factors that contributed to eligible students enrolling in Advanced Placement and eligible students not enrolling in Advanced Placement before I compared the two groups. The forthcoming portion of the analysis focuses on the factors that contributed to students not enrolled in Advanced Placement, even though they had the academic credentials and met the

criteria for enrollment. Similar to the analysis on students, who enrolled in AP, the analysis for the students who were eligible but chose not enroll in AP courses yielded four themes: Internal, External, Institutional, and Family

Internal. The students who chose not to enroll in Advanced Placement were not dissimilar to their peers who chose to enroll. Understanding the pressures and expectations associated with each school, some chose to apply and attend application schools, while others decided that a charter school was a better option than their neighborhood schools. They chose schools that were academically demanding, schools where staff strongly encouraged students to pursue higher level courses. Lonnie, John, Dionna, Jack, Michael, Rick, and Maria chose to attend these schools but decided that they did not want to enroll in Advanced Placement courses.

Every non-enrolled student mentioned a strong sense of identity and capability. These students either stated that they were not ready for Advanced Placement courses, or that they could not balance the AP course load with other activities. The idea of balance is an important factor for this theme. The students were self-reflective and felt they were not ready or able to take these courses. Maria stated:

I think that they [AP courses] are awesome. It depends on what type of student you are. Are you a go-getter or are you a, I just want to get an A so I'm going to stay in regular classes type of student? AP classes are tough...I don't think I'm right for AP classes...I'm big on grades. I would rather receive an A than a C even if it's AP.

Michael described why he was hesitant:

I'm not afraid at all [of AP]. It's more of a time management thing. I'm not that good with scheduling or time management. So, I know that if I do all those classes then it would be a little harder. But I probably still should have did them...I don't know why I didn't, really, now that I'm thinking about it, it's hard to say why I haven't taken one, I don't know.

The reasons for the students' lack of interest in AP courses varied from interview to interview. The students who attended an application school—Lonnie, John, and Dionna—stated that they chose not to enroll in an Advanced Placement course because they had other interests and AP courses would require too much of their time. Lonnie was a star athlete for his school. He split his time commitment between multiple practices, games, and activities he enjoyed, as well as academics. He perceived that AP courses would overwhelm his schedule. He felt that the diversity of his experiences in school was just as impressive as having AP courses on his transcript.

I have not taken any AP courses so I really don't think AP courses put you ahead of anybody else. If anything it gives you a cred, and that's only at certain colleges...School is number one for me but I don't think that's the only thing. It's number one but it's not the only thing on the list. You have to think about other things in your life that are going on.

John and Dionna were similar in their thinking. They felt that having numerous interests was just as important as having experience in AP courses. They enjoyed having several interests and being able to balance their number one priority-school-with other activities they enjoyed.

Throughout each interview I heard the students discuss the lack of interesting AP offerings. The students stated that they were either not interested in the Advanced Placement offerings or that they did not believe that there was any value in AP. Lonnie, John, and Dionna attended application schools that offered a wide variety of AP courses. These students simply chose not to enroll. They mentioned that AP courses had benefits but those benefits did not interest them. These students were just not interested in AP courses and the benefits of these courses. They weighed their options and concluded that the potential for academic enhancement did not outweigh the amount of time and effort that AP required. Lonnie explained:

I say, if you know that you can handle a certain workload and you can adapt to any type of teacher, then AP is for you, but if you know your style of learning, and you understand how AP works, you should go based off if you know you can handle it or not.

The students enrolled in a charter school—Jack, Michael, Rick, and Maria—mentioned not having diverse offering of AP classes at their school. As mentioned, the students seemed to assess their strengths and weakness to determine what they thought they could accomplish. They believed that if they were not interested in a given AP course, they thought they would likely be unsuccessful in it. In addition to lack of interests in available courses, the lack of a variety of AP courses also influenced academically eligible students not to enroll. Maria stated:

The only reason that I haven't taken an AP course is because we don't have a course that I like. Like sometimes I don't have the grades to get considered for an AP class. Maybe what I think I'm strong at doesn't reflect [in grades] so I wasn't able to do that class.

Jack, Michael, Maria, and Rick mentioned that at some point in their schooling they questioned their ability to perform at the Advanced Placement level. The combination of questioning their abilities in conjunction with internal and external factors contributed to student reluctance. John and Maria explained their journey:

My ninth grade year was the first time that I came [to an application school] and it was extremely rough. It was hard for me to adapt to not having every class every day, so that some days I didn't have to do homework, and that would put me behind.

When I first got to the school I did not like it. I just felt like it was too much to manage and that I was never going to live up to the same capabilities as my classmates because I noticed that they had already learned some of the stuff that I was not exposed to...I was in public elementary school so we didn't learn like that, so I was just kind of thrown off.

These students struggled to remain confident, especially when they were surprised by their new school culture and felt unprepared. The exceptions were Michael, Lonnie, Rick, and Jack. Michael, Lonnie, and Jack found confidence through success in athletics. Michael, Rick, and Jack had reflective moments that made them realize that they needed to change for the better. Unfortunately, Maria, John, and Dionna still struggled with the idea of whether they were good enough. Dionna explained:

Like, I still struggle a lot. When I take exams I don't do well. I'm not good at them and I don't go into the exams thinking that I'm going to do well. I do all of my work but I just don't think I'm good at testing. Sometime I just don't think I can be successful.

I am not that confident in my abilities, I don't think that I am confident in my abilities to succeed.

Lonnie and Michael explained their struggles:

I know that I'm not strong in writing. I'm not, I'm not really, on, I probably wouldn't do all of the work. I just know myself that I wouldn't, I don't have the intentions to sit down and write and hand in a bunch of papers. So I know that personally, I don't want to set myself out for failure.

Wow, why didn't I do that? To be honest, I'm not necessarily sure I was ready for those classes, yet. And, once I was ready, it was kind of late. Oh, well, I'm not going to say I wasn't ready...I didn't think I was ready, but I was ready. I just didn't have the confidence.

This perceived lack of self-confidence in conjunction with few interesting Advanced Placement courses, negative school-based interactions, and external pressure from peers created a situation that made it difficult for these young people to feel comfortable enrolling in AP courses.

Racial Identity. Eligible, but not enrolled students encountered difficulties with racial identity throughout their academic careers. These students had to deal with the pressure of peer influence and possible peer jealousy. Every eligible but not enrolled student mentioned that there was some type of negative peer interaction that eventually impacted their decision not to

enroll in Advanced Placement courses. The impact from peers was negative and significant for the seven unenrolled students. Their peers were significantly more negative and judgmental than positive and encouraging. Rick stated:

Yes, they [peers] have a big impact. Because you look at your peers, they judge you, basically. Your friends will be like, ‘oh, you’re a nerd, blah blah blah.’ They’ll call you a nerd or make fun of you because you’re smart. But most friends only do it because, they do it jokingly, but they don’t realize that most of the time it’s showing the person that you’re joking on that they are, they don’t realize what impact it has on them. They [smart student] don’t want to be judged. The people who are being judged, they don’t want to be judged so then they kind of slip under the radar and they don’t perform to the best of their abilities. They perform to their friends’ abilities. And that kind of holds them back.”

These students were negatively impacted because the people they considered friends had essentially create a situation in which they had to choose between their friends and academic success. The eligible but not enrolled students had to determine whether their peers were participating in friendly banter or displaying jealousy towards the student’s ability and academic success.

Acting White is a prevalent stereotype, but these students also had to deal with acting Black. For the purpose of this study, acting Black is dressing, talking, and having a certain attitude toward academics that is stereotyped through media about young African Americans. Although these students did not have to deal with being the anti-stereotype they were being

pressured to perpetuate the stereotype. The students had to choose between being labeled Black (African American) or being labeled as “acting White”. Michael explained:

I don't know. I've been told that I'm a sell-out by people I grew up with because I go to school every day. Because I don't hang outside anymore like I used to when I was younger. I go to school every day, I come home on time, I'm at home at a reasonable hour, I'm not out all hours of the night. I don't smoke weed, I do those things that other people [friends] do. I don't stand outside and stand on the corner and stuff. So, I guess those are stereotypes that people want you to, that people have for Blacks. It's not right.

This was the norm for six of the seven eligible but not enrolled students. To mitigate this dilemma these students learned to adjust their behavior according to their surroundings. They hid their intelligence among their peers outside of school and tried to show their intelligence while in school. Rick explained:

One thing that I know stresses out a lot of people, at least in my circle of friends, is having the honors or AP class. Those classes have that extra title, it gives them more stress because they feel like it's harder than a normal class so they put more time into it. If you're in that bad environment, you notice they're fighting each other [neighborhood vs. education]. The environment is bad so you have to try to your way to situate yourself in a good position in that environment and also focus time into that AP course.

Rick went on to point out:

Certain neighborhoods may be just a bad living condition in general. Having an AP course may drive them to be better and so, 'I can take this AP course. If I can get in an

AP course, and I can pass that, I won't have to live in this environment later.' But it could also deter people because, 'Hey I'm living here in this bad neighborhood, I don't know what's going to happen here. I need to try and survive.' Maybe they have the mindset that they need to focus more on where they're living rather than school.

Rick also stated:

Well, there's a certain scripture in the Bible that says, 'Bad associations spoils useful habits,' which can also go the other way. Useful associations can bring up useful habits. You tend to become sort of the people that you hang around. If you hang out with people who may be the stereotype of a Black person, who may not be educated, who may not care about their education that they're getting, then you're going to become them in some sense. You may not care as much about your education. If you're around people who care about their education, who like being in school because of the opportunities, that's going to say, 'Hey, I should be like them because they're going up in life, I can kind of see where they're going to be in the future. These guys may be the next leaders. I should probably be with them.' If all you do is surround yourself with the bottom of the barrel, you're gonna be at the bottom of the barrel too.

School-Based. The school as an institution had a major impact on these students' decision not to enroll in Advanced Placement courses. The students mentioned that their academic foundation was weak because of their elementary and middle school experience. Teachers often were negative and discouraging. If the schools do not properly prepare students,

motivate them, or encourage them, then schools will have students who are eligible and should enroll but choose not to because of the negative impact that the school has had on the students' psyche.

Lonnie, John, Dionna, Maria, and Rick mentioned that their academic foundations were not as strong as their peers' foundations. These students noted that early in their academic career they had to attend schools within their neighborhoods that they perceived as providing inadequate academic training and that they moved to different schools in search of academic rigor. This was especially detrimental for Lonnie, John, and Dionna, who had to take entrance exams to attend their application schools. They found themselves behind their peers in academic development. Maria and Rick attended a charter school, as their parents realized they were not prepared for academic success.

These students recognized that they were behind and that they did not receive the same academic training as their peers. Rick stated

Right now I'm going through kind of a period of not just, academically I can do the work, but I just don't. I'm at a point now where I'm now seeing the true consequences of it. Now, I actually have a thought to the future of what I want to do and what I have to do to get there. So I'm trying to rebuild and try to restructure myself.

Discouraging and negative school-based staff members also deterred the students from enrolling in Advanced Placement courses. Every student from the application school and charter school, mentioned that they were discouraged from taking an AP course by school-based staff who questioned their reasons for wanting to take the course, or only encouraged students to take the course after staff saw the student's grades. Michael stated:

They [staff members] started to come on later once they realized that I could be something, and I was a positive individual. Once they realized that I was somebody who had a bright future, then they started to encourage me to those things. It's just harder to get on track. Once I got on track it was good.

These students were motivated enough to apply to the top schools in the district yet were still being discouraged by staff members. Throughout their high school careers they still saw school as a negative experience because of the perceptions, low expectations, and stereotypes of staff members. Rick described how positive relationships were important to students, yet they were not experiencing them:

Every student is different so when you are picking out which student belongs in each class you got to figure out if this student really going to come to school or is this student going to work all the way up to her potential or his potential? Is she going to work harder than those students that I didn't choose? How do I support these students?

Students who attended application schools did not have to concern themselves with criteria to enroll in AP, but the students who attended public and charter schools had to meet criteria to be able to take an Advanced Placement course. This criterion was a deterrent for Jack, Michael, Rick, and Maria. Jack explained his school's criteria:

So to get into an AP course you have to get B+ in the class before that. And last year I didn't really do that well until the 3rd quarter, that's when I started to get my grades up.

Jack was denied an opportunity to enroll because of a grade, but he showed that he had the desire to challenge himself in an AP course. Inflexible criteria deter young people who are otherwise motivated to enroll. Jack and Michael explained the criteria of their school:

I had to get my act together because you have to have a certain GPA [to enroll in AP].

And, you have to present yourself a certain way to be in those classes. So, once I started doing that then it started to change. But it was a little on the late side.

I feel like everyone doesn't have the same chance. I know I have friends who are really intelligent, but they don't have the same opportunities that I have because of their certain [home] circumstances. So, they don't go to school as much, or they don't show up or they don't perform to the best of their abilities in class. So it makes them seem like they're not that intelligent so they don't qualify for the AP classes. But they probably would succeed if they took them.

Schools must realize that they have a major role be it, negative or positive, in influencing Advanced Placement student enrollment. In many cases, secondary schools have not properly prepared students, motivated them, or encouraged them. Our schools have students who are eligible and should enroll in AP courses but are choosing not to because of the negative impact that the school has had on the student's perceptions about themselves and their abilities. A lack of academic foundation, negative staff members, and a strict criterion has impacted the interviewed students' willingness to enroll in AP courses. These school experiences and staff interactions eventually have an impact on the internal motivation of students.

Lack of interest and the institutional factors contributed to students' desire not to enroll in AP courses. However, the factors that contributed the most to the students' desire to participate in Advanced Placement were internal factors such as their lack of motivation, low self-esteem, lack of academic confidence, and knowledge of self.

Family. The family structure varied for students who were eligible but not enrolled. Some students came from two-parent homes while others lived with their mother in high poverty areas. Some of the students lived in the same neighborhood for their entire lives, while others moved frequently. The common factor among the majority of the students proved to be their relatives' lack of awareness about AP. With the exception of Jack and John, none of the eligible but not enrolled students' parents had graduated from college, nor were they knowledgeable of AP courses.

These students' parents were not involved much in their academic lives. The students were regularly allowed to choose their own academic path without parental direction or pressure. As Lonnie described:

My mother and my father, they really left the choosing of the classes, they really left that up to me, with the exception of a couple of little things. AP and not AP, and which elective to take, they left that stuff up to me.

The students struggled internally, did not receive school-based support, lacked family support, and had to deal with stereotypes while attempting to decide whether they should enroll in Advanced Placement courses.

Comparison of Factors

During this comparative analysis I answered each research question about the factors that contributed to eligible students enrolling in Advanced Placement and eligible students not enrolling in Advanced Placement. The forthcoming portion of the analysis compares the factors of the enrolled and unenrolled students and the difference of their perceptions of the yielded themes.

Internal. The first theme both groups identified concerned internal factors. The enrolled students recognized the value of Advanced Placement courses and were able to identify AP courses that would help them accomplish their goals later in life such as college and then a career. They felt that these courses would prepare them to be successful in college because they had an opportunity to earn college credit, they experienced the rigor of a challenging course, and they were able to receive content and interactions that they perceived as similar to entry-level college courses. The enrolled students believed that there was value in these learning opportunities and that there was value in being able to practice being a college student prior to attending college. These students took AP courses in hopes of making their transcripts more attractive to college admissions officers even if they were not interested in the course.

The academically eligible but not enrolled students explained that they did not find any interest in the Advanced Placement courses that their schools offered. They did not want to take courses that they “thought” that they would not do well in. The students stated that they would prefer to receive an A in an honors course versus receiving a B or C in an AP course. These students also stated that they wanted to balance their schoolwork load with other priorities. They

wanted to be well-rounded people with many interests. Three students out of seven stated that they preferred to take honors courses because they allowed them to participate in other activities.

The academically eligible and enrolled students believed they could achieve and succeed regardless of obstacles. They desired to succeed; they wanted to be in the most challenging classes because they wanted to prove to themselves and to others that they could be successful.

Racial Identity. Another theme that resulted from the analysis of the student interviews was that students recognized the role of their racial identity in their schooling. This means that students were motivated and/or discouraged by stereotypes about intelligent, school-centered African Americans.

The eligible and enrolled acknowledged that being judged as the representative for an entire group, exists and that they were motivated by the idea that people questioned their abilities. The students recognized that they needed to be the anti-stereotype because African Americans were often portrayed as unintelligent and incapable of success.

The enrolled students experienced racial stereotypes from peers as well. They had to deal with the idea that advanced education was not meant for African Americans, as well as with the idea that being intelligent and enjoying school is considered acting White. This racial slur, acting White, was identified as commonly used derogatory term in the African American community towards intelligent African American students. Characteristics of students who “act White” include speaking proper English, working hard in school, enrolling in higher level courses, and eventually going to college because of their intellect.

The eligible but not enrolled students allowed the negative stereotypes associated with African American students to discourage them from enrolling in AP courses. The students

identified acting White as a stereotype that had to be handled, but they also mentioned having to deal with stereotypes of acting Black. The students stated that acting Black involves being more concerned about one's appearance (clothes, hair, nails, style, etc.) than school work. How their peers viewed them was very important to these students. Both groups dealt with stereotypes that were associated with African Americans. They experienced these stereotypes from their peers, school staff, and the media.

School-Based Factors. The analysis of both groups' interviews revealed a third theme, school-based factors. This factor focused on how school staff influenced the student, how the criteria for admission to Advanced Placement impacted enrollment, and how the quality of education in lower grades affected students' decision whether or not to enroll in AP courses.

The enrolled students expressed that they interacted with positive staff members throughout their academic careers, especially in high school. Enrolled students explained that their teachers strongly encouraged them to take AP courses. Still, some of them were automatically enrolled by their schools' administrators. These students revealed that they were pushed and encouraged throughout their time in school, and that this continuous form of encouragement was a major factor in their deciding to take AP courses.

In contrast, students who were eligible but not enrolled had a different experience with the staff members in their schools. All of the students recounted negative experiences with staff members included members who doubted their abilities, discouraging comments from teachers, and/or staff members who did not support their desire to take an Advanced Placement course. Students felt that some of the negative interactions with members of the faculty and staff were a result of the students' low grades and work habits while other negative behaviors were a result of

their personal characteristics. The students all mentioned that if somebody had encouraged them, they might have changed their behavior. Two of the eligible but not enrolled students actually did change their outlook on the on enrolling in AP courses because of a staff member at their showed personal interest in them. The other five students made excuses about why they should not take AP courses. Some of the eligible but not enrolled students were also affected by the strict criteria and deadlines that their schools enforced. The students enrolled in application schools were affected by the academic expectations of their school. Some students needed support and encouragement, but could not find it in their school.

The eligible and enrolled students all believed that they had acquired strong foundations in elementary and middle school. These students felt that they received the proper academic training to help them be successful in high school and confident in enrolling in AP. Their eligible but not enrolled peers felt less confident about their ability and their academic preparation for high school. The majority of these students felt that their elementary and middle schools failed to adequately prepare them to be successful in high school. Three of these students attended multiple schools prior to entering high school. All of the eligible but not enrolled students perceived that they lacked the necessary foundation to be academically ready when they arrived to high school.

Family. The analysis revealed a fourth and final theme for the two groups, family support. This factor included family support, family knowledge of Advanced Placement, and family involvement in academics.

The eligible and enrolled students' goals were in alignment with their families' goals. This group of students agreed that their families played a major role in their desire to enroll in

and stay in Advanced Placement courses. These students did not all come from high socio-economic families but they all had families that were involved in their schooling. These parents communicated their desire and expectations about college attendance to their children. They made it clear to their children that they wanted their children to get the foundational education to succeed in high school. The parents of enrolled students made sure that their students were in academic institutions that would provide their child the best education.

Beyond enrolling their children in the right school, these parents were also actively involved in their child's class schedules. Seven of the ten enrolled student's family members had knowledge of Advanced Placement. The parents of these students emphasized that AP enrollment was important because of the benefits, college credit, and GPA boost. These seven students stated that their parents and families constantly supported them and their academic decisions.

Conversely among the eligible but not enrolled students, five of the seven had to figure out the educational process without family input. These five students had supportive parents but they did not have parents that were knowledgeable about AP and the benefits of these courses. The family environment, the lack of parental involvement, and the lack of knowledge about AP courses had a major impact on the twelve students' decision not to enroll in AP courses.

Summary

Chapter four began with a description of the study, the sample, the location of the study, an explanation of the research questions, the process of collecting the data, and a description of how the students were chosen to participate in the study. I followed this description with a detailed summary of each interview, grouping them in application schools, comprehensive

schools, and charter schools. Each interview summary included the student, their school of choice, their demeanor, and their overall reactions throughout the interview process. I then proceeded to address each research question.

Based on the comparative analysis, I uncovered four major themes that were factors in the decision for eligible African American students to enroll or not enroll: internal, racial identity, school-based and family factors. Although these factors were common for each group, these four factors played a different role within the two groups.

A discussion of the findings, implications, limitations, and recommendations will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5 : DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Background

The growing academic disparity between African Americans and Caucasian Americans has gained the attention of not only the federal government, but also researchers. Since 2000, there has been an increase in research on the achievement gap. In the past 5 years, researchers have focused more on the underrepresentation of African American students in AP courses and have specifically been focusing on students' perceptions of this underrepresentation.

The AP program is the result of funding provided by the Ford Foundation after World War II. The initial purpose of the program was to increase the quality of curriculum provided to students at the secondary and higher education levels (College Entrance Examination Board, 2004). To this end, the Foundation financed researchers from premier institutions at both levels (Rothschild, 1999) to create a college-level curriculum to challenge high school students. The Ford Foundation wanted to provide a more demanding curriculum for capable high school students that would ease the transition into higher education (College Board, 2010). To entice students to take these courses, college credit was given to students who achieved certain benchmarks on the end-of-year examinations.

The mid 1980s and early 1990s saw more minority students becoming aware of these courses. Inner-city and other low-income districts started to offer AP courses, giving all students the opportunity to challenge themselves with more difficult curricula. Even after the implementation of these programs—and the explanation of their benefits—the population of African American students remained miniscule (Ford et al., 2008). African American students with the strongest academic backgrounds were taking advantage of these educational

opportunities, but the majority of the population resisted these courses because of the assumption that AP classes were for those “other students” (Ford et al., 2008).

To combat this disparity, Congress passed the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, the sole purpose of which was to identify and serve traditionally underrepresented populations, particularly African American and students of low socioeconomic status (National Association of Gifted Children, 2010). Unfortunately, this act did not change the existing perceptions. From the perspective of African American students, AP was still for the “others.”

The underrepresentation of African Americans in AP courses shows that African American students are neither taking advantage of the academic opportunities provided to them nor being provided with enough opportunities to succeed at the highest academic levels in secondary education (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). The underrepresentation of African American students in AP classes might lead one to conclude that AP courses are not intended for students of color (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005). The disparity in representation between other minorities and Caucasian Americans is either minuscule or nonexistent. Although African Americans are frequently compared to Latino/Hispanic Americans in academic research, recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that the representation gap between Hispanic Americans and Caucasian Americans has been eliminated and the equity gap has been significantly reduced (College Board, 2012). Yet, a stereotype persists that AP courses are not intended for African Americans (Ford & Whiting, 2007).

Summary of the Study

This study examined the factors that discouraged African American students from enrolling in AP courses. Academically successful African American students continuously deal with factors that other races rarely know exist (Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004). This is a community that has not always had access to or felt welcomed within the educational institutions (Ford et al., 2008). The negative perception of education and African American success has an impact on intelligent African American students who are capable of successfully navigating advanced studies (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008).

Underrepresentation not only is detrimental to African Americans, but affects students of other races. The psychological effects of underrepresentation can be detrimental to educational culture at the school, district, and even national level. The nation is becoming increasingly diverse; by 2020 America will be a majority-minority nation (Harris, Brown, Ford, & Richardson, 2004). If noticeable underrepresentation of African American students continues, it will be difficult to combat the stereotype that African Americans are not meant to participate in AP courses. The lack of African American students in upper-level courses reinforces the negative stereotypes of laziness and lack of ambition that have plagued the African American community for generations.

External factors, institutional factors, and internal factors were identified during the literature review. The external factors identified were Acting White, Acting Black, Peer Influences, and adult supports. The research identified the responses to these external factors to be academic disengagement, distancing from gifted identity, deflection of giftedness (Henfield et al., 2008). Critical Race Theory and Stereotype Threat were identified as theories that supported the external factors and the student reactions. The identified institutional factors were tracking

and deficit thinking. The internal factor that was identified was internal motivation. This research addressed the following three questions.

1. Among African American students who are eligible for AP participation and enrolled, what factors most influenced their decision to participate in AP courses?
2. Among African American students who are eligible for AP participation but not enrolled, what factors most influenced their decision not to participate in AP courses?
3. How do the factors identified by eligible, but not enrolled, African American students compare with the factors identified by eligible, enrolled African American students

Attribution theory, interpretivism, and achievement theory were the foundations for this study. These theories allowed me the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the African American eligible student perspective. Attribution Theory expands on Achievement Theory by incorporating cognitive and self-efficacy theories (Weiner, 1985). Students not only are internally driven by experience but also begin to justify failure and success by internal and external factors (Mkumbo & Amani, 2012). I interviewed sixteen students from across three different genres of secondary schools; application, comprehensive, and charter.

Sixteen students participated in interviews that were initially structured. The interviews were immediately transcribed and coded to prepare for comparative analysis to previous interviews. Interview questions changed as the constant comparative analysis identified more codes and categories. This process was repeated throughout all sixteen interviews until the themes internal, external, school-bases, and family were identified.

The research findings were presented in four parts; the introduction of the students and their academic backgrounds, the factors that influenced eligible and enrolled, the factors that discouraged the eligible and not enrolled, and a comparison of the factors that encouraged or discouraged students who are eligible but choosing not to enroll.

Internal

The first theme that resulted from the analysis was internal factors, supports that are driven from within. Grantham (2004) explains that external factors are largely uncontrollable by students (i.e., determined by others), motivations is an internal force. Grantham (2004) explains that intrinsic motivation is driven by external factors. Grantham (2004) identifies three factors that influence the decision whether to participate in gifted programs; participation competence expectancy (student self-belief), participation outcome attainment expectancy (rewards of AP), and value of participation outcome (challenge to prepare them for next goal in life).

The findings of the ten eligible and enrolled students support the conclusions of Grantham. These students identified that being intrinsically motivated was a factor to their deciding to enroll in Advanced Placement. The data also supports Grantham's conclusion that students developed participation competence expectancy, participation outcome attainment expectancy, and the value of participation. The students mentioned that having a plan and knowing what is necessary to ensure that the plan is successful is a part of being internally motivated. The data confirms that these factors are important for students who are enrolled but that the research fails to mention students wanting to prove themselves and interest in the school's offering of AP courses.

The data suggests that proving ability to self and others and an interest in subject area are just as important as confidence and the student's future. The majority of enrolled students suggested that they were able to take AP courses that they were interested in which improved their confidence in their ability. These students also suggested that being able to enroll in subjects that they were confident in increased their ability to succeed. The majority of enrolled students also described the need to prove their ability to others and to themselves. They wanted to prove that African Americans were capable of being academically intelligent. This internal desire to prove the stereotypes wrong was the main internal factor that motivated enrolled students.

The eligible but not enrolled students proved Grantham's participation competence expectancy, outcome attainment expectancy and value of participation outcome findings to be correct. The eligible but not enrolled students admitted that they did not perceive Advanced Placement to have advantages over honor courses or that they were necessary to be successful at the next level. These students used excuses to mask their lack of self-confidence and self-belief.

Data analysis from eligible but not enrolled students provided evidence of other internal factors that the literature did not mention. The students chose not to take AP courses because of other non-academic interests and the course offerings. Students believed that they should be well-rounded and that Advanced Placement required too much time. They did not want to focus only on academics, they wanted to be able to dedicate equal amounts of energy towards other interests as well.

The analysis also revealed that several of the not enrolled students were not interested in the AP courses offerings provided by their schools. The eligible but not enrolled students believed that it was important to enjoy the subject of the course. The literature alluded that

eligible but enrolled students lack the motivation to work past external forces and strive to what is best for themselves (Grantham, 2004).

Racial Identity

Racial identity refers to students identifying that they are of African American decent and that they recognize the stereotypes that are associated with African Americans and academics. Researchers established conclusion that posit that students in the African American community believe academic characteristics such as speaking standard English, earning good grades, avoiding trouble, and achieving in gifted programs are not representative of the African American community (Henfield et al., 2008). Fordham and Ogbu state (1986) that, “generations of black children have learned a lesson that has appeared to have emerged in Black communities that defines academic learning in school and ‘Acting White’ and academic success as the prerogative of white America” (p.177). The research illustrates that students take into account the stigma that is associated with giftedness when determining whether to challenge themselves academically.

Researchers also identified the idea of Acting Black. Henfield et al. (2008) and Peterson-Lewis and Bratton (2004) reports that Acting Black has five dimensions:

1. Academic/Scholastic
2. Aesthetic/Stylistic
3. Behavioral
4. Dispositional
5. Impressionistic

These characteristics of Acting Black lead successful African American students to believe that academic success and achievement are racially inappropriate and their success is going against their race (Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004). Ford and Whiting (2007) describe Acting Black as an emerging factor in the decreased participation of African American students in AP. The researchers believe that it is just not the stereotypes but that Black students have a fear of separation from their peers and are concerned that AP and gifted classes are not meant for them or that they do not belong in the classes (Henfield et al., 2008). The research explains that peers influence student decisions to enroll because of the negative connotations in the African American community about education.

The research also yielded stereotype threat, the unrecognized factor in the lives of students that can contribute constantly to personal and societal problems and that can lead to increased pressures in everyday life (Steele, 2010). “Stereotype threat is a situational predicament as a contingency of a group’s identity, a real threat of judgment or treatment in the person’s environment that goes beyond any limitations within” (Steele, 2010, pp. 59-60). African American students are stigmatized as intellectually inferior and incapable of achieving at the gifted level.

The eligible and enrolled students believed in being the anti-stereotype. The current study supports racial identity is a factor that motivated African American students to enroll or not enroll in Advanced Placement. Enrolled students believed that they could defy the academic stereotypes associated with African Americans and represent the race in AP courses. The data suggests that these students relished in the opportunity to defy the stereotypes. Conversely, the eligible but not enrolled student support the idea that stereotypes deter African American students from enrolling.

The research states that Acting White is a deterrent, but enrolled students did not allow this stereotype to deter them from enrolling in AP courses, they used it as motivation. The students believed that education is universal and necessary for success. They decided to surround themselves with peers that were educationally like-minded and encouraging. Their eligible but enrolled peers were deterred by the stereotypes associated with African Americans and academics. The unenrolled students supported the research that stated that Acting Black, Acting White, and negative peer encounters deterred African American students from enrolling in AP courses.

Results of the current study concluded that the home environment is a major factor when eligible students decided if they were going to enroll in AP course or not. These students were impacted by their home environment and their neighborhood. Students mentioned that the home environment makes it difficult to enroll in difficult courses because the students have to worry about helping with bills, raising family members, racial discrimination, and protecting their home. Their home environment is dangerous at times and impacted the students' decisions to stay late at school for the extra assistance and support.

School-based

School-based factors that influence student decisions regarding AP courses include tracking and deficit thinking by staff members. Tracking allows the school-based personnel to decide a student's academic ability and places the student on an academic trajectory that determines their future secondary and post-secondary placements. This tracking arrangement prevents some students from demonstrating their abilities and often discourages students from advancing to more challenging coursework (Archbald et al., 2009).

Deficit thinking is the practice of educators lacking high academic expectations for a particular group or sect. Educators exhibit deficit thinking towards African American students (Henfield et al., 2008) and focus on the students' weaknesses and expect all African American students to act and display similar abilities. Deficit thinking reinforces the idea that African American students are intellectually incapable of achieving at the highest levels of academia (Henfield et al., 2008). This institutionalized idea gives teachers an excuse to focus on the students' deficits instead of the academic strengths or assets (Moore et al., 2005).

Tracking and deficit thinking are school-based factors that deter African American students from enrolling in Advanced Placement according to the body of research about the impact of the institution. The analysis of the current study supports the researchers claim that deficit thinking can deter a student's willingness to participate in Advanced Placement. All of the enrolled students, except Lee, reported that encouraging teachers and staff members helped to motivate them to enroll in Advanced Placement. They reported that these teachers were the school-based support that helped build their self-confidence and contributed to their intrinsic motivation. Eligible but not enrolled students supported Henfield et al. and Moore et al. and their findings that deficit thinking impacted student's decisions to enroll in AP courses. The students reported that they did not experience encouraging staff members because the staff members. The students were discouraged by the school-based and staff stereotypes that they perceived were directed towards all African American students.

The current study was able to identify other factors that the research did not reveal. The students reported that early knowledge about Advanced Placement is essential to enrolling students in AP courses. Enrolled students reported that they learned about AP and the benefits of the courses prior to enrolling in high school. The unenrolled students stated that they did not

learn about AP from teachers but learned about the courses, the difficulty of courses, and the benefits of courses from their peers.

The students reported that their schools needed to create relationships with students who have academic potential. The enrolled students felt as if they were fully supported and that they had a staff member that would give advice and extra support. The unenrolled students did not feel that they had a personal relationship with staff members in the building. They did not know who to contact within the school that could help them navigate their high school academic experience.

The students also reported that there was a lack of equality in elementary and middle schools. The eligible and enrolled students reported that they attended great schools that prepared them well for the academic rigors of Advanced Placement. They reported that their elementary and middle schools gave them the academic foundation for future success. Their schools provided them the extra attention to prepare and plan for the high school years and beyond.

Their academically eligible but not enrolled peers, with the exception of Jack, reported that they did not perceive that they received an equal, rigorous education as some of their peers. These students did not feel that they were prepared for the rigors of high school. The research was able to identify tracking and deficit thinking within the institution that deterred students from enrolling in Advanced Placement. The research did not identify how students were introduced to the benefits of AP courses, school-based mentorship opportunities, and the lack of equal academic foundations.

Family

The findings in this study support the research findings of Herbert (1998) and Ndura et al., (2003). The results from these studies suggest that parents are the most influential adult figures in students' lives (Ndura et al., 2003). Some parents of African American students hold high academic aspirations for their children and encourage them to pursue every academic opportunity that exist. The parents who want the most for their child are involved to ensure that their child is successful, no matter the experience that they may have had during their school years (Herbert, 1998). These positive expectations and aspirations are fuel to the intrinsic motivation of academically eligible students (Ndura et al., 2003). A caring, encouraging, and involved parent can create a positive experience for African American students when the expectations and stereotypes for academically eligible African American students is negative (Herbert, 1998). Parental support for these academically eligible students is essential to break the bonds of ignorance and hatred that exists in Black students for their gifted peers (Herbert, 1998).

The results from this study support the findings about the importance of parent involvement from previous research. Eligible and enrolled students stated that family involvement is an important factor in their decisions to enroll in AP courses. Eligible but not enrolled students revealed that their parents were not as involved and not as supportive. All of the unenrolled students stated that their parents allowed them to select their courses and their schedule. Their parents did not get involved in school matters.

This study did discover two family factors that were not discussed in the previous literature. The students stated that parental knowledge of Advanced Placement and parental preparedness helped to encourage students to enroll in AP courses. The students that enrolled in

AP courses had parents who knew about Advanced Placement courses and their benefits. These parents explained the benefits to their children early in their academic careers and encouraged their children to participate in rigorous classes to prepare for AP courses in high school. The unenrolled parents---Jack's parents being the exception---did not know about AP courses and could not provide their children with the benefits of the courses.

The second family factor not discovered in the literature is parental educational preparedness. Parents of enrolled students were actively involved in ensuring that their children were at the best schools available. They enrolled their children in schools that had a strong reputation for providing strong academic rigor. The eligible but not enrolled students did not express that their parents invested similar efforts. These parents did not have the knowledge of the best schools and did not have wherewithal to ensure that their children were in the schools that would provide the best academic foundation.

Implications

This study provides important information for practitioners interested in increasing the representation of African American students in Advanced Placement courses. The results of this study suggest that students are choosing to enroll or not enroll because of internal, external, institutional, and family factors.

The students identified intrinsic and external motivations as factors that either encouraged or discouraged their enrollment in Advanced Placement courses. This study specifically targeted students' lived experiences and their perceptions about why they chose not to enroll. Motivation could not be determined because this study did not use motivation assessment data collection instruments.

The data from this study supports the data from Grantham's (2004) study that recognized that internal and external factors impact African American students' decision to enroll or not enroll in Advanced Placement. Grantham (2004) found that participation competence expectancy, outcome attainment expectancy, and outcomes values must be addressed to assist in building the students' self-belief. It is incumbent that practitioners establish peer support programs, teacher-student summer AP bridge programs, and alumni relations programs within their school to help create a culture that supports all students self-belief.

The majority of students were advised to wait until their junior and senior year to consider applying for AP courses. Still, establishing an early peer-mentor support programs would provide potential AP students with a group of peers who have already successfully traversed different AP subjects and can assist students academically or emotionally. Junior and seniors who are already enrolled in AP courses should be asked to encourage freshmen and sophomores to consider taking AP courses in the future. This group of students already know what to expect and can share their experiences and reflections on what they might have done earlier to help them better prepare for their AP courses. Participation in this type of program would be another type of community service that students can include on the college applications.

In addition to an in-school peer mentoring program, a minority alumni mentor program will help students understand the outcomes of taking these classes. It will give students real-life examples of how these classes help students save on college courses and impact graduation from college. In addition, relationships with alumni might help students understand the importance of establishing professional networks that will be important later in their academic careers.

A summer bridge program would provide teachers and students with the opportunity to get to know each other prior to the beginning of the school year. The teacher can take the time to build a positive relationship with all students and can also prepare the students for the academic challenge of the school year. It is a time to develop a trusting and caring relationship that could be difficult to develop during the school year. A bridge program could be a summer Pre-AP prep program for students. During this program the school could schedule informational sessions on AP for underclassmen and upper middle school students, schedule evening informational sessions for parents who are interested, and provide videos, webinars, or webpages that provide added information for parents. Parents who want to be involved but may have other obligations must have access to similar information as parents with flexible schedules.

A second implication is that the perspectives, biases, and stereotypes of teachers and other staff members impact students' decisions to enroll or to not enroll in Advanced Placement courses. Students cited that school-based supports and biases either increased their confidence or deterred their willingness to enroll in AP courses; this finding supports Archbald, et al. (2009) research on the same topic. The preconceived stereotypes and biases of staff members contribute to a culture that is either supportive or unsupportive of the participation of African American students in AP courses.

Practitioners must be aware of their own biases and become culturally responsive and create a culture that supports all students regardless of race, economic status, gender, or religion. In order to develop an inclusive and supportive culture, professional development training in diversity awareness that compels adults to recognize their stereotypes and biases is necessary. Self-reflection and brutal honesty is necessary in order to correct the biases and stereotypes that plague school-based cultures.

The school must develop a culture of high expectations for all students. Creating a culture that requires all students to take a Pre-AP and an AP course in order to graduate changes the culture from one of exclusivity to a culture of inclusivity. Students should also be allowed to take high-level courses if they are so motivated. School-based criteria for courses create tracking arrangements and promote exclusive courses, both of which act as deterrents for certain students.

The final implication of this study is that parental involvement has an impact on students' decisions to enroll in Advanced Placement. This study suggests that the level of parental involvement is contingent on a parent's motivation to ensure that his or her child receives an excellent education. Most students who were enrolled in Advanced Placement stated that their parents were equally motivated and involved in their success. This study's data suggests that most parents of unenrolled students allowed their children and the school to dictate their child's academic track. Because these students and parents might be from a lower socio-economic background, it is important to emphasize the future benefits associated with taking AP courses in high school.

The data from this study supports the findings from Herbert (1998) and Ndura et al. (2003). Parents are the most influential adult figures in students' lives (Ndura et al., 2003) and it is incumbent on the school to treat these parents as partners. Practitioners must think creatively to get parent involvement. There are parents who themselves did not have great high school experiences. Nonetheless, it is important to market the benefits of AP courses to both parents and students.

Family nights, celebration nights, grocery raffles, home visits, personal invitations, and neighborhood meetings are a few examples of ways to encourage more parental involvement. Creating a culture of expectancy in which parents are expected to participate is vital. Once

parents are involved, the school must inform and involve parents in the AP educational process. They must inform parents of the benefits of AP, the expectations and culture of the school, and the available supports available to students and parents to ensure academic success. Building parent partnerships and different parent groups help parents become more comfortable in the building which in turn will support the culture of ensuring that all students are exposed to and successfully in AP courses.

Recommendation for Further Research

This study focused on the perspectives of African American students concerning Advanced Placement courses. It revealed perceived factors that affect the representation of African American students in AP courses, but there are still many aspects of this issue to be explored. New lines of inquiry might include a focused study of students and parent motivation.

Based on the findings of this study, a potential follow-up study would focus on the college application process for both groups of students, those who enrolled in AP courses and those who were eligible to enroll but did not. The research questions would be (1) Did all of the students apply to college? (2) Did all of them apply to a four-year institution? (3) Did they get accepted to a top-tier school? (4) How much in merit-scholarships did they receive? and (5) Did they complete their college education in four years? This research would address the overall benefits of enrolling or not enrolling in AP courses during high school. If the outcomes are the same, then the students who were eligible but did not enroll made an understandable choice. If the outcomes were substantially different, then the sacrifice of hard work during high school would have paid off for those who actually enrolled in AP.

The present study revealed that students who were enrolled had extensive knowledge about the Advanced Placement program and the benefits of taking these courses. Future research

could focus on the implied long-term benefits of the program. Advance Placement suggests that if students score well enough on the AP exam, then they will get credit for that course in college. Do students who take AP courses in high school graduate from college earlier than those who did not take AP courses? Do they have less financial debt after graduating from college?

Whereas the recommended study focuses on the impact of AP after high school, another possible study examines when is the best time to start getting students interested in AP courses. A longitudinal study that investigates if there is a relationship between introducing upper middle school African American students to AP courses and the increase in representation in AP courses would be useful. Such a study might encourage educators to seek effective approaches to influencing decision-making regarding AP course selection.

Finally, this study also revealed that students believe that their culture may be misunderstood by school personnel. Students expressed the belief that educators generally were not knowledgeable of external factors that impact students' decision-making. A study that focuses on the impact of cultural responsiveness training is needed. Studying the impact of such training on the school-based personnel offers another possible way to encourage educators to reconsider student access to challenging courses.

Conclusion

The authentic voices of this study supported the findings of previous studies and also introduced factors that have major impacts on the course selection decision-making of academically eligible African American students. The data identified external, internal, school-based, and familial factors that contributed to African American students enrolling or not enrolling in AP courses.

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that were preventing balanced representation in Advanced Placement courses. This study provided evidence that academically successful African American students continually deal with factors that other students may not encounter (Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004). Practitioners must exhibit cultural understanding and create programs that encourage student enrollment in academically challenging courses.

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Appendix A

Parent/Guardian Informed Consent Agreement

Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to participate in the study. Your child will also receive an assent form; please review the assent form with your child.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of the study is to understand African American students' perspectives about the underrepresentation of African American students in Advanced Placement courses.

What your child will do in the study: Your child will be asked to participate in an interview that will take approximately 30-60 minutes. Your child will be asked to answer questions about their experience as a student. The interview with your child will be audio taped and the researcher will take notes during the interview. Your child will not be deceived in any manner. If at any point your child feels uncomfortable because of a question, s/he may ask to skip the question or to end the interview without any risk or penalty. The participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

The interview will not be conducted during class time. The researcher will schedule interviews to occur during non-class hours. The interviews will be conducted in person or over an Internet chat site, Skype or Google Chat.

There is no harm or grade reduction as result of a child deciding not to participate in this study.

Time required: The study will require approximately 30 to 60 minutes of your child's time.

Risks: The possible risks to your child are minimal. The anticipated harm or discomfort is not greater than those encountered on a daily basis. Students will be asked to speak about their experiences as a student and why they are motivated or not motivated to participate in Advanced Placement courses.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to your child for participating in this research study. This study may provide information to help us understand why African American students are underrepresented in Advanced Placement courses.

Confidentiality: Data linked with identifying information:

The information that your child provides in this study will be handled confidentially. Your child's information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your child's name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your child's name will not be used in the report.

Names and consent forms will be stored separately from interview and questionnaire data. The recorded interviews will be placed on a password protected external hard drive and then deleted from the digital recorder. Transcribed interviews will be stored on the external hard drive as well.

All of the data collected will be kept at the researcher's residence in a locked filing cabinet. Upon the completion of the study, all of the interviews and transcriptions will be deleted from the hard drive.

Voluntary participation: Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw your child, and your child has the right to withdraw, from the study at any time without penalty. Your child's recorded interview and the transcription of that interview will be destroyed should you decide or your child decides to withdraw from the interview.

How to withdraw from the study: If your child wants to withdraw from the study, tell the researcher. There is no penalty for withdrawing. If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact Benjamin Williams.

Payment: Your child will not receive payment for participating in the study.

If you have questions about the study, contact:

Benjamin Williams

Curry School of Education, Administration and Supervision,
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903.
Telephone: (703) 258-5130
Email: blw9a@virginia.edu

Faculty Advisor: **Dr. Daniel Duke**

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106-6
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If you have questions about your rights in the study, contact:

Tonya R. Moon, Ph.D.,
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences
One Morton Dr Suite 500
University of Virginia, P.O. Box 800392
Charlottesville, VA 22908-0392
Telephone: (434) 924-5999
Email: irbsbshelp@virginia.edu
Website: www.virginia.edu/vpr/irb/sbs

Agreement:

I agree to allow my child to participate in the research study described above.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

You will receive a copy of this form for your records

Minor Informed Assent Agreement 13-17

Please read this assent agreement with your parent(s) or guardian(s) before you decide to participate in the study. Your parent or guardian will also give permission to let you participate in the study.

The researcher wants to learn about why African American students are underrepresented in Advanced Placement courses.

As part of the study, the researcher would like to ask you to participate in an interview that will take approximately 30-60 minutes of your time. You will be asked to answer questions about your experience as a student and your perceptions about the African American student population and their representation in Advanced Placement. The interview will be audio taped and the researcher will take notes during the interview. You will not be deceived in any manner. If at any point you are uncomfortable with any of the questions or the interview overall, you may ask to skip the question or to end the interview. The participation in this study is strictly voluntary and there is no penalty or grade reduction for withdrawing or not participating.

The interview will not be conducted during class time. The researcher will schedule interviews to occur during non-class hours. The interviews will be conducted in person or over an Internet chat site, Skype or Google chat.

To reiterate, there is no penalty or grade reduction if you decide not to participate.

If you participate in the study, you may be uncomfortable if I ask you a question that may ask you to recall a difficult memory. Other than the recollection of memories there are not any risks to you.

If you participate in this study there will not be any direct benefit to you. The study may help us understand why African American students are underrepresented in Advanced Placement courses.

Confidentiality: the information that you give to the researcher during this study will be kept private. Your name will not be used, and the list linking the code name assigned to your name will be destroyed after all of the data is collected. Your name will never appear in the study.

I will keep all materials locked away so that only I will have access to the recordings and transcripts. The digitally recorded interviews will be transferred to a password protected external hard drive upon the completion of the interview. The interview will then be deleted from the digital recording device. The transcription of the interview will be stored on the external hard drive as well.

All of the data collected will be kept at the researcher's residence in a locked filing cabinet. Upon the completion of the study, all of the interviews and transcriptions will be deleted from the hard drive.

You do not have to participate in this study. Your grades will not be affected if you decide not to participate.

You can end your participation at any time. The recording of the interview, the transcription and any notes will be destroyed should you decide to withdraw from the interview.

If you want to stop participating tell the researcher, Benjamin Williams. If you choose to end your participation before the interview is complete, any answers that you have already given will be destroyed.

There is no penalty for ending your participation. If you decide that you do not want your materials in the study but have already completed an interview, please contact Benjamin Williams.

You will not receive compensation for participating in this study.

If you have questions about the study, contact:

Benjamin Williams

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Telephone: (703) 258-5130

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Website: www.virginia.edu/vpr/irb/sbs

Agreement:

I agree to participate in the research study described above.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

APPENDIX B

Enrolled AP African American Student Interview

1. Tell me about your school history in this school and district?
2. Tell me about your thoughts and experiences with the AP program in this school and this district?
 - a. How did you find out about AP?
 - b. What are your thoughts about Advanced Placement courses and the program?
3. Are there certain requirements before students can enroll in Advanced Placement[®] courses at your high school?
4. How do parents find out about Advanced Placement[®] or college preparatory courses?
5. Do your parents know that you are taking Advanced Placement[®] courses?
 - a. Did your parents know about AP courses before you enrolled?
 - b. Did your parents encourage you to enroll in AP courses?
6. Tell me about your interactions with faculty members (teachers, counselors, coaches, etc) that related to the AP program.
 - a. Are there faculty members who encouraged you to enroll in AP Courses?
 - b. Why do you think s/he encouraged you to take AP courses?
 - c. Did they also encourage other students to take AP courses?
 - d. Is there a culture within the building that encourages students to take AP courses?
 - e. Is there a culture within the building that encourages African American student to take AP courses?
 - f. Did the AP teacher's expectations influence your decision to enroll in AP courses?

For the next three questions I want to ask you to tell me your perceptions about African American students in AP programs in your district

7. Are there stereotypes of African American students who are enrolled in higher level and AP?
 - a. Are there stereotypes in your community of African American students who are enrolled in AP courses?
 - b. What are stereotypes of African American students who are enrolled in higher level and AP programs?
 - c. Do faculty members have stereotypes about African American students and AP?
8. How did the stereotypes of African Americans and high academic achievement influence your decision to enroll in AP course/s?
 - a. Is it difficult to be an African American student in AP courses?

- i. What makes it difficult?
 - ii. What makes it easy?
 - iii. How are you dealing with it?
9. Do peers and friends influence African American students' decision to enroll or not enroll in AP courses?
 - a. Do you have peers that make comments towards you because you are enrolled in AP courses?
 - i. What type of comments?
 - b. Does the lack of minority representation influence eligible African American students' decision to enroll or not enroll in Advanced Placement courses?
 - c. What do you think motivates African American students to enroll in Advanced Placement® courses?
10. Who perpetuates the stereotypes of African American students in gifted courses?
 - a. How do the stereotypes influence your decision to enroll or not enroll in AP courses?
 - b. How do these stereotypes influence other African Americans from enrolling in these courses?
11. What advice moving forward to you have for your schools district in relation to African American students in AP courses?
 - a. Why did you enroll in AP courses?
 - b. Where did your motivation come from?
 - c. Who continues to support you?
 - d. What factors do you think discourage African American students from enrolling in Advanced Placement® courses?
 - e. What more can be done to encourage African American students to enroll in AP courses?
 - f. What more can be done to support African American students once they are enrolled?
 - g. What suggestions do you have for administrators and teachers that will help increase the representation of African American students in AP courses?
 - h. What suggestions do you have for your peers that will help motivate them to enroll in AP courses?

Eligible but Not Enrolled African American Student Interview

1. How long you have attended this school?
2. How long have you attended a school in this school district?
3. When was the first time that you become aware of the Advanced Placement[®] program?
 - a. How did you find out about AP?
4. What are your opinions about Advanced Placement[®]?
 - a. What are the perceived advantages of enrolling in AP?
 - b. What are the perceived advantages of not enrolling in AP?
5. Are there certain requirements before students can enroll in Advanced Placement[®] courses at your high school?
6. How do students find out about Advanced Placement[®] or college preparatory courses?
7. How do parents find out about Advanced Placement[®] or college preparatory courses at your school?
8. Do your parents know about Advanced Placement[®] courses?
 - a. Do your parents know about the advantages of taking AP courses?
9. Are there faculty members who you perceive discourage you from enrolling in AP Courses?
 - a. Why do you think s/he discourages you from taking AP courses?
 - b. Do you also perceive that they discourage other students from taking AP courses?
 - c. Is there a perceived culture within the building that discourages students from taking AP courses?
 - d. Is there a perceived culture within the building that discourages African American student to take AP courses?
Do the AP teacher's expectations influence your decision to not enroll in AP courses?
10. Are there stereotypes in your school about African American students who are enrolled in higher level and AP courses?
 - a. Are there stereotypes in your community about African American students who are enrolled in AP courses?
 - b. What are stereotypes of African American students who are enrolled in higher level and AP programs?
11. How do the stereotypes of African Americans and high academic achievement influence your decision to not enroll in AP course/s?
 - a. Do you perceive that it would be difficult to be an African American student in AP or honor courses?

- i. What do you think will make AP courses difficult?
 - ii. Do your perceived difficulties of the course discourage you from enrolling in an AP course?
 - iii. Where were your perceptions about AP courses developed?
12. Do peers influence African American students' decisions not to enroll in AP courses?
 - a. Do you have peers that make comments towards you about African American AP students?
 - b. Does the lack of minority representation discourage you from enrolling in Advanced Placement courses?
 - c. What do you think motivates African American students to enroll in Advanced Placement[®] courses?
13. Who perpetuates the stereotypes of African American students in gifted courses?
 - a. How do the individuals who perpetuate the stereotype influence your decision not to enroll in AP?
 - b. How do these stereotypes influence your decision to not enroll in AP courses?
 - c. How do these stereotypes influence other African Americans from enrolling or not enrolling in these courses?
14. Why have you chosen to not enroll in AP courses, even though you are academically eligible?
 - a. What discourages you?
 - b. Are there adults that encourage you to enroll?
15. What factors do you think discourage African American students from enrolling in Advanced Placement[®] courses?
 - a. What more can be done to encourage African American students to enroll in AP courses?
 - b. What more can be done to support African American students once they are enrolled?
16. What suggestions do you have for administrators and teachers that will help increase the representation of African American students in AP courses?