THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK STUDENTS, ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES, AND COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

by

JAMIE DEMETRIUS BROWN

(Under the Direction of Anneliese A. Singh)

ABSTRACT

Participation in The College Board's Advanced Placement Program has expanded greatly since its inception in the 1950s, where in 1955 there were 1,229 students that took Advanced Placement exams, compared to the 609,807 students that completed Advanced Placement exams in 2005 (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). Even with the growth of the Advanced Placement Program, Black high school students are enrolling in Advanced Placement classes at half the rate of White students (Klopfenstein, 2004a). This does not bode well for Black students and college admissions, as more colleges are using participation in the Advanced Placement Program as criteria for admission decisions (Geiser & Santelices, 2004; Klopfenstein, 2004a).

The following manuscript-style dissertation reviews the educational history of Blacks as a backdrop for encouraging professional school counselors to use both the American School Counselor Association's National Model (2012), with the American Counseling Association's Advocacy Competencies (2003) as a vehicle to assist Black student in navigating the AP Program participation evaluations that are used in many college admissions offices. Research shows increased student achievement when the template for the American School Counselor Association National Model (2012) was implemented in schools (Carey, Harrington & Martin,

B2012; Pyne, 2011). The goal of this study is to use the research to bring awareness to professional school counselors, so they will advocate for Black students who are not involved in the AP Program to have as many post-secondary options available to them as possible upon graduating from high school.

INDEX WORDS: Black students, African American students, Advanced Placement, College Admissions

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2014

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late mother Vivian Inez Brown, my light, my inspiration, my motivation, and my very first instructor! When I started this program you were so excited, and I hate that you weren't able to be here at the end, but in your honor I will cross the stage to be hooded in your name. I love you girl!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This was supposed to be a three-year journey that ended up taking me six, and I would not have been able to do it without the help and inspiration of others. First, my wife Niccolla, the kids Micaela and Javian, thank you for allowing me the space, time, understanding, and patience to help me accomplish this amazing goal. I still don't believe that we have made it to the end! To my dissertation chair, whoever thought a key with the word believe inscribed on it would be so powerful?! Because of you and that key, I don't know that anything will ever be out of my reach. Thank you for your guidance, motivation, and inspiration! To my dissertation committee, thank you for challenging me to open my eyes to see what I was not seeing. Your guidance gave me the direction to complete a study that I became even more passionate about. Nikki Williams thank you for keeping me on track with your reminders that were always on time. Last but not least, thank you to my cohort who I started this journey with. Most of you finished in three years and I did everything in my power to distract myself from finishing this degree like getting married, having children, coaching sports, and purchasing a small business, but when I saw pictures of you all in your regalia I was happy for you and wanted to be a part of it. You all are great people and it has been a blessing getting to know you all.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the Advanced Placement (AP) Program expands to play an increasingly larger role in the college admissions process, AP classes are becoming the default standard for college admissions and placement (Hammond, 2009). This new practice by post-secondary institutions creates an educational inequity for Black students who are enrolling in AP classes at less than half the rate of White students, while those Black students who are taking AP classes are failing the AP exams at a rate that is 35% higher than White students (Ashford, 2007; Aud, Fox & Ramani, 2010). Initially, the AP Program was created to offer high school students the opportunity to earn college credit prior to matriculation and be placed in classes appropriately upon enrolling in college. The AP Program was not originally used as admission criteria (Geiser & Santelices, 2004). There have been attempts to improve the participation rate of Black students in the AP Program, but an educational achievement gap continues to exist with Black students participating at a much lower rate than White students (Ramani, Gilbertson & Fox, 2007). In this study, achievement gap is defined as the numeric discrepancy between the academic performances of Black and White students. For example, in 2005, Black students in urban school districts were not meeting proficiency rates in math and reading 90% of the time, compared to that of White students who were not meeting the same rates 52% of the time (Hayes, 2011).

Black students will be the focus of this research, so term Black is defined as anyone who identifies as Black or African-American. The primary researcher uses Black as a descriptor for this population of students due to the comfort level and appreciation for the term and its positive

characteristics stemming from popularization in the 1960s by the "Black Power" movement (Niven & Zilber, 2000). Black students were selected for this study to bring awareness to how this subtle change that colleges are making to their admission process can have a detrimental effect on a racial/ethnic group that has already dealt with years of educational inequities (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). The fear is that this new barrier placed in front of Black students will discourage them from aspiring to attend college, thus affecting their future earning power. According to the 2007 Census Bureau, college graduates earn 63% more than those students who only finish high school (Field, 2009). Not attending college would be another setback to a group of students where it has been found that many of them devalue education, and potentially cause them to further disengage from the same educational system that has already led to lower graduation rates for Black students compared to that of White students (Harper, 2009).

The educational history of Blacks and the inequities that plague them have been well documented since the days of slavery (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). This history began with Blacks being prohibited from learning how to read and write as a technique used to help slaves remain submissive to their owners (Beyer, 2010). Educational issues improved with the end of slavery and Black students were able to attend school, however, they were segregated and not allowed to attend schools with White students. Ideally both groups would have been equally educated, but this would not come to pass for a long while (Neal & Moore, 2004). Even with the forward progress and victory of segregation ruled unconstitutional, Black students have remained behind the curve educationally when compared to White students, who have not had to deal with the same challenges in educational history (Karpinski, 2010).

Considering the negative and inequitable educational history that is interwoven into the background of Black students, it is important that the practice of including AP Program

participation as criteria used in college admissions decisions is discontinued, thus assisting in lessening an even greater divide in the achievement gap. With a lack of historical research supporting the use of AP classes as criteria for college admission, the purpose of this narrative study is to analyze the perceptions of Black students in regard to the AP Program and their college experiences. The research question that guided this study was:

1) What are the post-secondary educational experiences of Black college students who did not participate in their high school AP Program?

Supporting Black Students in a Successful Transitions to College

All students can benefit from the rigor of AP classes, and it has been suggested that the AP Program can assist in closing the achievement gap between Black and White students; however, in order for Black students to participate and be successful in AP classes, they need the support of both educators and family members (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gundy, 2008). Carter-Andrews (2012) suggested that Black students may practice adaptive behaviors such as using resilience strategies to navigate school climates that exhibit racial/ethnical microaggressions. Ford and Whiting (2007) argued that in order for more Black students to be academically prepared for placement into gifted education, deficit thinking should be eliminated. With an increase of placement into advanced level courses as early as elementary and middle school, the goal would be to have Black students prepared for enrollment in AP courses by the time they reach high school (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gundy, 2008).

Hayes (2011) found that when parents of Black students hold high educational aspirations for their students, these expectations related to higher rates of parent involvement and increased opportunities for students' academic success. In this study, 86% of the parents had aspirations of seeing their students graduate from college or graduate school, no matter their own educational

attainment, which indicates potential first generation Black college students may have sources of support in their families (Hayes, 2011). Parental involvement can be divided into in-school involvement and in-home involvement. Scholars have suggested that Black parents may place more significance on being involved at home rather than in school due to employment or childcare responsibilities, which contributes to the lack of knowledge that Black parents have about their students' underrepresentation in the AP Program (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gundy, 2008). Ford and Whiting (2007) suggested that schools consistently and aggressively develop partnerships with Black families to make sure they understand (a) that the school offers AP classes, (b) the referral and placement process for these classes, and (c) the purpose and benefits of the AP Program (Whiting & Ford, 2009). This partnership can increase the opportunity to create a trusting relationship between Black parents and the school, thus allowing the parent and educators to speak on the same accord when informing the Black student about the purpose and benefits of increased academic and AP Program participation (Ford & Whiting, 2007; Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Whiting & Ford, 2009).

Educator support can also exist in the form of professional development to increase the awareness of personal beliefs regarding the potential of Black students and their educational needs (Henfield et al., 2008). There should also be collaboration between educators to develop culturally-sensitive recruitment and retention policies to normalize placement in AP Programs for Black students, this can be assisted by educators developing a greater rapport with Black students. In addition, the school's curriculum should be supplemented with more multicultural content, while also increasing the hiring and retention of educators that are educated on the unique needs of Black students (Henfield et al., 2008). Hale (2007) saw increased interest in Black students in the AP Program when he taught AP English Language to Black students who

were rated the lowest academic group in a high school in Florida. He was able to build rapport with students by focusing on the power of their minds, while also improving their speaking and writing abilities. Whiting and Ford (2009) encouraged educators to create opportunities for Black students to learn how to advocate for themselves through mentoring programs where they are able to be introduced to Black scholars, while also continuing to inform Black students of the benefits and data involved with the AP Program so that they can have a complete understanding of how underrepresentation in the AP Program is an inequity. Grantham (2004) found that when Black male students felt their mentors were committed to their success, the student's own internal motivation to be successful increases.

Williams and Portman (2014) find Black students believed that there is a need for them to be personally involved and take responsibility for their success, even in situations where they experience adversity or failure. This behavior is defined as resilience. There are many definitions of this term, but for this work, resilience will refer to Black student's ability to translate stressful or adverse situations into a source of motivation and to produce a positive outcome (Carter-Andrews, 2012; Singh, Garnett, & Williams, 2012). Toldson and Anderson (2010) found that resiliency was the explanation for the statistically improved academic outcomes for Black males. There is an increased demand for more research on the resilience of Black students, which would allow for the opportunity to elicit the voices of these students in an attempt to identify their explanations of how they navigate adversity (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Bonner, Jennings, Marbley, and Brown (2008) suggested that the Black students who have been successful at being consistently resilient use it as a protective process that incorporates support from their immediate family, their community, the school, and their own ability to be accountable for themselves. Successful resilience is based on the Black student's ability to bounce back after recognizing and

dealing with racism in educational settings, thus allowing that same student to work on dismantling the system that allows racial microaggressions to exist (Carter-Andrews, 2012).

In their study of Black adolescent females, Belgrave, Chase-Vaughn, Gray, Addison and Cherry (2000) found that promoting resilience as a protective process is linked to positive behaviors and individual emotional strength. There are also recurring themes in literature showing that Black male college students tend to be successful academically due to their ability to be resilient (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Harvey and Hill (2004) identified Winfield's four-step process to promote resilience in Black youth: (1) exposing youth to risks; (2) after exposure, diminishing the probability of a negative reaction; (3) initiating self-esteem; and (4) presenting them with the positive outcomes. Marsh, Chaney and Jones (2012) suggested that in order for Black students to maintain a strong sense of resilience, they must develop strong familial relationships with other Black students through social clubs, where they maintain the ability to maintain pride and a connection to their Blackness. The majority of research on Black students suggest that these students would benefit academically from a strength-based approach, where their ability to be resilient to racism is outlined and highlighted (Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Williams & Portman, 2014).

Another strategy to increase the academic success rate of Black students is to dismiss the opportunity for deficit thinking, where the majority of public schools are taught by teachers that are White 90%-92% of the times (Ford & Whiting, 2007). Taliaferro and DeCuir-Gundy (2008) posited that the achievement gap between Black and White students in the AP Program is due, in large part, to Black students being less likely to be chosen by White teachers for placement in AP classes. The movement to removing deficit thinking can start with supplementing research that is deficit-informed, portraying Black students as unintelligent, incapable, and at-risk for failure,

with research that promotes success and resilience (Harper, 2009; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Kim and Hargrove (2013) believed that such deficit-informed research does nothing but feed the stereotypes that promote a negative impact on Black students, as well as on the educators that provide a service to them. Instead, there is the challenge to provide anti-deficit research that exudes ways of replicating Black student success rather than conveying repetitious failure. Too many times educators interpret differences as deficits, dysfunctions, or disadvantages that lead to issuing the tag "at-risk," when this deficit thinking allows educators to ignore the considerable strengths, gifts, potential, and talents that Black students possess (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002; Ford & Whiting, 2007; Henfield et al., 2008). This deficit ideology is further promoted by the limited numbers of Black students in AP classes, leading educators to continue to employ the stereotypes and negative perceptions they have about Black students (Henfield et al., 2008).

With deficit ideology as one of the principal barriers impeding Black students from entering the AP classroom, Ford and Whiting (2007) also identified the need to develop a home and school partnership, while also using materials that are culturally sensitive, and to provide multicultural education for both educators and students, allowing both groups to become culturally competent. Williams and Portman (2014) also suggested that educators could benefit from putting a greater emphasis on getting to know their Black students and their families. This would help them with embracing a strength-based approach to working with Black students, thus allowing them to identify the positive characteristics of resiliency. Henfield, Moore, and Wood (2008) had similar suggestions encouraging educators to use professional development to challenge their beliefs about Black students, so that they can improve the student-to-educator

relationship enough to become sensitive to the racial biases that may exist in their teaching strategies and policies.

The previously mentioned research can increase the possibility of Black students being tracked into advanced courses and the potential of being placed into AP classes in high school (Ford & Whiting, 2007). Taliaferro and DeCuir-Gundy (2008) credited the low numbers of Black students in AP classes to the lack of advanced tracking applied to Black students in middle and elementary school, suggesting a lack of initial preparation for AP classes. The lack of preparation can be linked to the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education, which at no time in history have Black students not been underrepresented in gifted programs (Grantham, 2013). Educators can use some of the strategies in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, which is implemented in elementary through higher education, where there is an emphasis placed on untracking students, thus giving Black students the opportunity to receive the same curriculum as White students (Black, Little, McCoach, Purcell & Siegle, 2008). AVID is implemented in different states throughout the country and is designed to increase school-wide learning and performance to combat the lack of minorities participating in the AP Program and the college admission process, where in 2010 more than 70% of the Black Students participating in AVID participated in the AP program (Bernhardt, 2013).

To assist in nurturing successful Black students, there is the need for educators and parents to hear the voices of these students as they identify their own perceptions of what they need to be academically successful (Williams & Portman, 2014). Moreover, the voices of our Black students go unnoticed in regards to their educational needs, which is an issue that is easily corrected with more qualitative research (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gundy, 2008). This study uses qualitative research as an opportunity to elicit the voices of Black students to explain how they

have navigated the adversity of enrolling in college without participating in the AP program (Kim & Hargrove, 2013).

A narrative inquiry research tradition was selected as the research method for this study in an attempt to obtain a rich and thick description of the lived experiences of Black students who have transitioned on to college without participating in the AP Program (Creswell, 2012). A narrative research tradition allowed the participants in this study to have the opportunity and freedom to self-reflect and reconstruct their own personal stories from their lived experiences (Anderson & Anderson, 2012; Chan, 2012). The narratives shared by the participants in the current study provided rich data about Black students' experience of AP and college-seeking that might be previously unknown (Brooks, 2012). The goal of this study was to understand these student narratives and to contribute to the research base on Black students, AP classes, and college-seeking.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was the theoretical framework used to structure the current study, as the tenets of CRT contextualize the racialized educational experiences of Black students, such as historical inequities and the achievement gap (Knaus, 2009). CRT provides the opportunity to identify subtle points of racism that go unnoticed in society, which are referred to as microaggressions (Malagon, 2010). This lens provides an emphasis on listening to the counter-narratives of marginalized groups to assist in identifying microaggressions (Creswell, 2012). Some believe that using AP classes as admissions criteria is a microaggression considering that all students are not informed about the AP Program or it may not be available at their high school (Malagon, 2010). There is still the concern that this country operates on a system of hierarchies that promote rich over poor, men over women, and Whites over Blacks. These concerns also support viewing this study through a CRT framework (Ladson-Billings,

2009). The goal is to use the five tenets of CRT to identify how the AP Program can assist in the oppression of Black students.

This dissertation is written in a manuscript-style format in an attempt to facilitate researcher submission of articles for publication in academic journals, as there is a lack of research studying Black college students who have not taken AP classes. Chapter One is an introduction to the study and an overall description of the research topic, along with highlights of some issues facing Black students. Chapter Two is a conceptual article with a comprehensive literature review and a call to the field of professional school counselors to use the American Counseling Associations Advocacy Competencies (2003) as a framework to become stronger advocates for the education of Black students. Chapter Three is the qualitative study with a review of the literature, research tradition, analytical framework, methods, findings, and implications for future research and practice. Chapter Four is the conclusion of the study and reviews the researcher's reflexivity through self-reflection of the biases, values, and experiences that were held prior to and during this study.

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CHAPTER 2

BLACK STUDENTS, THE HIGH SCHOOL ADVANCED PLACEMENT PROGRAM, AND COLLEGE ADMISSIONS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND A CALL TO SCHOOL COUNSELORS USING THE ACA ADVOCACY COMPETENCIES[1]

[1] Brown, J.D. To be submitted to the *Journal for Social Action in Counseling Psychology*.

The Transforming School Counselors Initiative encourages school counselors to embrace their redefined roles as organizational change agents for the Black students that they serve (Erford, House, & Martin, 2014), and with the creation of the Advanced Placement (AP) Program in the United States (U.S.), Black Students have endured a new barrier to education. The AP Program was started in 1955 by the College Board with the intent to allow high school students the opportunity to earn post-secondary credit prior to matriculating to college. Initially, the AP Program was used only to award college credit and assist in proper class placement upon enrollment in college, with no effect on the student admissions process (Geiser & Santelices, 2004). The program allowed elite private school students the opportunity to take college-level courses that offered a more advanced curriculum so that those exceptional students could enroll in college with credit for introductory classes and earn their degrees in a shorter time (David, Callahan, Kyburg, 2006; Hammond, 2009; Sadler & Tai, 2007). Over time, however, the AP Program has expanded to take on a redefined role that is increasingly more important to the admissions decisions at selective institutions, and its role in admissions is now arguably more important than its placement function (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009). In this new age of "high stakes" testing and competitive admissions, several universities use AP course performance as criteria in their admissions decision (Byrd, 2007).

The expansion of the AP Program into the admissions decision started to accelerate in the 1980s with just very selective universities, but today, almost all colleges or universities give special quantitative consideration to AP courses when reviewing an admissions decision (Geiser & Santelices, 2004). Geiser and Santelices (2004) found that colleges and universities are using the practice of adding "bonus points" or "extra weight" to the high school grade point averages and profiles of first-year applicants. These reviews are also done qualitatively when colleges and

universities compare applicants from either the same or different high schools to see which student has taken a more rigorous curriculum of classes. An example of the expansion that the AP Program has made into the post-secondary admissions decision can be viewed in the Counselor Evaluation section of The University of Georgia's in (Athens) 2013-2014 first-year student application, where the question is asked: How many AP year-long credit courses will this student complete by graduation? (University of Georgia Athens, 2014).

As the AP Program expands into college admissions, the statistics from the May 2012 administration of the exams show a great disparity between Black and White students where 1,158,172 White students accounted for the submission of 2,024,479 exams, while only 156,746 Black students accounted for 242,817 exams (www.CollegeBoard.com, 2013). College Board's philosophy behind offering the AP Program has evolved into assisting students in attending college and also being successful once they get there (Ashford, 2007). Although, after 57 years of existence, the AP Program has still not been able to remove the obstacles that are disallowing equal access to these courses and exams, where during the 2007 – 2008 school year only 59% of the high schools in the U.S. offered at least one AP course (Kober & Usher, 2012). Unless that number becomes 100%, is it possible for the AP Program to assist in helping all students get into college?

Even for the Black students who are taking Advance Placement courses, there is another identified achievement gap in their preparation for the exam as there are discrepancies in the final scores of Black and White students. AP exams are scored on a 1 – 5 scale with 1 = no recommendation, 2 = possibly qualified, 3 = qualified, 4 = well qualified, and 5 = extremely well qualified (www.CollegeBoard.com, 2013). In 2008, 48% of the Black students who were administered AP exams scored a 1, compared to 16% of White students. On the other end of the

spectrum, only 3% of Black students scored a 5 on those same exams, while 14% of White students scored a 5 (Aud, Fox & Ramani, 2010). When comparing these numbers to the scores of Black students that tested in 2005, there is a decrease in exam preparation where only 43% of Blacks students scored a 1 on the exam, compared to the 48% that scored a 1 in 2008 (Ramani, Gilbertson & Fox, 2007). This article will identify how these disparities came to be by exploring the history of how Blacks have been educated in the U.S., and how professional school counselors can assist in preparing Black students to be successful with or without participating in the AP Program.

Comprehensive Examination of the Literature

The following portion of the article will detail the history of how Black students have come to be educated in the United States of America. The history of Black Students begins with the struggles of slavery and brings them to their current struggle with the U.S. educational system. There is an achievement gap that exists between Black and White students, which adds to the majority of educational inequalities that Black Students have struggled with in the past (Finkel, 2010). Boswell (2004) found that minority students continue to trail White students on every educational indicator, and are less likely to complete high school, less likely to enroll in college, more likely to enroll in a two-year than a four-year college, and much less likely to obtain a baccalaureate or graduate degree.

Black Students and Their History of Education in the U.S.

Issues with access to and inequality of the U.S. educational system have plagued the educational experience of Black students (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). As the second largest minority group in the U.S., Black Americans are still lagging behind White Americans in

attaining high school diplomas and higher education degrees (Marbley & Rouson, 2011). Although, even as far back as 1619 - over 400 years ago, Blacks have always recognized the value of education and slaves were secretly tutored and instructed by abolitionists and fellow slaves who were already educated (Logan, Minca, & Adar, 2012). These advocates for education were determined to revolt against the White slave owners that prohibited Blacks from learning to read or write, which was a technique used as a means to ensure that slaves would remain submissive while in slavery (Beyer, 2010).

Beyer (2010) found that the private tutoring continued until about 1830, when free slaves in the north were able to attend manual labor training schools as a form of common education to allow those former slaves the opportunity to provide for themselves while attending classes to learn a new skill. In these schools, Black students were first instructed on how to use tools, materials, and simple operations of a trade, and then progressed to actually performing the operation until they mastered the trade. Upon mastery of a trade, students were given a certificate to document this mastery and were then allowed to seek out and engage in the practical work of their given trade (Beyer, 2010). Not until 1963, when slavery was ended with the Emancipation Proclamation, and the end of the Civil War in 1865, was the education of Blacks extremely important. Tthis was met with much resistance as there was a push for educational equity. Jim Crow Laws and cases like *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) ruled in favor of separating Black students from White students and encouraged a philosophy of "separate but equal" forms of education This philosophy never really lived up to its meaning as the schools that Black students attended were substandard to those of White students. Most of the schools for Black students not only lacked the same curriculum as White schools, they also were without cafeterias and libraries (Neal & Moore, 2004).

In a continued effort to overturn the decision in the *Plessy v. Ferguson case of 1896*, and receive equal educational resources, the decision in the case of *Brown v, The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954)* established that it was unconstitutional for states to have separate schools for Black and White students (Nieto, 2004). This ruling "technically" desegregated public schools, but all was not equal as the schools that were attended by a majority of black students were underfunded and the preparation programs to train the teachers for those schools were under-financed as well (Karpinski, 2010). Trends in research found that segregation was not only an important historical event because it separated children, but it also left minority students to learn in inferior schools (Logan et al., 2012). Logan et al. (2012) found that these facilities were inferior because black students attended schools staffed by teachers with less experience than those teaching in schools attended by a majority of white students. This lack of experience added to the growing achievement gap between the two sets of students.

Since *Brown v, The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954)* the vision of equity has been an implied legal promise of public schools in the U.S., but two generations of students after *Brown* have attended schools that were not equally funded or employed (Darden & Cavendish, 2011). The most recent foray into the push towards educational equality for Black students was the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which was an educational reform that was passed with the goal of decreasing the achievement gap between Blacks and White students by making public education equal for all students (Rowley & Wright, 2011). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required states to create an accountability system of tests, graduation rates, and other indicators that document students in a subgroup (in which Black students were included) were raising their level of achievement to a proficient level (Harrison-Jones, 2007). Although, this was not the case as Black students were scoring lower on standardized test, had a

higher dropout rate, and were more likely to be suspended from school than their White counter parts (Braun, Chapman & Vezzu, 2010). This same research also found that the achievement gap was not getting any smaller after the passing of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Finkel, 2010). Paul (2004) found that these same Black students continued to suffer academically from receiving less funding per student, having teachers that were less qualified or experienced, and being taught less challenging curriculums.

Based on the history of Black students that dates back to slavery when Blacks were not allowed to learn how to read or write, there has been a negative intergenerational impact due to the educational inequities placed on Black students. Other concerns or myths have been brought up by educators as contributors to the lack of ability to close the achievement gap between Black and White students. Brown and Brown (2012) found that there were educators who believe Black students just do not possess the ability, skills, beliefs, values, or experiences to be successful in school, and that Black, as a family structure, do not care about education, nor do they provide the appropriate support needed to be successful. There is also the concern that Black students do not have the motivation or interest to learn and the belief that black students disengage from education as early as elementary school, which leads to low rates of graduation, academic unpreparedness, low rates of college degree completion, more emphasis on being cool rather than smart, and the prioritizing of athletic aspirations over academic accomplishments (Dancy & Brown, 2008; Harper, 2009).

Each of these issues and beliefs noted above, quantifiable or not, continue to give some educators the perception that Black students do not care about education, which can lead educators to overlook these students and not interact with them in the appropriate way to spark their interest in learning (Harper & Davis, 2012). These perceptions lead to black students being

over-labeled with learning disabilities, which are more labels added on to a group of people who have been labeled as inferior since slavery (Gold & Richards 2012). The labels, issues, and beliefs led to the many black students currently being disproportionately placed in special education, where Black students make up 8% of the student population, but account for 33% of the students identified as developmentally delayed (Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry 2012).

Poverty has a large effect on the achievement gap with 34% of Black children under the age of 18 living in poverty, where in 2009 only 11% (reading) and 14% (math) of Black males were performing at a proficient level or above, compared to that of White males who were performing at rates of 38% (reading) and 53% (math) (Wilson, 2011). Existing research has found that schools with large poor and minority populations often have less overall resources such as experienced or well-trained teachers and technological resources (Darden & Cavendish, 2011). With more Black families living in poverty, the chances of these students enrolling in post-secondary education are decreased. About 36% of the students in low socio-economic areas enroll in college, while 88% of the students from high socio-economic areas attend college (Boswell, 2004). Only about 20% of Blacks between the ages of 25-34 have earned a post-secondary degree (Wilson, 2011). The lack of post-secondary education will affect Black students' earning power as bachelor's degree holders make 40% more than high school graduates and households headed by high school dropout's account for 10% of the poverty rate (Boswell, 2004).

Professional School Counselors, Black Students, and Advanced Placement

When the educational history of Black students is taken into consideration, there is a clear sense of discrimination present when it comes to AP classes and college admissions. An

example of this discrimination can be seen in the University of Michigan's points system admission process, where students can earn points towards their application for admission based on the curriculum strength of the high school that they attend, if their parents graduated from Michigan, or if the student has taken a rigorous course load that includes AP classes (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). This form of discrimination suggests that the University of Michigan's points system is set up for the majority of Black students to fail and not gain any points at all. Research has shown that the many Black students attend schools that do not have the same curriculum strength as schools that White students attend. Black Students will have fewer parents who have graduated from college than White students and Black students are clearly at a disadvantage because of their underrepresentation in AP classes versus that of White students (www.CollegeBoard.com, 2013; Ramani et al., 2007; Solarzano & Ornelas, 2002).

With the increase in post-secondary institutions using the AP Program as an evaluative tool, it is clear that colleges want high school students to take AP classes, as their performance in these classes have become the default standard for admissions and placement (Hammond, 2009). College Board, along with Federal and several state government agencies, have made it a concern and priority to increase the number of underrepresented students who participate in the AP Program. The number of Black students participating in the program has increased but Black Students continue to underperform in the AP classes and on the exams and are still underrepresented in the classroom (Klopfenstein, 2004b; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). This underperformance tends to deter other Black students from taking AP classes because they do not see them as a good fit (David, Callahan, & Kyburg, 2006). The lack of a good fit could be due to many Black students having feelings of alienation because the AP curriculum does not reflect their past, as well as them being, for the most part, the only Black student, or one of only

a few in the AP classes (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). Darity, Castellino and Tyson (2001) found that when Black students start elementary school and move on through middle school, they are not tracked into the advanced classes needed to prepare them for placement in AP courses, and thus, they are not prepared to perform appropriately in these classes or on the exams. Black students are not even tracked into pre-AP classes, which Wehde-Roddiger, Anderson, Arrambide, O'Conor, and Onwuegbuzie (2012) found that students who enrolled in pre-AP classes not only did better in AP classes, but they had higher GPA's and were better prepared for pose-secondary curriculums. Even with the increased participation in the AP Program, Black students are enrolling into AP classes at half the rate of White students (Klopfenstein, 2004a).

Professional school counselors at the elementary, middle, and high school levels must be aware that Black students have a history of being the only American citizens that were denied the right to an education, and that this denial of instruction continues to affect their education today (Ford & Whiting 2007). These effects resonate in issues that are emotionally, socially, or psychologically based in Black students. They are often displayed through concern about being portrayed as acting White or other behavioral issues with racial identity, peer pressure, and self-esteem. These issues can also detract Black students from enrolling in AP classes because there is the idea that enrolling in these classes and showing an intellectual side is more of a White quality (Ford & Whiting 2010). In addition, Ford and Whiting (2007) found that the negative images displayed by the media of being undereducated and criminally minded also dissuade Black students from viewing themselves as scholars that should be enrolled in advanced classes. These negative images also affect the majority of White teachers who are responsible for suggesting which students should be recommended for placement in advanced courses.

Responsibilities like choosing students for placement in AP classes prompted Ford and Grantham (2003) to question the level of teacher's cultural competence, and their experiences working with Black populations of students. Lastly, the issues with racial identity cause Black students to question what is right and what is wrong between Black and White; this peer pressure can cause students to purposefully underachieve so that they are accepted socially (Ford & Whiting 2007; Ford & Whiting, 2010; Grantham, 2004). These issues have also presented themselves in the form of Black students choosing not to participate in gifted programs due to negative peer pressure, concerns about being isolated from their Black friends, and the fear of being alienated from White students in the class (Grantham, 2003)

Professional school counselors need to evaluate these concerns of discrimination, historical marginalization, and the achievement gap in order to identify activities to address such issues in their school's comprehensive developmental school counseling program. Professional School Counselors can use the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2012) as a template to develop programmatic strategies to assist Black students' academic, social/emotional, and career growth (Studer, Diambra, Breckner & Heidel, 2011). The purpose of this national model could provide schools across the U.S. with uniformity, while also allowing counselors diverse options to fulfill the individual needs of the Black students at their particular schools. The ASCA National Model (2012) encourages counselors to collaborate in the success of Black students by providing them with leadership while serving as their advocates and agents of change (Schulz, 2010). Research shows schools implementing comprehensive programs that follow the template set forth by the ASCA National Model (2012) not only show enhanced student outcomes, but increased job satisfaction for their counselors, who are also more likely to continue to implement elements that follow the ASCA National Model (Carey, Harrington &

Martin, 2012; Pyne, 2011). Carey, Harrington and Martin (2012) found in one study that the implementation of a state-wide developmental comprehensive school program increased both the student's average scores on the ACT and the number of students taking the ACT, which suggests that the comprehensive program also increased student achievement and interest in attending college (Carey, Harrington & Martin, A2012).

As advocates and agents of change, professional school counselors can couple the template for the ASCA National Model (2012) with the American Counseling Association (ACA) Advocacy Competencies (2003), which are specific guidelines set for counselors to develop their skills in advocacy, so that they are delivered in an effective and ethical manner. The combination of the ASCA National Model (2012) and the advocacy competencies can assist counselors nationally to acknowledge that oppression and systemic barriers have affected the health and well-being of Black students for many years (Toporek, Lewis & Crethar, 2009). The ACA Advocacy Competencies (2003) can be delivered in three levels starting with the client/student level, which implements the application of direct services to empower the individuals directly affected. The second level is school/community of advocacy that calls on both to collaborate for change. The third level of the advocacy competencies involves the public arena and how to create change through public policy (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009).

Ratts and Hutchins (2009) identified three incentives to infusing the ACA Advocacy Competencies (2003) into comprehensive counseling programs that would identify (1) the prevalence of oppression in society and the negative affect it has on human development, (2) the need to address the educational system as the vehicle that needs change, and not the individual person, and (3) the need for counselors to operate from social justice point of view. There is an urgent need for professional school counselors to take on the role of change agents and advocates

for social justice to assist those Black students who attend schools that accept the false beliefs that these students cannot achieve at a high level (Bemak & Chung, 2005). Ratts, DeKruyf and Chen-Hayes (2007) suggested that the advocacy competencies can be a useful tool to assist professional school counselors in advocating for Black students at the microlevel, mesolevel, and macrolevel because the competencies allow for direct and indirect services depending upon the environment of the students in need.

Recommendations for Professional School Counselors

Using the ACA Advocacy Competencies (2003) as a framework, professional school counselors are encouraged to cover all three levels of the competencies by breaking them down into the six domains that form the complete paradigm. On each level, the recommendations will cover activities that counselors can do while acting on behalf of the client/student, and activities they can perform with the client/student. At the client/student level, empowerment and advocacy will be addressed and on the school/community level, suggestions will be made for community collaboration and systems advocacy. Lastly, in the public arena, a response will be given for public information and social/political advocacy.

Client/Student Level

An important starting point at the client/student level would be student empowerment because giving awareness to Black students can possibly lead to them becoming advocates and agents of change for themselves (Toporek et al., 2009). Professional school counselors can assist in developing this awareness through individual meetings and group or classroom guidance lessons and by making all students aware of the history and background of Black students that has been previously covered in this article. This new awareness can give Black students a voice

and knowledge that they have never had before, thus giving them a new sense of awareness that may have already been internalized, but can now be viewed as a result of an oppressive society (Worell & Remer, 2003). Professional school counselors can also assess a student's ability to become a self-advocate by giving them activities that evaluate their potential to implement the skill of self-advocacy, thus giving the counselors an idea if students are empowered enough to move towards taking action for their own change (Vera & Speight, 2003).

Professional school counselors can work indirectly with Black students by developing an action plan that would identify correct academic and class placement; this advocacy could be done on the student's behalf within and outside of the school building (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009). Advocating within the school building could be consulting and collaborating with teachers and administration to review policies, such as making sure that the procedures for placing students in classes are not discriminatory, identifying individual students who have shown interest in a certain subject area, or evaluating the curriculum and grading practices to make sure that they are culturally sensitive to Black students. Outside of the building, professional school counselors can develop partnerships with local businesses to assist in developing internships for Black students, which could allow them the opportunity to try out different careers that could increase college interest, by increasing their interest in obtaining a degree in their field of choice. This would also foster opportunities for counselors to coordinate mentorship programs with some of the organizations providing internships for these Black students. Grantham (2004) found that mentoring programs were beneficial to increasing Black students' participation in gifted programs.

School/Community Level

The school/community level of the ACA Advocacy Competencies (2003) involves an advocacy-oriented professional school counselor, the community, school, and interacting systems in which Black students live and work. This environment has to be addressed from a social justice perspective where counselors are advocating and actively working to alleviate the oppression that society holds over Black students. Professional school counselors can encourage community collaboration by bringing awareness of the issues with AP and college admissions to the attention of the community leaders and constituents to establish alliances with those community groups and leaders that want to assist in working towards change. As leaders, professional school counselors should then assess ability and use everyone's skills, strengths, and resources to formalize an action plan to promote changes and to assist in increased achievement and college interest for Black students (Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009).

Professional school counselors can act on behalf of the community through systems advocacy, which involves removing system factors that can act as barriers to increasing the achievement levels of Black students (Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009). The suggested activities for this domain include first identifying the barriers that affect the development of Black students, then compiling research and data that illuminate the urgency of why there needs to be change. The next step involves presenting this research and data to stakeholders, such as the school board, in a vision to guide change while also assessing the system for influence and political power (Ohrt, Lambie, & Ieva, 2009). This presentation is followed by a comprehensive plan of action to implement change while also accounting for any foreseen resistance to the execution of the plan (Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009). Professional school counselors should also develop an accountability assessment to evaluate how effective these advocacy activities are for the community. The accountability assessment should encompass feedback from all stakeholders

involved, along with longitudinal data to identify if the professional school counselor's advocacy strategies are effective.

Public Arena Level

At the public arena level of advocacy, professional school counselors will combine all issues, concerns, research, data, and knowledge delivered in the first two levels, to be presented to the general public so that they are informed about the forms of discrimination and inequality that have been imparted on Black students. This information can be made available to the public by whatever means available to the professional school counselor… be it email, town hall meetings, board meetings, public advertisements on television or postings, or mailings to name a few. The last domain of social/political advocacy involves counselors potentially helping to inform the public by nominating and electing officials that will be an ally for the change needed for Black students. Professional school counselors can also assist in developing allies by becoming even more active participants in political affairs by joining certain groups or political parties as a vehicle to drive change for Black students (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009). This new membership gives professional school counselors the power to directly inform potential stakeholders and political powers about the difficulty Black students are having trying to receive educational equality. This is an important arena for professional school counselors to advocate for social and political empowerment by encouraging local political officials to increase civic participation from the community by implementing a political curriculum in schools. This is also a form of advocating for the community and students so that they can be empowered to use their voice by educating them more on civic participation.

This advocacy can be implemented by using Herczog's (2012) curriculum that consists of the following concepts: (1) schools should provide instruction in government, history, law, economics, and democracy; (2) schools should incorporate discussion of current, local, national, and international issues and events into the classroom, particularly those that young people as important to their lives; (3) schools should design and implement programs that provide students with the opportunity to apply what they learned through performing community service linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction; (4) schools should offer opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities outside of the classroom; (5) schools should encourage participation in school governance; (6) schools should encourage students to participate in simulations of democratic process and procedures. With the majority of Black students coming from low to moderate income families that have not been educated on how to have their voices heard by government agencies, there is a need for black families to be trained like the advantaged income families of whom the majorities are White. The advantaged families are heard far more because they have been educated on how to "roar with clarity" (Herczog, 2012). Using the ACA Advocacy Competencies (2003) as a framework, professional school counselors can educate, empower, and advocate for the families of Black students to have a voice that can "roar with clarity" in reference to the inequality that colleges are placing on black students by using the AP Program as criteria for admissions decisions.

Conclusion

Many Black students have to learn in schools where their worth as human beings is never really recognized except during Black History Month. It may be challenging for Black students to develop a positive sense of self, which negatively affects their ability to assess their academic, social, and emotional worth as human beings (Ford & Whiting, 2010). This is the core issue that

professional school counselors must start with when they research why more Black students are not graduating on time, enrolling in AP classes, or showing a greater interest in going to college after high school. These students need be educated with an awareness of their past and present, which then can empower them to share their own voice – the voice that needs to be heard more by not only professionals in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education, but by those professionals that create government policy.

There is an injustice for Black students, or any group of students who have limited-to-no participation in the AP Program experience, when some college admissions is based on the number of AP classes taken in high school, while research finds that AP classes bear little-to-no relationship on how students will perform in college (Geiser & Santelices, 2004). Those Black students who attend high schools where the AP Program is not as readily available as they are to White students in other schools, are at a clear disadvantage and in a "cannot win" scenario. There also has to be consideration for the Black students who are tracked into Special Education or remedial learning groups, where they receive minimum academic training, and do not have the opportunity of moving into more rigorous classes or exhibit any interest of going into an AP classroom. Ford and Grantham (2003) posit that the inconsistency of defining what an intelligent student is causes Black students to be tracked into lower levels of rigor. It is the belief that intelligence is either a function of genetics or the environment that a student is raised in, which leaves the majority of teachers in a position where they would not select a Black student for placement in gifted or advanced courses Ford & Grantham, 2003). Situation like these, continue to highlight the injustice that using the AP program as college admissions criteria presents (Hale, 2007).

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CHAPTER 3

THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK STUDENTS, ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES, AND COLLEGE ADMISSIONS: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY[2]

[2] Brown, J.D. To be submitted to the *Journal of Counseling and Development*.

There is growing research showing that the Advanced Placement (AP) Program has lost some of its uniqueness due to the growing amount of high school students submitting transcripts filled with AP classes. The result is that participation in the AP Program is also less effective at identifying the most ambitious and talented students (Schneider, 2009). The lack of effectiveness has caused critics of the AP Program to note many concerns with its validity and credibility, as well as the availability of the AP program in schools with limited curricular resources (Ackerman, Kanfer, & Calderwood, 2013). This criticism has not derailed the increasing number of colleges and universities from awarding extra incentives to the admission applications of those first year applicants that have completed AP classes in high school. This inherently reduces the admission opportunity of Black students not enrolled in AP classes (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). These incentives are incorporated into the admissions decisions of those students enrolled in the AP Program and increase their chances for college admission. The AP Program is the largest testing program in the world and is administered by The College Board. The examinations are offered in 34 subject areas over a three-hour period that consists of multiple choice sections and free response sections. Based on the examination score, colleges and universities may grant college-level credit or placement to students once they enroll (Brennan, 2010). In 2012, there were 2,099,948 students that registered and sat for the administration of 3,698,407 AP examinations (www.collegeboard.com).

The 2009 annual report from the College Board documented that 14.4% of the graduating class of 2008 was identified as Black, but that population only accounted for 7.8% of the students enrolled in AP courses, in comparison to White students who made up 61% of that graduating class and accounted for 62.6% of the students enrolled in AP classes (Lewin, 2009). The gap in the proportion of Black students enrolled in AP classes, coupled with the increasing

competitiveness of college admissions, provides evidence that educational inequalities imposed on Black students prior to their enrollment into college will adversely affect their post-secondary educational opportunities (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004).

There is both a lack of research and also contradictory research documented on AP students after they have entered college, yet colleges continue to incorporate AP classes into their admission practices (Flowers, 2008; Glenn, 2005; Thompson & Rust 2007). Basing college admission on student's participation in the AP Program can be a huge disservice to Black students that are not enrolled in AP classes. These students can gain the impression that there is not a need for them to apply to certain colleges or universities due to their lack of participation in the AP Program, thus encouraging Black students to make the decision not to apply to a college or university at all, which can adversely affect a their earning power if they decide to drop out of school or attend little-to-no college at all (Flowers, 2008). For instance, past research has identified that education is positively related to employment advancement and salary progression (Hargis, 2006). According to the 2007 Census Bureau, students with some college courses or an associate degree earned 12% more than high school graduates, while those with bachelor's degrees earned 63% more than those with some college or associate degrees (Field, 2009). Prior to that, the annual income of high school graduates was $21,000 compared to college graduates who earned $41,000 annually (Campbell, 2004). Boswell (2004) found that more education has a major effect on the community by increasing tax revenue and productivity, lowering crime rates, and resulting in less reliance on government support, while also increasing improved health, civic participation, and charitable giving.

Flowers (2008) found that, on average, Black students are underrepresented in AP classes when compared to White students and Black students also average a score of 2 on the AP exams

while White students average a score of 3. Findings in the state of Texas identified that Black students were more likely to not participate in the AP Program, versus White students (Klopfenstein, 2004). The previous findings, along with similar research, have guided the purpose of this narrative study to understand the experiences of Black students who are not enrolled in AP classes and their perceptions of how the lack of participation in this program has affected their post-secondary opportunities (Creswell, 2012; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002)).

A Background of Academic Inequities

In 1954 (*Brown v. Board Of Education)*, when the United States (U.S.) Supreme Court ruled that segregating schools was illegal, there was supposed to be a goal that more than 50 years later segregation would be a thing of the past. Education, however, has become more segregated because academic achievement between Blacks and Whites continue to be unequal (Anderson, 2004). There was a closing of the academic gap between Black and White students between the 1970s and 1980s when the test scores of Black students rose, but since 1990, those scores have declined while White students' scores have stayed the same (Anderson, 2004). To assist in helping to close this gap, there have been attempts to cater to the educational needs of Black students by creating alternative schools, but it was found that although most of these schools offer a comfortable environment for students, they are not offering a challenging enough curriculum to improve academics (Kim & Taylor, 2008).

One of the major disputes that has occurred throughout the years related to the academic inequities Black Students face, is whether the lack of performance is caused by genetics or environmental factors. Fritzberg (2001) found that there is a group that believed Black students could just be naturally less intelligent than white students, while others believed that the environment in which Black students are raised and educated has more of an effect on the

academic inequalities. There have been arguments that Black student's own culture is also to blame for the lack of academic improvement (Anderson, 2004). Anderson (2004) found that the blame for Black student's culture could be due to an inherited belief that devalues education, but there are pundits who claim that the diminishing of education could be created from past years of racial inequalities. Hayes (2011) found data which disputes the belief that Black culture does not identify the value of education, when 86% of Black parents in his study had aspirations of seeing their adolescents graduate from college and complete a graduate level degree, thus identifying the value Blacks truly place on education. There is also much research that refutes the devaluing of education through discussions of Black students' ability to be resilient by bouncing back from adverse situations by using positive motivation that is produced through forms of racism and educational inequities (Carter-Andrews, 2012; Singh, Garnett, & Williams, 2012).

Black Students, Advanced Placement, and College Admissions

In 2009, the lack of equal opportunities in education for Black students included the inclusion of AP classes as a determining factor in college admissions. The shortage of equal educational opportunities for Black students is evident in The University of California's ranking of the number of AP classes taken and the grades they receive in those classes as the fourth criterion in their admissions decision. This is a trend that most colleges are also following. With Black students enrolling in AP classes at half the rate of White students, this admissions procedure identifies a definite educational inequity (Klopfenstein, 2004). Parsons (2005) found that Black students' lack of enrollment into AP classes has been attributed to the lack of recommendations by White teachers, who account for 84% of the U.S. teacher workforce. The nation's obsession with high academic standards results in the proliferation of pre-AP and AP

programs continue to exacerbate the issue of Black students not being recommended for advanced courses (Hargrove, 2003).

Another issue that contributes to the low enrollment of Black students in AP classes is the lack of opportunity to be placed in a more rigorous academic curriculum because they are not nominated for placement in gifted programs. Black students are usually tracked to a remedial curriculum where they receive a more watered down version of the subject matter (Whiting & Ford, 2009). Johnson and Kritsonis (2006) found that Black students were twice as likely to be placed on a non-academic track of study that would decrease the rigor of their curriculum. A large number of Black students are also overrepresented in Special Education classrooms, where they are isolated not only from the AP classrooms, but also regular education (Jordan, 2005). Black students seem to be operating on the opposite end of the spectrum from White students, overrepresented in Special Education classes and underrepresented in AP classes. Wehde-Roddiger, Anderson, Arrambide, O'Conor, and Onwuegbuzie (2012) found that when 9th graders are introduced to at least pre-AP classes they gain the confidence and experience necessary to enroll in AP classes later on in their high school careers, but Black students in Special Education are not afforded that opportunity.

Besides the stated lack of opportunities to enroll in AP classes due to academic placement, colleges should also consider that over 40% of the schools in the U.S. do not even offer the AP Program, so Black students applying to colleges from these schools may not have the opportunity to take an AP class. There is also contradicting research that shows some AP curriculums to be diluted and not as challenging at some schools, and follow-up research does not conclude that college students who take AP classes have higher grade point averages (Thomas & Rust, 2007). Colleges can be proactive in assisting with making sure the admissions

process is equitable by discussing amongst their board members if the admissions process is fair by asking how Black students are expected to compete if they are underrepresented in the AP classes (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004).

Using Narrative Inquiry to Understand the Educational Experiences of Black Students

Far too often, research literature that should address the academic issues and needs of Black students either ignores or removes the voices of these students, not allowing them to express needs in their own words (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008). Narrative research is a qualitative approach that is both a product and a method which studies the lived experiences of participants through a series of events as described through the stories or narratives of its participants (Creswell, 2012). Growing numbers of researchers are using narrative research to extract Black students' perceptions of what they need to be academically successful, while also finding the characteristics that make successful Black students resilient (Williams & Portman, 2014). Other researchers have also guided studies covered several issues such as the racial achievement gap, high school transition, the perceptions of attending school as a minority, and the dropout rate, and they all selected a narrative study because of the ability to offer an open forum to gain a feel for the individual experiences of the participants in those studies (Gregory, 2010; Ohrt, Lambie, & Leva, 2009; Ramsey, 2013). Seagraves (2008) found that the existing research regarding Black students and achievement is numerous, but nevertheless, a multitude of these studies are missing the "voice" of the African American student as it specifically relates to their actual educational experiences, achievement, and identity development.

Findings from previous narrative inquiries have suggested that quantitative studies can provide the numbers to identify where the achievement gap is between Black and White students, but those numbers cannot give educators concrete ideas on how to correct or change

their teaching methods to foster better teaching experiences for both teachers and Black students (Tucker, 2009). There is the goal that, through narrative findings, the "voices" of these students can dispel false preconceptions and decrease discipline and behavior problems, while also increasing the graduation rate, empowering the marginalized black student, increasing the stronger learning identities, and closing the achievement gap between black and white students (Milner, 2007). There is also the benefit to the participant, who has the opportunity and time to reflect on their past experiences and to create meaning from their own personal story (Sales, Merrill, & Fivush, 2013). To assist participants with exploring and reflecting on their stories, Williams and Portman (2014) suggest using probing questions that (a) encourage participants to concentrate on specific points, (b) check for more detail or clarification, and (c) test the validity of a more general response and seek evidence, thus forcing the participants to reflect.

Taliaferro and DeCuir-Gunby (2008) implored future researchers to use narrative inquiry to study not only the Black students and parents who do not take AP classes, but also those who do participate in the AP Program:

> Researchers committed to equal opportunity and operational citizenship must expand the discourse to include the voices of students and parents. Often the voices of African American students are glaringly absent from achievement discourse. To adequately address the many dimensions of this issue, it is necessary to explore the perspective of students both qualified and unqualified for AP courses. (p. 182)

Henfield et al., (2008) encouraged using narrative inquiry but also gave recommendations that suggest professional school counselors and teachers aggressively pursue rapport-building activities in an attempt to develop relationships that are comfortable enough for students to share

their voices with their educators. This level of comfort is very important when research is based on Black male students, who were found by Marsh, Chaney and Jones (2012) to put on a "cool pose" to mask their personal feelings – another form of Black males silencing their voices.

A narrative tradition was selected for this study to allow the researcher a greater opportunity to capture an in-depth understanding of the voices and experiences of those Black students that were not enrolled in AP classes (Creswell, 2012). Critical Race Theory (CRT) was selected for this study in an attempt to illuminate and bring life to the lost voices of those same Black students that have gone unrecognized and unacknowledged (Yosso, 2005). The following research question guided this narrative inquiry: What are the post-secondary educational experiences of Black college students who do not participate in their high school AP Program?

Method

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry continues to be embraced by educational scholars because this research tradition gives researchers the opportunity to explore the experiences of students by allowing them a forum to construct personal stories into direct expressions of their lived experiences (Anderson & Anderson, 2012). Narrative inquiry, when used as a research tradition within an educational setting, invites the participants to use their voices to critically think and self-reflect on their narratives related to a phenomenon (Chan, 2012). The opportunity for the participant to think critically allows the researcher to analyze the narratives in much more in depth and to reveal the commonalities between individual life experiences. This also provides another chance for the narratives to illuminate themes and experiences that were previously unknown about individuals or groups (Brooks, 2012). Prior qualitative research has identified three indicators that assist in making meaning out of the narratives that are told: (1) narratives have to be

comprehensible and coherent; (2) knowledge of the language and the expressions that are used; and (3) reflective insight that assist in connecting the events to the past and sense of self (Sales, Merrill, & Fivush, 2013)

The narrative stories of the participants in this study were important because they let the researcher consider how the events, actions, and experiences of not taking AP classes related to their perceptions by giving their stories meaning (Steihaug & Malterud, 2008). The meanings that were interpreted from the participant's stories allowed the researcher to identify salient themes from the participant's experiences in being educated without the use of the AP Program. The goal is that the findings from this study will assist in ending the previously stated college admissions inequity by empowering the participants to share their stories. The narrative research tradition encouraged the participants to freely voice their own intense experiences, thus allowing the researcher to bring these stories to life and assist in breaking the stereotypes that lead students to rejecting education (Knaus, 2009).

Critical Race Theory

CRT was the lens used to interpret the data in this study, as the tenets of CRT bring specific awareness to how education and curriculum can be affected by racial/ethnical related issues, such as the achievement gap between Black and White students, and how the U.S. has struggled with educational microaggressions for several years (Knaus, 2009). CRT emphasizes the importance of listening to the counter-narratives of marginalized groups to identify microaggressions (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This study believes the use of AP classes as admissions criteria can be understood as a microaggression considering that all students should have equal access to education in the U. S. (Malagon, 2010). Malagon (2010) defined microaggressions as subtle gestures that can navigate below the country's educational system's

radar. It is the goal that this study spotlight the inequality that is still at hand. The primary researcher believes that CRT, coupled with a narrative inquiry, assisted in identifying the central themes. These themes helped in interpreting the meanings of social life through researching historical problems of struggle with the dominant ideology, to then focus attention on how race is important in college admissions (Creswell, 2012).

The additional importance of viewing this study through CRT acknowledges that in society there are still hierarchies that encourage rich over poor, men over women, and Whites over Blacks (Ladson-Billings, 2009). These hierarchies can play themselves out as discourses in the educational system and be representative of the majority culture (White) without any consideration of the minority culture (Black) that also participate in that system (Jordan, 2005). CRT can help identify some of these discourses that camouflage themselves as "invisible" standards set forth by "whiteness" or "white privilege," which all affect the environment in which Black students are educated (Parsons, 2005). CRT is an appropriate lens to view qualitative research in education because the laws and policies that govern this country are supposed to be racially neutral, although racial injustices continue to reproduce and maintain the racial inequalities that promote white supremacy (Malagon, 2010). CRT posits that race, and the meaning of race, is socially constructed, so researchers cannot ignore how powerful it is to human social life. So the majority of the researchers that employ this thinking make it explicit their concern to confront injustices (Henfield et al., 2008). Kohli and Solorzano (2012) encouraged more researchers to adopt the thought process associated with CRT in an attempt to be better equipped to understand the complexities of racism so that language can be given to the voices of Black students.

Specifically, CRT proposes that instances of racial bias are not exceptions to regular human behavior, but rather they are the norm (Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009). The application of CRT allows the voices of former high school students to provide a narrative of how the structure of the AP Program assists with the oppression of the American education system (Knaus, 2009). Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) used CRT in a similar study that investigated the unequal access to and enrollment in AP classes for Latina/o and Black students. Their findings led them to identify the practice of colleges adding additional points to the applications of students with AP classes as a microaggression. The goal of this study is to use participants' stories to identify and bring to light the five tenets of CRT as they apply to education by explaining how; (1) racism is essential in how society in the U.S. has been developed; (2) thus allowing those claims of equal rights to be challenged; so that (3) we are able to gain more support for social justice; (4) this then allows the high school experiences of Black students to become the priority; which (5) will assist in detailing with how these students can be excluded from experiencing many of the benefits of living in the U.S., such as attending college (Evans-Winter & Hoff, 2011; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004).

Participants

The goal of using narrative inquiry for this study was to listen to the voices of the participants to obtain a rich description of their experience with college admissions after not participating in a high school AP Program (Johnson & Christensen, 2013; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). The participants in this study were self-identified as Black or African-American high school graduates, were between 18 – 24 years of age, had enrolled in an institution for post-secondary education for at least one semester, and had not taken any AP class while in high school.

Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants with the specified characteristics, along with snowball sampling as the eligible participants were asked to identify other potential participants who matched the same characteristics (Johnson & Christensen, 2013). The sampling procedures produced 12 eligible participants with the first six volunteers participating in the individual semi-structured interviews, and the final volunteers participating as members of the six-person focus group. Potential participants were screened by phone to determine their eligibility for the study and invitations to join the study were offered to all volunteers that met eligibility requirements. To acknowledge any ethical issues, an informed consent document was created and provided to all volunteers. Prior to having potential participants sign the consent form to participate, the purpose of the study, procedures, and consent form were explained to each eligible person volunteering for the study (Creswell, 2012).

The participants in the individual semi-structured interviews were four women and two men who all attended different high schools and post-secondary institutions located on the east coast. Three of the participants were currently enrolled and taking classes at different points in their major, two of the participants had already completed their degree requirements and graduated from a post-secondary institution, and the last participant was not enrolled during the time of the study and had not completed degree requirements. The six-person focus group was made up of four men and two women who all attended the same post-secondary institution located in a southeastern state, but attended different high schools located in the southeast. Three of the focus group participants were due to complete their degree requirements and graduate at the end of the semester following the study, while the final three participants were at different points in completing their degree requirements. Two of the final three participants had attended

the same 4-year college the entire time, while the final one had taken some time off and returned back to the same college.

Table 1: Demographic Information

Participant	Age	Gender	High School Type	College Type	College Enrollment Status
Ash	21	Female	Public	4-year, Private to Public	3rd year
Bre	24	Female	Public	4-year, Private, Historically Black	Graduated, Bachelors
Brian	19	Male	Public	2-year, Public	2nd year
Etna	23	Female	Public	4-year, Public	Graduated, Masters
Jen	24	Female	Private	4-year, Private, Historically Black	Unenrolled
Jon	23	Male	Public	4-year, Public	5th year
Pal	20	Male	Public	2-year, Public	2nd year
Shauna	22	Female	Private	4-year, Public	4th year
Tania	22	Female	Public	4-year, Public	4th year
Timmy	21	Male	Public	4-year, Public	4th year
Tony	19	Male	Public	4-year, Public	3rd year
Ty	23	Male	Public	4-year, Public	5th year

Procedure

The study was structured using two forms of data collection. The study started with two semi-structured interviews with each of the six initial respondents, and ended with a six-person

focus group interview. The semi-structured interview questions were constructed as open-ended study-specific questions that allowed the participants to share their stories. The open-ended questions gave the researcher the insider perspective needed to facilitate the study by allowing the respondents to reply in a more expansive manner (Chenail, 2011).

Approvals from the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) at the University of Georgia were obtained before the study started and participants were recruited. Prior to their participation in the study, volunteers underwent an eligibility screening by phone to verify that they met the sampling criteria of being a high school graduate, that they had not taken any AP classes, that they identified as Black or African-American, and that they had enrolled in college after high school. After meeting eligibility requirements, participants were presented with an informed consent form to acknowledge that their rights as participants were protected. The informed consent form identified the primary researcher, sponsoring institution, sampling procedures, purpose of the study, benefits of participating, their level of involvement, risks involved, confidentiality procedures, notification that they could withdraw at any time, and the names of people they could contact if they had questions (Creswell, 2013). Attached to the informed consent was a list of counseling and career services resources that potential participants could refer to if there was any emotional discomfort. To protect each participant's confidentiality, interviews were transcribed using a pseudonym to identify each person. During the focus group interviews, the primary researcher also reviewed confidentiality procedures with the group of participants. $25 gift cards were given to the participants involved in the two semi-structured interviews and $10 gift cards to those participating in the focus groups as incentives to participate in the study.

Semi-structured interview protocol. The researcher conducted two individual 45-60 minute semi-structure interviews with each of the first six respondents. The interview was guided using open-ended questions. Each interview was audio recorded in full, including three that were done over the phone. Williams and Portman (2014) suggest that through student voice initiatives, there is an opportunity to foster educational change by asking Black students what they need to achieve academic success. A semi-structured interview was the chosen method for this study because of the interest in understanding the lived experiences of the participants and the meaning they made of that experience (Seidman, 2012). Using the research team, questions were developed around the central question, which was composed by creating a broad question centered on the experiences of Black students and the AP Program (Creswell, 2013). The central question and sub-questions were used to create a set of standardized open-ended interview questions based on research findings that identified barriers affecting Black students. These Barriers were the lack of partnerships and information shared between the school and Black families and findings that educators were less likely to identify Black students for placement in AP classes (Creswell, 2013; Ford & Whiting, 2007; Henfield et al., 2008; Johnson & Christensen, 2013). With a list of questions already developed, the interview was structured using an interview guide approach and conducted in one 45-60 minute session with a goal of allowing the participants time to reconstruct and reflect upon their experiences within the context of their lives (Johnson & Christensen, 2013; Seidman, 2012). Due to time constraints, the three-interview series was reduced down to only two sessions, but Seidman (2012) suggested this exploration as long as participants are allowed the appropriate time to reflect on their experiences.

After the first round of interviews, the second set of standardized open-ended interview questions were developed using similar procedures to the first set of questions, with the addition of the feedback the primary researcher and research team obtained from coding the transcripts of the first interviews (Johnson & Christensen, 2013). The final round of interviews were also conducted with each participant in one 45-60 minute session. All interviews were conducted in public locations that were conveniently located in close proximity to the participant and where audio recording was appropriate (Creswell, 2012).

Focus group interview protocol. The second type of data collection was done in the form of one 60-90 minute focus group interview with the six remaining respondents to create a homogeneous group that would promote discussion (Johnson & Christensen, 2013). The focus group followed the same interview guide approach used in the semi-structured interviews, hoping to identify the stories and experiences of those participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2013). The structure of the focus group interview was different as the primary researcher conducted warm-up activities with the participants to assist in helping the group gain some rapport with each other and ease into the interview (Williams & Portman, 2014). With the focus group interview being conducted after both rounds of the semi-structured interviews were completed, the research team decided to combine both sets of questions used in round one and round two of the semi-structured interviews.

The focus group interview was held in an apartment on the campus of a four-year college located in the southeast. The participants for the focus group were gathered via snowball sampling, as the seventh participant was able to identify five other participants on campus that met eligibility requirements. Prior to asking the interview questions, but after the rapport

building activities, the primary researcher reviewed a confidentiality statement with the group, requesting that what was said in the group remained there (Seidman, 2012).

Researcher as an instrument and primary researcher biases. The researcher functioned as the instrument in this study, as he was the primary source of data collection. The researcher was a Black male that had worked as a professional school counselor at multiple high schools in a southeastern state. Two members of the study attended the same high school where the researcher was employed, meaning the researcher and participants had developed a personal relationship prior to the study. The researcher was also very knowledgeable about the AP Program and the college admissions process, due to his own placement and participation in the program while in high school. The researcher also participated in the annual placement of high school students into the AP Program and assisted seniors with the college application process each year. There are also several college admissions information sessions that the researcher attended each year as a means to gain knowledge on the new procedures of college admissions. The researcher had experience working with both those high school students who participated and those who did not participate in the AP Program. The researcher conducted all interviews and observations in this study as a means to use the knowledge, perspective, and subjectivity to acquire detailed information from the participants and to compile data that illuminates the concern for using the AP Program as criterion for college admissions (Barrett, 2007).

The primary researcher's major bias in this study was his current position as a high school professional school counselor who does not believe that students have to be involved in the AP Program to successfully earn a college degree, observed through experiences as a professional school counselor for over 10 years. These experiences were silenced while acting as the main instrument for data collection during the face-to-face interviews, allowing the primary

researcher to remain in the role of interviewer to obtain reliable data. Being mindful of how researcher bias can affect different aspects of the study, the primary researcher discussed the formulation of the interview questions with the research team, as Chenail (2011) suggested that it takes training and practice to develop open-ended questions. As these questions were the hallmark of the study, and could cause the largest challenge to instrument rigor and bias management, which can jeopardize the quality of the study, it was important that they be correct (Seidman, 2012).

In an attempt to create a form of transparency, the primary researcher maintained a reflexive audio journal throughout the study to acknowledge that his own values, beliefs, and experiences were a part of the research (Ortlipp, 2008). Reflexivity made the primary researcher aware that his writings and interpretation were based in the cultural, social, gender, class, and political makeup that he brought to the study (Creswell, 2012). The goal of the reflexive journal was to make these concerns visible to the researcher, participants, and the reader (Ortlipp, 2008).

The primary researcher came into this study with the belief that it is an inequity for Black students who do not participate in the AP Program to be evaluated for college admission based on the number of AP classes taken. The primary researcher also believed that AP classes are much more rigorous than a normal college curriculum, so it is difficult to understand why black students would be judged on an AP Program that is more rigorous than the college's classes to which they are trying to gain entrance. The researcher believed that the AP Program's effect on college admissions will not only discourage Black students from applying to college, it will also discourage any other students who are not involved in the program, regardless of their racial/ethnic background.

Research team as instrument and biases. The research team consisted of the author and primary researcher, along with two other individuals who work as professional school counselors. Two members of the research team had completed their Ph.D. in Counseling and Student Personnel Services with a Focus in Counselor Education and Supervision. The primary researcher and each of the research team members were all enrolled in the same Ph.D. program that was grounded in the values of social justice. The first member of the team was a heterosexual White female who was a high school department chair of counseling at a high where the majority of the students were White. She and the primary researcher had previously worked in the same high school where there had been several conversations based on AP Program course offerings. The second member of the research team was a gay Black male who worked as a professional high school counselor at a high school where the majority of the students were Black, and he also works as an adjunct college professor. Both research team members were acting as the primary test coordinator for their school's AP Program. This entails ordering the correct number of exams from College Board, scheduling where the exam will be administered, and identifying test proctors to administer the exam to students.

Each member of the research team had previously participated in the AP program when they were enrolled in high school, and as professional school counselors had attended AP Program workshops sponsored by The College Board. These workshops offered information on course offerings, changes to the AP Program, and new statistics gathered by The College Board in reference to the number of AP exams completed and scoring. Prior to the initial participant interview the research team met to discuss reflexivity by identifying individual and group biases, values, and personal background that may shape their interpretations formed during the study (Creswell, 2013). Based on initial discussions all three team members believed that it was an

inequity to evaluate college admissions on AP Program participation, when all high school students do not have equal access to AP classes. At this initial meeting, the primary researcher started a reflexive journal that he used to make entries throughout the study until it was complete and all data was analyzed. During each meeting thereafter, the research team discussed reflexivity as it applied to past and present biases, values, or issues that were either discovered or developed during the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary form of data collection was the previously stated semi-structured individual and focus group interviews. The participants were first offered consent forms to obtain their permission to be involved in the study and to inform them of the researcher's purpose with the study, with the goal that this would assist in building rapport (Creswell, 2012). After the consent forms were collected from participants, the research team reconvened to discuss the open-ended interview questions that were used during each of the study. Once there was a set of questions that were agreed upon by the team, one team member used the questions to interview the primary researcher, thus putting him in role of participant. This technique is referred to as "*interviewing the interviewer*" and assisted the research team and the primary researcher in developing the questions, and how they are delivered to the participants (Chenail, 2011). After discussing the interview process, the research team then made any needed adjustments to the first set of interview questions.

The primary researcher conducted the first round of individual interviews and the focus group interview using an electronic audio recorder to document the interview. After the first-round of data was collected, the interviews were transcribed word-for-word by the primary researcher in an effort to know the interview better and then given to the research team along

with a copy of the audio recording (Seidman, 2012). The research team individually reviewed and organized both the transcript and audio recordings to identify salient themes and terms that arose during their analysis of the data, which is referred to as coding (Creswell, 2013). Coding was done manually as the primary researcher and research team individually read through each transcript line-by-line, writing descriptive terms or phrases in the right hand margin next to each segment of the text, and then a master list of inductive codes was generated from the combination of descriptive terms and phrases recorded on the transcripts (Johnson & Christensen, 2013). The primary researcher also made entries into a reflexive audio journal before and after each interview that was performed. The research team reviewed and examined the reflexive audio journal entries to identify any researcher bias that needed to be exposed so that these biases could not go unchecked and adversely affect the study (Chenail, 2011; Creswell, 2012; Creswell, 2013).

The research team reconvened for a third time to compare and discuss the master lists that were generated from the initial interviews, as well as any reflexivity. Team members cross-checked one another's coding by comparing their individual results, based on an intercoder agreement that another coder would code the same passage with the same or similar code at least 80% of the time to also assist with intercoder reliability (Creswell, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2013). Using another intercoder agreement that 100% of the research team members agreed with the code, it was added to a master list for the study, which combined each list created from all interviews analyzed. Based on a discussion of the data collected and analyzed from the initial interviews, the second round of open-ended questions was developed by the group. When the second-round of interview questions were complete, the primary researcher

was interviewed again using the "*interviewing the interviewer*" technique. The research team then made any needed adjustments to the second set of interview questions.

The second round of interviews began following the same protocol as the first-round of semi-structured individual and focus group interviews. The data collected in this round of interviews was also transcribed and given to the members of the research team along with a copy of the audio recordings. Team members were asked to first analyze and code this new data following the same procedures as they used after the initial round of interviews. The research team then met for a fourth time to review and cross-check their analysis of the second-round of interviews, where all master lists were combined into one list of codes, as was done in the previous meeting (Creswell, 2012; Creswell, 2013). This meeting also included discussions and comparisons of both master lists created. Using an intercoder agreement of 100% agreement, both master lists were reduced and combined into one list of salient themes that were all interpreted for their meaning and depth (Creswell, 2013). This meeting also contained a discussion on reflexivity and a review of the primary researcher's reflexive journal to identify any biases, values, and background that shaped their interpretations of the study as a whole (Creswell, 2013).

The feedback, data, and themes that were generated by the research team were provided in a summarized report to the participants as a form of member checking to analyze the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012). Member checking was initiated by phone, with the option being offered to meet in person to any participant that requested a meeting. None of the study's participants requested a final meeting to review the findings.

Trustworthiness

The primary researchers use as an instrument for the study presents the greatest threat to trustworthiness, so to reduce that threat to the authenticity of the study, the primary researcher put the research team in place to challenge him by making sure that the appropriate time was spent on the preparation for the study and that the reflexivity of both the primary researcher and the research team was discussed. This team concept allowed the opportunity for triangulation and peer evaluation (Chenail, 2011). The availability of the research team members also provided the opportunity to perform the interview the interviewer technique and evaluate the researcher's reflexive audio journal to identify issues with trustworthiness.

Findings

The primary researcher and along with the research team identified four themes in this narrative study: (1) lacking information about AP, (2) perceptions that AP classes were too stressful, (3) college was an easy transition, and (4) "If only I would have known about AP, I might have made different choices." Additionally, the researchers identified two sub-themes embedded in the findings: (a) lack of encouragement directly linked to lacking information about AP and (b) lack of motivation closely relating to perceptions that AP classes were beyond their abilities.

Lacking Information about AP

When asked about the lack of participation in the AP Program, participants expressed concern with not having enough information about the program to make an informed decision on if they should have taken an AP class or not. Participants referred to the program as being confusing and indicating that they were not sure how to register to take AP classes. This concern was reiterated by many of the participants as Ash (21 years old) who attended a public high

school, and is attending a public 4-year university after transferring from a private 4-year university mentioned:

> Um, I remember that all the smart kids would talk about AP's all the time, and um, everyone would talk about how they got a 3, 4, or 5, and I didn't know what it meant because I was not in any AP classes. I was confused. I was like I got a 90 on my Math test. Yeah, I didn't know what the 4's and 5's were. I thought it was crazy, like would you want a 4 on a test?

Etna (23 years old) who graduated from a 4-year university in the Southeast in five years with a Bachelors and two Masters degrees, made the statement that even as late as junior and senior year she was never given detailed information about the AP Program. The lack of information given to Etna did not provide her enough to go on when making a decision about what classes she would take throughout her high school career:

> Yeah, I started making that connection, but obviously at that point it was too late to go into the class. At that point I still didn't realize that not taking the class could hinder me in college admissions. We never had meetings where they told us about the importance of rigor. No one ever talked about that.

Timmy (21 years old) a former basketball player who attended a high school that was outside of his district, suggested the same confusion:

> I mean I knew there was some benefit to taking [AP] them, I just didn't know what the benefit was. It wasn't clear. It was like if you want to know about it, you got to come find out. In my opinion, I think they should have come into every class, and take like 5 minutes out of the class period just to explain the program to the students in homeroom or something. If someone would have explained what AP was, I might have taken them,

> because it seemed liked everyone who had taken AP knew where they was going to college early on. I felt like mine came really, really late. I didn't find out until June after graduation, but the people that took AP classes were quick to get acceptance letters. Everyone in my [graduating] class that took AP, they knew where they were going in February and March, way before graduation.

Participants felt as though having some understanding of the background information on the AP Program and its benefits could have altered their decision to take AP, because it could possibly affect their college admissions process as previously mentioned by Timmy. The concerns of not being informed about the AP Program that were voiced by participants tie right into tenets of CRT, where if everyone is educated equally, why were these students not informed about AP? Was the lack of information due to the traditional school culture, where only "certain" students were informed about AP? Shauna (22 years old) attended a majority White high school where most White students were told about AP. Shauna questioned if students in AP also received additional knowledge about college admissions and preparation when she said:

> I honestly do believe that there was something else going on in there. Maybe I was paranoid, but they did more work with the counselors, and if you were in AP, you were in AP everything! Even if you did terrible you got to stay the whole year, so how am I failing and you know. It really got bad when senior year hit and everybody was looking for schools to go to, and then they were like I'm going to this school, or I'm going to that school. Then they were like did you get in anywhere? I was like I don't know, but if I was in AP and would have known that it would help with getting into college, I would have done that, but I didn't get to have that decision, because it really wasn't told to me.

> So when I got to my senior year I always wondered was there something told to them, that wasn't told to me.

Etna had similar feelings of missing out on information that could have affected her college decisions:

> But as the little kid that I was, with no knowledge, I still wouldn't have taken it [AP]. Obviously with me knowing what it could have led to, would have forced me to take them [AP] because now I might have been able to get into Emory or go to college outside of the state! I would have felt like the world was open to me with that knowledge. But not having it, made me feel like why do I need that?

Similar statements and feedback led to a sub-theme about the lack of information provided to students about the AP Program and participants expressed the feeling that there was a lack of encouragement from school personnel.

When further explaining their lack of participation in the AP Program, only three of the 12 participants shared that they were offered placement in their high school's AP Program. Others said that there was no mention of joining the AP Program at their high school, which prompted a conversation about the lack of encouragement from their teachers and counselors. Etna said that she can remember as far back as 5th grade when she was asked, "What are you going to do?" which she perceived to be her 5th grade teacher questioning her ability to do anything. The lack of encouragement followed Etna who has self-described low self-esteem, into high school as she shared:

> I just felt like, someone must have talked to them about this class and they didn't talk to me, so clearly they thought they were above me, or academically, or whatever. And a lot of that is what has pushed me to do what I have done academically throughout high

> school. Oh [Etna] she is smart enough to be an honors student, but not AP. Like I remember um, you know like the senior superlatives, ours was voted on by teachers. So teachers who would be most likely to succeed. Well I was ranked 3rd in my class and still didn't get a recommendation. They chose 6 girls and 6 boys.

Etna, who also attend school in a public school system that enrolled a majority of White students, seemed to be overlooked by teachers the entire time she was in school prior to enrolling in college. There is a chance that Etna's teachers had some deficit thinking that caused them to not consider encouraging her, thus continuing the thinking of the dominant ideologies (Evans-Winter & Hoff, 2011). Ash who describes herself as smart, but not "super" smart, found that her decision to participate in the AP Program may have been different with some encouragement and knowledge of the program as she remarked:

> I guess I thought that if you belong in AP class someone would tell you and be like, 'Hey you want to take AP,' and that never happened to me, so I never like went out and asked to take an AP class.

There were other participants, like Ash, who were not sure what their outcome could have been with some form of encouragement from school staff. As Bre, a 24 years old graduate of a private historically Black university also expressed:

> I wasn't pushed by my counselor, my academic advisor that picked my classes. I was pushed by my parents, but I really didn't listen to them, I just went to school because I had to. Um teachers really didn't push me either. High school just wasn't very challenging, you know, it was like let me just go and get by so I can go on to the next thing. So a lot of times teachers just did the work for you.

During the focus group Shauna who was planning on graduating that semester, had similar feedback when she stated:

> I don't really remember anyone like advertising it to us, so there for I felt like okay, the perception was that the teachers really see potential in [AP students] them to do well and succeed versus the rest of us.

Tony (19 years old) a former basketball player, who is majoring in engineering, followed Shauna's statement by telling a story about how a basketball teammate of his was embarrassed by their coach. When the teammate made it known that he was taking AP classes, their coach said, "You are taking AP classes? What are you a nerd?" Tony said that this reaction from his coach had a major impact on him not taking an AP class during high school. The lack of information and encouragement had an impact on the participants' perceptions that AP classes were only stressful and not worth dealing with the trouble.

Perceptions that AP Classes were too Stressful

Many of the participants expressed that most of the information they gathered about the AP Program was through the conversations and observations of their classmates who were in AP classes. These classmates expressed feelings that the classes were hard and very stressful. When prompted to discuss their first memories of their high school's AP Program, most participants immediately referred to the rigor and stress that was involved in taking AP classes. There were no initial discussions about any of the benefits that the AP Program offers in regards to college admissions and meeting college degree requirements, which relates back to the lack of information imparted upon these former high school students. Brian a 21 year old professional dancer whose initial response centered on this concern for stress levels, when asked what he remembered about AP classes, he said:

> Uh, kids were stressed with AP classes and they would be running around the hallway trying to do all of their homework and talk about how the teacher always gives them a lot of work. It was stressful on kids who took those [AP] classes, so all I heard were negative things most of my high school career. I wouldn't want to take them just because of the work load and how the teachers would stress them about everything that they are learning, and yeah, it just didn't sound fun at all… AP classes wouldn't have shown me how to uh, enjoy anything, and I didn't want stress.

Brian went as far as to make the statement that, "AP students could not think for themselves," and were only able to follow the directions of the teachers:

> My perception was they wanted to do a lot more than what they could handle. They wanted to better themselves by doing what the teacher told them to do and not what they wanted to do. Um, they couldn't necessarily think for themselves. Some could think for themselves, but the majority I don't think so, because they would always complain and stress about everything.

The concern with the level of stress associated with AP classes was an issue that was prevalent with all 12 of the participants in the study. Bre's first response was:

> I never really saw the importance of it. I just told my counselor that I didn't want to take it and she said, 'Okay.' And I didn't want to apply myself because it seemed hard. Everyone said, 'It's so hard, but it is so good for college.' As an African-American woman I wasn't feeling pushed to do better for myself and take AP classes. They just took whatever answer I gave them and on to the next person down the line who needed to be advised for classes.

In the focus group, there was almost a snowball effect of agreement as Jon (23 years old) who is a former football player at the #1 public high school in a state in the Southeast, and is currently a music producer stated, "The only people that I heard that took it, they just said that it was really stressful, and to me I already had a lot of things to do in high school, so I didn't want to add more stress, so I didn't take it." Timmy had similar thoughts:

> I didn't take any AP classes, but I did take a couple of honors classes and I realized that this amount of work is pushing on top of sports and things like that, so I didn't want any more stress on my plate. Plus I was out of my district and had to commute to school every day so that was time that I did not have… Another thing that I didn't particularly care for was the fact that it took so much extra studying outside of normal schooling, and you had to pay for the test, that was going to be three times as hard as anything else that you are doing.

The amount of concern over the stress and rigor of AP classes identified the sub-theme of participants lacking motivation to participate in the AP Program. This lack of motivation was another form of them closing the door on even considering taking an AP class, as Jon shared:

> I remember they offered for me to take some AP classes, and it was a sheet that I think I had to get approved by some um, teachers. I first went around to get it approved and one teacher was like, 'You know you are going to have to do a lot of work?' and I was like um, okay, never mind, and that was it.

Tony had similar feedback:

> Teachers told me to take AP classes, but I heard that junk was too stressful. So I decided let me get my A's in this and I will be able to get into college somewhere. That was my mindset.

Bre actually went into an AP class for one day, and after hearing feedback from the teacher on the workload, changed her mind about taking the class:

> I actually did sign up for an AP course, and I dropped it after one day because I said I am not about to write all these extra papers, and read these extra books. I remember the teacher saying the only thing different between AP and your regular class is the amount of papers you write. So I was like I don't need to be in here just to write an extra paper a week, so I dropped it and decided not to even take it. I didn't even get past the syllabus.

Tania (22 years old) who was also planning to graduate at the end of the semester believed that her status in high school was balanced, and felt like there was not a need to add on any other responsibilities that could affect her ability to be a good student, thus causing her to not consider taking an AP class:

> I didn't want to put that on myself, the real intelligent people who already got they scholarships to Tech and all, were struggling just to get B's, and I was stressed enough trying to get my B's and A's. I felt like I was going to get an F or something.

This unmotivated feeling, for some, affected their self-esteem as Shauna stated:

> Well I just know that observing of the people taking AP, they were more so concerned with having the advantage in their future and the college in their future, and as a student or person not in [AP] it, it's like damn, I'm dumb.

Etna shared similar feelings, as she remembered not being selected to go into the AP Program:

> Yes, and I still feel like I struggle with that now, but yes it actually started in 10th grade when they parted us off saying that these people were AP worthy and these others not so much, so you go over here with these people.

Taking another look at this study through the lens of CRT gives the picture that this was the dominant ideology saying, "You are Black and this is not for you." At the time that these participants were in high school, did they ever think that this could be a form of oppression similar to slave masters not allowing slaves to learn how to read and write as a way to have them remain submissive (Beyer, 2010)? The lack of involvement in their high school's AP Program did not prevent any of the study's participants from attending college, as during the study nine of them were currently enrolled in a post-secondary institution. The final group had two college graduates of institutions located on the east coast, and one who had been enrolled, but was not taking classes at the time of her participation in the study.

College was an Easy Transition

In discussing their academic college experiences, participants offered feedback that the transition for them to a college curriculum was a relatively easy one. Some participants, such as Jen (24 years old) who attended a historically black university, but had recently taken time off to care for her ill grandmother, felt as though college was less challenging than high school:

> Yeah, oh yeah. From going from high school to college, when I got to college is where I felt less challenged. When I left high school the new principal wanted to be #1 in academic and sports, so he pushed everyone to do this, and when I went back they were in line to be #1.

Ash had similar reports of college not being more challenging than high school during her first three years there:

> Well, I came to [the university] in the fall of 2012, so I have been here for two and a half semesters, and pretty much all of the semesters have been super easy, which is why I mainly felt like it was high school, and this is the first semester that I am actually getting

> into my core classes, so I am actually having to learn how to study three years later…so it is a little harder, but I am getting used to it. And my major is going to be really hard, so I need to get used to it anyway.

Brian felt as though he was well prepared for college even without participating in the AP Program, and spoke in high regard for how well his high school prepared him for his transition to college academia:

> Well my high school really did well prepare everybody I think, including myself for college. It really wasn't a bad transition, and it was actually pretty easy, and classes are small sizes, you know, like 20 kids a class, teachers are great. People there are great, I just enjoy being on campus and talking to my friends and sometimes I will even go talk to the teachers depending on if I like that teacher or not, but the majority of them I do. It's fun! I'm not stressed out, I don't put too much on my plate, and it's good. More one-on-one than one-on-three, which helps me understand things a lot better and more.

Tania did not discuss the level of challenge between high school and college, but she brought awareness to the improved difference in her performance once she got to college:

> I feel like in high school overall I just wasn't that great of a student, so I don't even think that AP would have been offered to me and wasn't right for me, but once I got to college it was like a completely different situation. Now I am like at the top of the class, getting into the nursing program, and I just really, I don't know it's like my high school and college are completely different stories.

Now that Pal (20 years old) a former special education student that attended a public high school, was in college and successfully moving through his major, he made it known that he did not see

the importance of the AP Program because it was not affecting his ability to be successful at his current college:

> My college experience is really not that bad, I think once you get into college it all becomes the same, I don't really think AP and on level even matters any more. I think you are starting with a clean slate, so whatever work you do, is the work you are going to get judged for, so really AP doesn't really matter now.

Pal's previous statement raised concerns, as he was still uninformed about any of the benefits of AP, and believed that not knowing about the AP program did not affect him, relating to the submissive slave mentality where he was clueless about how he could have used those benefits because he was never told.

Other participants identified instructors that were very encouraging and impactful in their transition to college academics, which challenged their thinking and the way they went about digesting their college curriculum. Etna raved about an instructor that unknowingly helped her with her self-esteem issues that carried over from high school, as she stated:

> Yes, that [self-esteem] question was still there, and then I took an African-American studies class that was essay driven, and English was always my lowest grade, granted I never had a B, but they were always on the border line 90s and 91s. So I've always thought I was a horrible writer, and never thought I was that good of a writer. Well my African-American studies teacher was an English professor at UFC also, so he was like, 'Your writing is phenomenal, why don't you speak like this?' He just really made me realize, and I got an A in that class, okay if I am able to make an A in his class, I should be able to make As elsewhere. And after that I only made a couple of Bs here and there. I just didn't think I could do it because everyone said to expect your college grades to be

> 10 points lower than high school. So I was like since I didn't have this AP preparation, I don't have these study skills, so I was worried that my whole four years would be this way until I took his class. I ended up with a 3.74 GPA - I didn't even think I could graduate with honors let alone magna. I was like, it blew my mind how much one class could turn my life around, but I don't think it was the class, I think it was the professor because he challenged me, but he also gave me credit where credit was due.

Jen who made it known that she would not be returning to her university, also had an instructor that not only changed her academic outlook, but also changed her outlook on life, even though she had to leave college to be a primary care-giver for her grandmother who had health concerns:

> I loved my high school. It was the college where I was like, 'This is it?' Like I didn't have to challenge myself at all. And it may be like high school where some classes are supposed to be more challenging than others, so there must be different levels to college classes, because some classes I took were challenging. Like Dr. Jones' class. He challenges his students and I love his class because he teaches you on the same level that they would teach you at Yale and Harvard. When I was in his class I made sure I turned in my best work because I wanted to live up to his high expectations he set for us, but in my other classes I could care less because I knew I could BS and I knew I would pass. Like if I know that you are going to pass me, why should I challenge myself? I need to be challenged, so if you don't give me a challenge I am not going to challenge myself. One day when I am successful I will be able to say that he was the huge impact in my life for the road that I took. I didn't go back to college, but I will really want to go back there and thank him, because he is really the reason why I changed my major. Even going back to high school I can count the teachers on one hand who impacted my life and he is #1. I

> wish he taught all of the business classes there because I would have taken all of them. I would have still changed my major, but I would have taken his classes because he is just that powerful. His purpose was to make sure that you knew that life was not going to coddle you, and life is not going to do any of that, and that is kind of what my high school did as well. He told us that yeah, you might be black and you are going to have different experiences, but don't let that stop you. He was very, very powerful.

Bre, on the other hand, did not mention an impactful individual, or identify a subject area that made college worthwhile, because she felt as though it was just something that you needed to go through in order to experience different life lessons, as she shared:

> College was great, um, the only thing I remember from college was the stuff I needed to do for journalism and communications. Outside of the Math, social studies, language arts, and English classes I don't remember anything, it is just what you have to do to graduate. Um, outside of what I learned from journalism, I grew up, I learned more about myself, my relationships with people, what I wanted to do with my life, and I learned life lessons. For my junior year I had to do an internship, so that summer I moved to New York to work for this post-production media group that dealt with educational DVD's for high schools and colleges. I did some editing and administrative work, just trying to get my foot in the door to figure out what I wanted to do with my life. It was a great experience, living in New York was a great experience. Ultimately I figured out that my internship wasn't what I wanted to do with my life, but it was definitely a great learning experience. Even now with that on my resume it has helped with some of the jobs that I have applied for and will in the future.

As much as everyone was able to make a positive academic transition to college, the data presented a theme that exhibited a great deal of contradiction between what most of the participants thought about the AP Program and how they would approach high school and AP classes as Black students looking back at their previous experiences and perceptions.

"**If Only I Would Have Known About AP, I Might Have Made Different Choices"**

Most of the participants shared that if they had the chance to go back in time and repeat high school knowing what they currently knew, they would participate in the AP Program. Although this seemed to contradict many concerns and feeling that were voiced during the study, consideration needs to be given to the initial concerns that participants expressed in reference to lacking information about AP classes. When analyzing this contradicting data through CRT, it is as if the participants were confused due to not being educated on the benefits of AP when they were in high school. They were never given the opportunity to voice their concern that they were not in the privileged group of students notified about the benefits of AP. During that time in high school, they were not able to identify and confront the injustice, also not knowing that the initial lack of knowledge could have an effect on their social, academic, and work futures. Ty a 23 years old student who had taken the previous school year off, spoke to this point as he also pondered how different his current placement could have been. He attended high school in a minority to majority program (M to M), where he was bused an hours ride to a school outside of his local school district:

> I would have taken it more serious, because I still feel like that affects me now. Like if they would have sat me down and explained to me. Especially since I was in the M to M program, so I am coming from the Southside to the Northside, you know they already don't want us there, and they were trying to like get rid of the program, if they would

> have sat down and just talked to us and explained to us what we were doing, instead of just sending us home? I might have tried, but now, you know what I am saying? That kind of stuff affects me now. I feel treated like I was just like whatever man, and just brushed off, but maybe I would have taken it more serious and I could have went to the school that I wanted to. People treated it like it was nothing, but just cause we treat it like it wasn't nothing don't mean that we don't want to know. We at least want to know, so that we could at least know a little bit. Now hearing all of yall talk, I feel like I could have tried a little bit, you know what I'm saying? I could have shown some initiative because this was kind of important, and I feel like I could have done a little better.

This was a strict contrast to his initial response to the AP Program:

> AP didn't mean nothing to me, I mean they told us about how you get an extra 7 points on your grade, but they took those points off, so I really didn't try to get into any of those classes because I didn't need them.

Bre exhibited some of the same contradiction between the two interviews in which she participated, as she stated previously in the findings that she never saw the importance of AP classes, which is different from:

> I would take AP for the discipline, not just to say I took an AP class and got a credit more, or that it was harder, but yes for the discipline. That's what I think high school is for, not for the learning, but getting the discipline, because I don't know anyone who is using sine cosine and tangent in their lives right now. Who needs to know what happened in The Catcher and The Rye every day of their life right now? It's not really necessary to life, but the discipline and study habits that AP gives you, that is what is necessary to life because even if you are not in school getting a masters or a doctorate, or even your

> bachelors, you still need the discipline in life. Because if not you just going to be a bum on the street.

The most interesting reactions when requesting an explanation for having the opportunity to redo high school and the college admissions process over again came from the focus group, where there was a resounding, "I wouldn't be here!" All six of the participants agreed that the roadmap of their life would be different, if they had it to do all over, considering what they now know about the AP Program. Ty was the first to respond with:

> Yup, I would not have been at this school. I would have been at Belmont in Tennessee, because they have the audio engineering program that I really wanted to be in. That is what I was mad about, because if they would have told us this, I would be at Belmont right now.

Timmy followed Ty's statement with:

> I would not have been here either, I would have applied early with the rest of the AP students! I would have applied for more scholarships too, so that I could have gone to my school of choice. I would have known all that if I was in those AP classes.

Tania responded by including the extra benefits of actually using the AP credits if she was able to do things over with, "I wouldn't even be here, and I would have graduated already!"

Etna, who admitted to struggling with self-esteem issues during her life, offered a different scenario on how she processed rethinking the opportunity to return to high school:

> Like I said, I think that I would have had some confidence going into college, but that is only if I would have done well in [AP] them. I think that if I had not done well in [AP] them, it would have torn me all the way down. So now that when I look back on it, I think that it might have been a blessing in disguise that I didn't do it, because with the

> mentality that I had. Had I done well it could have been a good thing, and it would have boosted my confidence when I got to college.

Etna was the only participant that made it a point to speak from the stance of how well she did in the AP would have affected how different her college admissions would have been. Etna was also only one of the 12 participants who admitted to having issues with a defeated mentality that has plagued her self-esteem her whole life.

Although, three of the 12 participants who steadfast in their feelings about not wanting to participate in the AP Program even if they had the chance to return to high school and take classes all over again. They all now understand the benefits that AP classes can offer a student, and see their worth, but feel that those benefits would not be in their best interest. Brian has been very satisfied with his high school and college career without AP classes, where he mentioned that if he had taken AP classes he would have probably looked at, "bigger universities," however, he then shared:

> I wouldn't have changed anything about my high school or my college years, because I had a great high school career, met a lot people, learned a lot, and then college as well. I learned in college that you don't need to go to a big school to be somebody in life, you know? I feel like some of these kids always think that you have to go to a big school in order to be something. A degree is a degree, and I wouldn't have changed anything. So not taking AP has affected me in a good way, because I would rather have street smarts than book smarts, because the world is not always going to be about where you graduated from or what you know. It's going to be how you interact with people, how you hold a conversation with someone, how you move forward from a simple hello, how are you doing, and I'm glad I didn't take an AP, because I am well with people, I'm great with

> just interaction as a whole, and it's taught me things that probably I wouldn't have learned about myself just because I would have been stressed. Now that I am stress free, I get to see things different, I get to enjoy my time because life is short and I don't want to be stressed out.

Pal, on the other hand, pointed out some of the benefits for those students who take AP:

> One thing that I do recognize about AP students is that they are tight knit and they study very hard with each other, so I think that would have been a great benefit. I know a lot of kids who don't sit down and study unless they have to, and I think AP students study when they have to, and when they don't have to. So that is also good. Taking AP classes would have definitely helped your GPA, I think if you did take AP classes and you were rocking in AP classes, then that is when you get on to your top, top schools, like I know a couple of kids who have gone on to Harvard and Yale or one of those big Ivy League schools.

Although, Pal agreed that the non-AP Program path that he took has been beneficial for him:

> I mean I like AP don't get me wrong, but I think your grade point average is a major point, and there are a lot of things that you can do in high school to impress colleges, rather than just being an AP student, and I think a lot of these kids think AP is a great course to go if you can go down that road, but the amount of hard work are things that you just have to do. I think you can put as much effort into something else and get a great result as well.

Jen had a different take on her life if she would have taken AP classes in high school, where she gave the impression that the AP Program would have altered who she was as a person:

> I think that I wouldn't have gone to my college. Maybe I would have gone to Howard, maybe I would have went to Hampton, maybe I would have went to Rutgers, or Temple. I think I would have played it safe. I think AP classes kind of when they say they prepare you for college, and college is supposed to prepare you for the real world, I think it prepares you for a safe zone. When I chose to go to my college and leave all that was around me, I said I'm taking a different route. I'm taking a route where I don't want to depend on someone stereotyping me and put me in a category, and tell me you go to high school, you go to college, and now you go get a corporate job. That's the last thing I want to do, I want to be different. And I think that I've always wanted to be different, so I think AP classes were a safe zone and they mold you and get your mind focused on college, college, college. I think I went to college just because you go to high school and you just go to college. So maybe AP classes would have kept me in that safe zone, but not being in them I kind of branched out on my own and went to that HBCU and I saw something and it definitely told me no, you don't have to follow in that same corporate path. Because it's not what it is all cracked up to be.

She then went on to state that nothing would be different if she were able to change her high school curriculum if she had the chance to:

> It wouldn't. Because I don't think that I would be the person who I am today now, and the person I am going to be. I wouldn't change it, even though it wasn't always the best. I feel like some of the decisions that I have made will really take me to a next level. I wouldn't change it at all.

Jen went on further to say that she believed that her lack of participation in AP classes had not affected her life as a whole:

> I don't think they have, I would say that my experience has been great. I think that wherever I may have failed at, I think in high school I failed one class, and it was a class where she should have failed me, but I feel like I came out on top of my classes. If I got a C it was because I chose not to look over the material. So everything in my life, where I am, my decisions that I made, shaped it, so if I wanted an A, I would go get that A. I understand what the outcome will be for my decisions, so whatever decision I make I am prepared to deal with the consequences. Everything you do is your choice, everywhere you put yourself in life, you did it.

Discussion

This qualitative study used a narrative inquiry to detail the lived experiences of Black students who did not participate in their high school's AP Program. The goal of the study was to deduct data to compare to previous research that found post-secondary institutions were using AP Program participation in the admissions decisions of their applicants. The findings of this study support the previous review of literature that found Black students were not encouraged to go into a more rigorous curriculum, devalued the program as a whole, felt alienated due to poor fits within the AP classroom, and, for some, had a lack of access to AP classes at their high school (Anderson, 2004; David, Callahan, & Kyburg, 2006; Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008; Thomas & Rust, 2007). These findings also support the opportunity gap that exists between Black and White students, of which there is a lack of awareness due to minimal focus being placed on resource equity amongst policymakers (Darden & Cavendish, 2011).

The data analyzed by the researcher and his research team identified four themes; lack of information about AP, AP is very stressful, college was an easy transition, and I would do things different if I were able to, confirmed that participants in this study were clearly disadvantaged

due to their underrepresentation in AP classes versus the representation of White students (Solarzano & Ornelas, 2002). When presented with the feedback that the majority of the study's participants were not fully aware of the details and benefits of the AP Program, it is hard to understand how the former high school students were expected to make an informed decision about participating in the program. Furthermore, students would not know to inquire about specific programs if they were not encouraged by school faculty, yet they were left to gather their own perception of the program through observations of their peers. As one participant remarked, "It's like a secret society, and they don't want us to know," Black students described how uniformed they felt when they were in high school. This lack of knowledge supports Taliaferro and Decuir-Gundy's (2007) suggestion that "the dearth of African American students in AP courses is indicative of a greater problem of education inequality" (p. 182).

Participants also confirmed that there was data to support the research findings that Black students tend to underachieve to try and fit in socially because there is the sense from some Black students that displaying an intellectual side is more characteristic of a White student (Ford & Whiting 2010). One of the participants had a similar perspective:

> All my friends were not really educated and they weren't like smart like me, cause I was smart. So I did my work behind closed doors so that I could goof off in class and look cool to my friends.

This devaluing of education led to students feeling more "confused" about the AP Program as they tried to finagle their way through the academic and social responsibilities of high school. One participant said, "I thought AP was supposed to be good, but they made fun of the kids that took it."

There was a small group of participants who voiced a concern about their access to the AP Program where the number of AP classes available to them was very limited because there was only one available in the entire school. How would a Black student at this high school even begin to compete with other students in the college admissions process if other high schools offer access to multiple AP classes? Data from this study showed that the high schools attended by the participants had AP course offerings that ranged from only one AP class all the way up to 28 AP classes. With the discrepancies between AP course offerings existing throughout the U.S., and colleges using these classes as the default standard for admission, a clear injustice is unveiled not only to Black students, but to any student who attends a high school with a limited number of offered AP classes (Hammond, 2009; Klopfenstein, 2004).

Although there were multiple themes and concerns shared by the participants in this study, the lack of detailed information and education on the AP Program stood out as the most frustrating issue for the participants. During the study, most of the contradictions can be attributed to the lack of information or misinformation that many of the participants observed during their high school career. This was clear in the latter responses to the protocol presented to the participants, where many in the study commented that they, "Would do a lot of things different" if they had the chance to go back to high school. One of the most salient observations occurred in the focus group, where it was evident that Ty actually learned information about the AP Program that he was unaware of up until the point of the study. He exhibited responses that portrayed him as being offended and cheated by not having the ability to make an informed decision, as many of the participants remarked that, "My life would be different."

Implications for Future Practice and Advocacy

This research study gave a voice to those Black students who have entered post-secondary education without the opportunity to participate in their high school AP Program. This study was constructed in response to the growing practice of colleges using AP participation as criteria for admission. The findings from this study indicate there is the potential that students meeting the criteria of being Black, not participating in the AP Program, and uninformed about the AP Program run the risk of not being able to gain admission to the post-secondary institutions of their choice, thus requiring further practice and advocacy to assist this population of students and possibly others.

Professional school counselors, teachers, school administration, and district policy makers must focus on implementing strategies that educate Black students and their parents on the actual content, rigor, expectations, and future benefits of AP classes. The information shared on the benefits of the AP Program should cover college admissions, college degree requirements, and financial benefits. Findings from the study identified that participants were unaware AP classes could assist them with admission to college and could potentially give them college credit towards a degree helping them graduate from college earlier, thus requiring them to spend less money on their degree program. There is also the need to inform this population of students on the differences between AP classes and general education classes by comparing and contrasting the limitations and benefits of each curriculums. These lessons and trainings can be done through classroom guidance and parent nights, using a series of technological strategies to assist with low parent attendance due to employment responsibilities (Hayes, 2011). The technological strategies employed can consist of, but not be limited to, providing the parent with the presentation via email, posting the presentation on the school's website, or providing a recorded replay of the presentation during school hours, which may be a better time period for some parents. Through

training sessions Black parents can be educated on how to advocate for their Black students to be placed in gifted education, which would assist in reversing Black students underrepresentation in the AP program (Grantham, Frasier, Roberts, & Bridges, 2005).

Counselors must take advantage of using the internet to also inform Black students about the AP Program as teenagers are consistently immersed in technology, where Ahn (2011) found that Black students are more likely to participate in social network sites than White students. With increased use of the internet and social networking sites Wohn, Ellison, Khan, Fewins-Bliss, and Gray (2013) found that many first generation college students used social networking sites to gain information about colleges and the college admissions process, which gave them confidence to complete high school. The use of the internet can also include Black parents as Bartholomew, Schoppe-Sullivan, Glassman, Dush, and Sullivan (2012) found that parents were using social networking sites such as Facebook on a daily basis to gain social and informational capitol.

Professional school counselors must also aim to assist in eliminating deficit thinking by providing professional development to faculty in their building. Using the opportunity to inform educators about some of the research and data presented in this study could assist in making educators much more aware of some of the potential behaviors in their classrooms. It could also assist teachers in making sense of some of the behaviors, giving them the opportunity to encourage behavior that is more academic in nature, thus allowing the potential for appropriate class placement that is not based on racial identity issues (Ford & Whiting 2010). The extermination of deficit thinking with teachers will lead to more Black students being placed in AP classes in time, as Black students become less underrepresented in gifted classes (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008).

There is also the need for professional school counselor trained in the removal deficit thinking, to educate and provide professional development for fellow school counselors who are not trained in identifying deficit thinking. Professional school counselors will need to be the change before they expect to advocate for the change. This type of training should begin at the district level with the goal of making sure that professional school counselors at the elementary, middle, and high school levels are all able to take a non-deficit thinking mindset of advocacy to their local schools.

As identified advocates and agents of change for Black students, professional school counselors are encouraged to spearhead this practice and advocacy (Schulz, 2010). Counselors can assist with this goal by using the American Counseling Association (ACA) Advocacy Competencies (2003) as a foundation to empower Black students by working with these students, and on their behalf by collaborating with the school, community, district, public, and government agencies. Professional school counselors, as advocates, can also assist in developing allies by becoming even more active participants in political affairs by joining certain groups or political parties as a vehicle to drive change for Black students (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009). The goal of this advocacy would be to not only assist in increasing the academic achievement of Black students, but also to make administrators at the post-secondary level aware of how the admission standards eliminate Black students.

Future Research Directions

Based on the data collected from this study, future research should examine why Black students are not being properly educated about and informed of the AP Program. This research should consider eliciting the voices of Black student's parents and teachers to see what disconnect exists between the student and those groups. Also, findings from this study and

Dancy and Brown (2008) identified a need for more research into why Black students place more emphasis on exhibiting the perception that they are cool, rather than smart. This research could use previous research designs that promote implementing strength-based approaches in the curriculum of Black students (Harvey & Hill, 2004; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Williams & Portman, 2014).

Additional research should be focused on why Black students continue to struggle with the negative images that dissuade them from perceiving themselves as academic scholars (Ford & Whiting 2007). This is a mentality that needs to be challenged, not only in the schools that these students attend, but also in the homes that they live where there should also be some training done with parents, in an attempt to have the same information disseminated in school be shared with the students at home Somers, Owens, and Piliawsky (2008) found that parental support was crucial in the academic success of Black students. With Hayes' (2011) findings that 86% of Black parents have aspirations of their students graduating from college or graduate school, it is imperative that school counselors exhaust all options to increase parental support in the lives of Black students.

Limitations of Study

Although the findings from this study give rich insight to the lived experiences of these participants, there were multiple limitations that affected the data collected. The small sample size and purposive sampling used to identify participants from the southeast limited the ability to generalize the findings to a larger population and is an immediate limitation (Creswell, 2012; Johnson & Christensen, 2013). Although, the goal of qualitative research is transferability, so the generalizability of the study's findings will be based on the reader identifying the data with their students (Williams & Portman, 2014).

Due to time constraints, the follow up interviews were conducted over the phone so the researcher was not able to have face-to-face contact with the participants during these interviews, thus limiting the researchers ability to build a physical rapport as well as observe body language. While there was a substantial amount of rapport built up during the initial interview, the ability to observe the participant's body language can be a valuable addition to the data collection process. The researcher's identification as a Black male professional school counselor, who had previous knowledge of two of the participants, was also limitation because of the bias this created for the participants in responding to the researchers' requests. Before each interview, the researcher made a statement that there was no "right" or "wrong" answer, and asked all participants to respond with their genuine feelings in regards to the requested information, but there was no guarantee that the participant's responses followed this request.

Conclusion

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to highlight the voices and the lived experiences of Black students who did not participate in their high school's AP Program. The participants were able to provide data that confirmed some of the research found prior to the study that some students devalued education, teachers did not choose them for placement in AP classes, and that AP classes were not a good fit. At the same time, some of this data was contradicted by many of the participants, who expressed they would have wanted to participate in the AP Program if they had been more informed about the benefits of the program. The themes that were deducted from this study are very valuable for professional school counselors, other educators, and post-secondary administrators to use in working with and evaluating Black students. Implications for research, advocacy, and practice have been provided.

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CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION: RESEARCHER REFLEXIVITY AND IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY

When I started exploring how Advanced Placement (AP) Programs have grown and how they affect the landscape of college admissions for Black students, I initially intended to conduct a quantitative study. I thought that a quantitative study would be easier and quicker for me due to its "top down" method, objective nature, and narrow focus (Johnson & Christensen, 2013). I spent time trying to come up with my methods and procedures, but continued to spin my wheels in a futile attempt to progress in my dissertation. As a person, student, and professional, I have always been much more interested in building rapport, which is much more in line with qualitative research. As I continued to struggle with developing my quantitative methods, I felt myself shifting more and more toward my true area of interest, qualitative research. I did not think the feedback I received from my study would be predictable. I wanted to view this issue through a wider lens. I wanted to capture each individual's story so that I could try to understand the rich specific descriptions of each of lived experience. Finally, I got over the issue of not being able to generalize my findings to other populations (Heppner & Heppner, 2004; Johnson & Christensen, 2013). Thus, my qualitative study with a narrative research tradition, viewed through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens began.

This chapter will explore and identify my research reflexivity by self-reflecting on the biases, values, and experiences that I held prior to and during this study (Creswell, 2012). The goal is that my reflexivity will increase the integrity, credibility, and trustworthiness of this study (Valandra, 2012). Prior to my struggles with trying to identify a method of research for this study, my decision to study Black students who had not taken AP classes came to me with ease.

My enrollment in the University of Georgia's Counseling and Student Personnel Services doctoral degree program, which has a strong focus on social justice, assisted me in identifying my population for this study due to the ever-growing number of colleges using AP classes to determine admissions decisions. As a practicing professional school counselor that has worked at the high school level for several years, I had noticed the changing landscape of college admissions and what it was doing to Black students, who thought they did not have the ability to attend college because they were not enrolled in AP classes.

I had several conversations with Black students who were misinformed, believing that they had to take AP classes to gain access to college, thus giving them the belief that college was not a possibility for them. I have my own personal belief that college may not be for everyone, but I believe that it is something that everyone should be able to experience, which is why we have so many different colleges ranging from technical to 2-year and on to 4-year colleges. My belief is that it is an injustice for colleges to evaluate applicants on their lack of participation in the AP Program. Findings from this study show that Black students have been uninformed about the benefits of the AP Program, unencouraged to participate in the program, and do not even always have access to AP classes. There is also the realistic possibility that all students are not academically prepared to be placed in AP classes, which again, makes evaluating those Black students on their participation in the AP Program an injustice in my mind. This would be similar to offering entrance to a member's only club that is based on potential members owning a Mercedes Benz, when everyone does not have the ability to own a car that expensive.

I will admit that my passion for this topic became an intense focus until I had to defend my prospectus. I received feedback from my dissertation committee that my focus could be in the wrong area, which could have run the risk of me losing opportunities for Black student as the

focus of my study. I was so consumed with College Board "being the bad guy" that brainwashed colleges into believing that AP classes as an admission criteria was acceptable, and giving the perception that the AP Program was not appropriate at all. College Board houses and coordinates the AP Program, along with the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and the Practice Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT). While I was narrowing my focus onto College Board, I was totally victimizing Black students as a whole, but what about those Black students that could actually benefit from the AP Program? This became even clearer to me as I started the study and identified Black students who probably should have participated in the AP Program, but did not because they either lacked information about it or were misinformed about the program.

My new direction was to focus on Black students and their equal access to the benefits of post-secondary education, but I was looking at them through two different lenses. The first lens focused on those Black students who were not appropriately prepared for placement in AP classes, but who could be very successful in college. The second lens focused on Black students who would have been appropriately placed in AP classes, but were either not tracked into them, or not encouraged enough to register for placement in AP classes. This second lens included the students that were left out of my initial focus for this study. Findings from this study assisted me in identifying another group of students who are so uninformed that they do not have enough accurate background to decide if they should participate in the AP Program.

As I immersed myself into the literature review for the study, I really did not learn any new information about the educational history of Blacks that I had not previously known, experienced, or observed. As a Black male, I have always been disturbed by the history of how Blacks came to be in the United States (U.S.) through slavery, segregation, racism, and constant bouts with educational inequities. I would like to think that I am an optimist, although some may

disagree, as I tend to bring up negative scenarios or "worst-case" scenarios when it comes to making life decisions, such as what is the worst thing that can happen if I do not complete this doctoral program? I lose out on an opportunity? I throw six years of work out of the window? I lose the opportunity to receive a salary raise? I do this only because I believe in mentally preparing for the worst, yet having a goal that the best will occur. So, as much as I have known about the negative past and present of Black people, I have tried to never let that cloud my own life's goals. I am not naive or oblivious to the world around me, but I have never been one to believe in "the man holding me down," even though I know that there are injustices around me, as there are people who do not have my best interest in mind. I also respect and fully appreciate the blood, sweat, and tears that those before me shed to make my life much more comfortable than it would have been for a Black man 50 or 75 years ago. With that respect and appreciation, I have always had the mindset that nothing can stop me, except for myself.

Even as a youth with a "nothing can stop me mentality," it has and still does pain me to know that some Black youths do not share the belief that they can aspire to do anything that they put their mind to. So, when I observe or read research confirming that Black students continue to devalue education, disapprove of showing an intellectual side, and believe that it is socially acceptable to underachieve, I am very disappointed (Ford & Whiting 2007; Ford & Whiting 2010). To me, this has always been a slap in the face to those trailblazers like Dr. Martin Luther King, Harriett Tubman, Rosa Parks, Claude Black, and Jackie Robinson, who dealt with the backlash and hate to help make this country a better place for the Black people who would follow. This causes me to step back and acknowledge my own bias that every Black youth was not raised or educated as I was. The Black youths who did not grow up with my mentality, do not know that slaves valued education and risked death to learn how to read and write because

they refused to follow the slave owners plan for them to remain submissive by keeping them uneducated (Beyer, 2010). Those same Black youths may not have strong parental support at home, with expectations and aspirations of them to have high levels of education and graduate from college (Hayes, 2011).

Regardless of the research and what I have experienced, I brought to this study the beliefs and biases that I do not think that it is appropriate to "play dumb" in front of a peer group, to not be a leader, or to play the victim, which is a message that I do not believe our Black youths are consistently receiving. To counter my biases, when I started this study I kept a reflexive audio journal that I made additions to before and after each interviews. Submissions were also made to the reflexive audio journal during the transcribing process, and during the analysis portion of the transcripts, to allow me to see what I needed to see in the data, without my own assumptions or behavior overwhelming the research (Watt, 2007). Valandra (2012) referred to this process as "coming clean" to inform the audience that the relational nature of qualitative research affects both the researcher and the participants. This reflexive journal allowed me to vent my approvals and frustrations, thus giving me the ability to be an instrument of the research who could remain composed and in the role of researcher during the interviews. I would also start each interview off by reintroducing the participants to the study and informing them that I was not looking for right or wrong answers, just their genuine responses to the prompts.

As I struggled to remain impartial by not playing the role of my given career, a professional school counselor and educator, there were several instances during all of the interviews where I felt compelled to, but had to refrain from, inserting my knowledge, support, empathy, or admiration. After reviewing all of the interviews, there were some major issues that

stood out to me, causing me to struggle the most with remaining in the role of researcher. An example of this is Bre and her comments:

> I was an in the closet good student. I acted like I wasn't a good student, but I had good grades, did my work, and I did what I needed to do, but I would goof off in class and get in trouble because I was bored. It just wasn't challenging. All my friends were not really educated and they weren't like, smart like me, cause I was smart. So I did my work behind closed doors so that I could goof off in class and look cool to my friends, but I am not even friends with those people now, so I guess it was pointless.

My immediate internal reaction to Bre's statement was, "Why is she wasting her talent?" She is a Black student who should have been appropriately placed in AP, but was overlooked because she was bored and not challenged in her on-level classes. The blame was directed at her until I read Ford and Whiting's (2007) research findings that Black students tend to strive for social acceptance by underachieving. Those findings were right in front of my face and I had no means to dispute their claims. Witnessing a Black student "dumbing down" their own intelligence was difficult for me to accept, so the ability to re-read the transcripts, while listening to the interviews and re-reading my reflexive journal multiple times, helped me see the entire picture. It also caused me to think, is it our history as Black people that has some of our youth wired like this?

I also witnessed some of the researched evidence of the tendency for Black students to not be tracked or encouraged to be placed into a more rigorous curriculum (Darity, Castellino & Tyson, 2001). Ash did not participate in the AP Program because she said that none of her teachers ever recommended the classes to her, but that she would have participated if prompted

to do so. She was probably a perfect candidate for placement in AP classes but just needed some encouragement and direction based on her statement:

> Um, well since I hadn't had any AP's, I guess, I had no idea of what it was going to be like, and I knew all of the smart kids took it. I didn't know how I was going to do, because I played basketball throughout high school. I really didn't focus on school, I just kind of, I don't know, I was automatically smart. I didn't really try, and just played basketball, and did my homework and just ended up with good grades. I really didn't want to have to work really hard. I mean I thought I was a smart kid, but at the same time I didn't have any AP's so I wasn't like I a super smart kid. I guess I thought that if you belong in AP class someone would tell you and be like Hey you want to take AP,' and that never happened to me, so I never like went out and asked 'Like hey I want to take' or asked to take an AP class.

My initial reaction to this scenario was curiosity about what the teachers doing. Did they just see another Black athlete and think that she was not smart enough to be placed in AP? I feel Ash was overlooked and this affected her future as a whole. These are the stories that teachers, counselors, and administrators need to hear to make them aware that they could be consciously or subconsciously viewing and/or treating their own Black students the same way.

My interviews with Etna carried a similar theme to Ash's – where Etna was not tracked or encouraged to move towards a more rigorous curriculum. These sessions were hardest for me because of how emotional Etna was during the interviews. Etna was a very talented young woman that was able to graduate from college with her undergraduate degree in three years, without the assistance of an AP Program in high school, and was then able to earn a total of three

college degrees in the time span of only five years. To me, this sounds like a very intelligent and strong Black woman, but in high school she was not asked to participate in the AP Program and she struggles with her self-esteem due to the belief that she was not talented and strong. As a young adult, she still felt the need to prove herself:

> I have always kind of felt like I have been swept under the rug the whole time. That's is why I did what I did, graduated in 3 years, went straight into my masters, because I felt like I had to do something to prove to myself that I was good enough or worthy enough for those past people who thought I didn't belong. And not that they said that, even though I had some people tell me that straight up, but just straight not acknowledging my existence or my accomplishments, or my whatever. That is what made me do all of that.

A vast amount of self-control was required for me to not break my role as instrument to console and encourage Etna during our interviews, but again the question comes to mind, "How could having encouragement from Etna's teachers affected her life?"

The participant's response that made the most impact on me came from Ty, a member of the focus group, who, going into the interview, seemed to be the most uninformed about the AP Program out of all six participants. During the interview, it was easy to observe that there was a clear processing of emotions by Ty that covered frustration, regret, and betrayal. By the end of the interview, you could hear in his voice that he felt let down by the system that was supposed to educate him. I could not get a sense of if this focus group encouraged or discouraged him because the passion in his voice sounded similar to Etna's "I'll show you" mentality, but his tone of betrayal could be perceived as beaten down and giving up:

> If they would have sat down and just talked to us and explained to us what we were doing, instead of just sending us home? I might have tried, but now, you know what I am saying, that kind of stuff affects me now? I feel treated like I was just like whatever man, and just brushed off, but maybe I would have taken it more serious and I could have went to the school that I wanted to.

My goal is that, in the future, Ty focuses those emotions on making sure he does everything in his power to seek out as much information as he needs to feel like he is knowledgeable about the world around him. Although, again, the research came to mind and made me question, "What did the educators in Ty's life see when they saw him?"

Professionals educators encompassing all faculty members (teachers, principals, professional school counselors, etc.), need to be aware of how they are viewing Black youth, and if there are any microaggressions that encourage White over Black when working with students (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Due to my passion for this population of students, it was very important for me to have my research team as a sounding board to review my interviews and the transcripts from those interviews, along with the contents in my reflexive journal, to ensure that I was confronted with any of my own biases that were going undetected. This provided us with very rich discussions, where I welcomed the opportunity to be confronted so that I could refrain from taking that bias into the interview or the analysis of the data. The most beneficial practice I used with my research team was the technique of interviewing the interviewer, which put me in the role of the participant while I prepared to begin the study, and made me more comfortable with conducting interviews (Chenail, 2011). The use of my research team allowed me to cross-check the data presented so that we could corroborate the themes we deducted from the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2013).

This research was an eye-opening experience for me, not in the sense that I learned new information, but in the sense that it made the previous research real for me. All of the information, activities, and events that I learned and observed as a youth that were not real to me then, reintroduced themselves to me as an adult and were very real. What made it real was that there was an actual voice verbalizing and confirm the previous research versus that situation of no voice being present, and researchers assuming what the issue could be. This encouraged me to remind and inspire all of my fellow colleagues that we need to be better educated on how to assist in providing a voice for our Black students so that we can then provide the information that will help them grow into productive and equal citizens.

Black students hold the answers to most of our questions and narrative inquiry is the way to expose these answers but it is as if we ignore their voices thinking that Black youth don't know any better (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008). I was content with the rich thick descriptions and stories that narrative inquiry was able to deduct from the voices of the Black students involved in this study (Creswell, 2012). Conducting the study through face-to-face interviews gave me the ability to actually appreciate the participant's body language, as I was able to observe them acknowledging the meaning that was created from their own self-reflection on their stories (Sales, Merrill, & Fivush, 2013). This was the most pleasurable part of this study, as I had the perception that "it made sense" to the participants and they had this feeling of being cheated out of something, as if someone had "pulled the wool over their eyes" in high school. Some of the participants were actually able to identify this through the lens of CRT making comments like, "All of the White kids were in there," or "They didn't tell the Black kids nothing."

Participants were able to verbalize direct expressions from reflecting on their lived experiences, and it was almost as if they had new information going forward in life that would cause them to be more aware of possible microaggressions that may go unacknowledged in society by the average eye (Anderson & Anderson, 2012; Jordan, 2005). Witherspoon and Mitchell (2009) encouraged people to accept that racial biases are actually norms in society and to give Black students the ability to highlight the bias and work towards a process of understanding it. Acknowledgment is a contrast to ignoring the bias, not trying to understand it, and disregarding it as an exception that nothing needs to be done because it does not happen often enough to give it attention. Some of the participants from the study understood that racial bias is the norm and this was something that they would not have an issue with identifying in real life. As a professional school counselor who had to maintain his role as a researcher and instrument, it made me feel good knowing that there were many times during the interviews where I wanted to jump in and educate the participants. Not being able to relinquish my role as researcher, to be a professional school counselor was the most challenging issue I navigated during this study.

Acting as researcher in this study made me aware of how important research is for those professionals that work in the field, because now I can take the information from the study and view education through that lens. I am back in the role of professional school counselor, so now I am able to educate on this topic! Research is such an amazing tool because the author gives you the opportunity to view issues, environments, populations, etc. through their own lens, allowing the reader or professional school counselor to use that knowledge or transferability to work with their population of students.

This has been a life altering experience because it provided me with the knowledge that I needed in order to research the topic, construct the design, perform the study, and fully immerse myself in the process allowing me to take ownership of the entire process. I was able to complete the process and extract my own perceptions and awareness from this study, which I can now use in my work with students. I would recommend that any professional school counselor or educator who is passionate about the students they work with, to seriously think about performing their own study on a topic that is important to them. It is powerful, because I now have an awareness, not only about Black students, but also about myself - that I previously either ignored or did not really believe was true.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent

"The Experiences of Black Students, Advanced Placement Courses, and College Admissions"

You are being invited to participate in a research study entitled "The Experiences of Black Students, Advanced Placement Courses, and College Admissions" conducted by Dr. Anneliese Singh, PhD, LPC, NCC and Mr. Jamie D. Brown, NCC, Ed.S. from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia (706-542-5431). Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or stop taking part in this study at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the experiences of those Black students that entered an institution for post-secondary education, without participating in their high school Advanced Placement Program. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you may be asked to do the following things:

1. Participate in either two individual 45-50 minute long interviews (either in person at a confidential location or on the phone), or one 45-50 minute long focus group interview, during which you will be asked specific and in-depth questions about your high school and college educational experiences, your college admissions process, and your thoughts on the Advanced Placement Program
2. Review a copy of your interview transcript (a verbatim written version of your interview) for accuracy

If you consent to participate in this study, the researcher will contact you to arrange an interview scheduled at a convenient time that will take place by phone or in another private setting. The interview will be audiotaped and later transcribed. A notable risk of this study is related to the possibility that you may experience a level of emotional discomfort, due to the invasion of privacy the study will require, along with time required for the study (approximately 45 -100 minutes). To assist with any emotional discomfort the researcher is available to provide counseling and career guidance, as well as a list of local and career services resources has been attached to this consent form.

While the researcher conducting the interviews is a trained and experienced professional school counselor, the purpose of the interviews/focus groups is for research. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. You may also discontinue participation at any time without any penalty. You may ask to have any information that can be identified as yours returned to you, removed from the research records, or destroyed. If you experience any distress as a result of participation in this research, you may contact the researcher for assistance and resources. Your participation will provide you with an empowering opportunity to share your story and the potential to benefit young black students who aspire to attend college.

To assist with the time lost the researcher will be providing all individual interview participants with a $25 gift card and focus group participants with a $10 gift card to a local restaurant, once the study begins

Even though the researchers will emphasize to all participants that comments made during the focus group sessions should be kept confidential, it is possible that participants may repeat comments outside of the group which the researchers have no control of. No individually-identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the individual interview portion of the research, will be shared with others without your written permission, unless required by law. All individually-identifiable information will be destroyed six months after data collection. If the researchers use any direct quotes from your interviews in any professional presentations or publications, the researcher will alter or delete any information that could identify the quotation as yours or be affiliated with your place of work.

Your responses will be confidential. If you agree to participate in this study, you will select a pseudonym prior to your in-depth interview, which will be used in place of your real name throughout the remainder of the study on any documentation (written documentation or the audiotaped interview) that requires a name. Therefore, identifying information will not be used that could potentially match your identity with the content of your interview. This informed consent form is the only document in which your real name will be used throughout the study. The audiotape(s) will be locked away securely and will be destroyed six months after the study has been completed.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the study.

By your initials, you are indicating whether or not the researchers have permission to audio-record your interview.

Circle one: YES / NO **Initial** _____

By your signature below, you are indicating that you understand the above-described study, have had all of your questions answered to your satisfaction, and agree to participate in this research project. You will receive a signed copy of this consent for your records.

_____ _____ _____

Printed Name of Participant ***Signature*** **Date**

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Jamie D. Brown _____ _____
Printed Name of Researcher ***Signature*** **Date**

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher at brownj3@uga.edu or call 404-428-9330 to have a copy picked up.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Larry Nackerud, PhD (IRB Chair), Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

APPENDIX B

FIRST INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The Experiences of Black Students, Advanced Placement Courses, and College Admissions

Protocol – Round 1

1. Tell me what do you remember about AP classes at your high school?
2. Explain to me the process for signing up for AP classes at your high school.
3. Explain to me why you never took an AP class during 9^{th}, 10^{th}, 11^{th}, or 12^{th} grade.
4. Tell me what it was like to be a student at your high school and not take an AP class.
5. What was your perception of those students who took AP classes at your high school?
6. Tell me how did the college admissions process go for you and how many did you apply to?
7. Do you believe that the lack of AP classes affected your college admissions process? If so, how?
8. Are you currently attending a college?
9. Explain to me what your college experience has been or what it was like when you were attending?
10. Tell me how different would your college experience have been if you would have taken AP classes in high school.
11. If you had the chance to do high school and the college admissions process all over again, tell me would it be different. If so, explain how.
12. Last question, explain to me how not taking AP classes have affected your life as a whole?

APPENDIX C

SECOND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The Experiences of Black Students, Advanced Placement Courses, and College Admissions

Protocol – Round 2

1. Based on what we discussed in the first interview, as a Black student, explain to me if you feel as though you had the same access to AP classes as White students?
2. Tell me about your elementary and middle school educational experience, explain to me if you feel as though they had anything to do with you taking AP classes in high school?
3. Speaking hypothetically, if you were a high school teacher responsible for recommending or encouraging students to take AP, explain to me how would use and implement that responsibility.
4. Discuss what changes you would make to the AP Program if you could.
5. Explain to me how do you feel the college admissions process should go for seniors applying to college, and would you involve AP classes in that process?
6. We have gone back in time and you successfully completed all 3 of the AP classes that you took with an A, explain to me where would you be right now and how did you get here.
7. Now you have the same scenario, but you failed the one AP class that you took, explain to me where would you be right now and how did you get here.
8. My last question, discuss your perception of your life up until this point and let me know if you are satisfied with it?