A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE FACTORS THAT MOTIVATE BLACK

STUDENTS ENROLLMENT IN

ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the motivations for Black students to enroll in advanced placement courses in the United States. The theory guiding this study is Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development (1979). Much of the literature associated with Black students in advanced placement courses focuses on the underrepresentation of Black students in the program and the factors that deter their enrollment. Few studies explore the lived experiences of Black students in rigorous coursework and their motivation. The central question that framed the study is: "What influences Black students' decisions to enroll in advanced placement courses?" The criteria to participate in the study were to be at least 18 years old, Black, and have taken at least one AP class. Twelve participants from 4 different regions of the United States were involved in the study. Data was collected through one-on-one interviews, journal entries, and 1 focus group interview. Data was analyzed using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. The results of the data revealed that Black students enroll in advanced placement courses due to educational influences, parental influence, the desire for rigor, college preparation, and peer influence. The results demonstrate that expectations, knowledge, and motivations within the microsystems and mesosystems have a positive impact on Black students' enrollment in advanced placement courses. Recommendations for future studies include examining the motivation of Hispanic/Latino students to enroll in AP courses, and exploring the cultural competency professional development of teachers.

Keywords: Advanced Placement, Black students, Ecological of Human Development, motivation.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Jessica Gwen, and my mother, Gwendolyn. Jessica, your presence in my life has inspired me, and I hope my actions motivate the goals you set for your life. Momma, while you are now one of my guardian angels, I could not complete this dissertation without remembering the love, wisdom, and guidance that you bestowed upon my life.

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First and foremost, I thank God for allowing me to complete this dissertation. I never imagined that I would work to obtain a doctoral degree. However, this is an example of how God has bigger plans for us than we have for ourselves. God sees more in me than I see in myself.

Secondly, I thank my husband, Luther, for his continuous support. My daughter, Jessica, for providing me with the motivation to complete this degree and understand the time commitment. Also, I am thankful for my immediate and extended families' encouragement, support, and prayers.

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List of Abbreviations

Advanced Placement (AP)

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Ecological Systems Theory (EST)

Fund for the Advancement of Education (FAE)

International Baccalaureate (IB)

National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)

Predominately White Institution (PWI)

Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics (STEM)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Black students are underrepresented in advanced placement (AP) courses (Kettler & Hurst, 2017). The background will examine Black students' education during the periods of segregation and integration to understand Black students' current status in AP classes. The aftermath of the Supreme Court Case Brown v. the Board of Education is discussed to show factors that led to underrepresentation in AP classes. The history of AP classes is discussed to show how their existence added to secondary rigor and postsecondary education preparation. The theory that supported this research study is the ecological model of human development theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner. The situation to self describes me as the researcher and includes my familial background, motivation for the study, and the assumptions that I possess. Underrepresentation in AP classes shows that too few Black students benefit from a rigorous high school curriculum, preparing them for postsecondary education. As a result, Black students are underrepresented in top research universities in the United States (Baylor, 2016). The purpose of the phenomenological study was to understand the perspectives of Black students that influence their decision to enroll in rigorous courses. The significance of the study was categorized according to practical, empirical, and theoretical importance. The study introduced new research that provides the voice of Black students at the secondary level. This study gives a voice to the lived experiences of Black students who enrolled in AP courses. The research questions centered around lived experiences in the home and community that foster an environment that encouraged academic rigor. A list of terms and definitions provides an understanding of some terms used in the study.

Background

The state of the Black students in the American public school system began with a lawsuit. In 1954, Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren presided over the court case Brown v. Board of Education. When giving the majority decision of the Court, Warren stated a child could not succeed in life without an education (Bell, 1980). Warren also said that segregation was not appropriate for the field of education (Bell, 1980). The decision of the Court ended segregation in public facilities, specifically in the field of education. Other court cases such as Swann vs. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education further enhanced the Brown decision by transporting students to schools in different parts of a city or county to create better racial balances in schools (Bell, 1980). Judicial measures and others have not guaranteed Black students a higher quality of education than what was received before the Brown decision (Bell, 1980).

Historical Background of AP Courses

For the United States, the 1950s was a decade filled with an international spirit of competition sparked by the Cold War, which created an interest in advanced curricula for high school. In 1951, the Ford Foundation sponsored academic projects that laid the groundwork for AP courses. The Ford Foundation created the Fund for the Advancement of Education (FAE). Initially, the Ford Foundation funded and sponsored a program that allowed academically gifted high school sophomores to attend the University of Chicago, Columbia, Wisconsin, or Yale Universities. Early exposure to collegiate level coursework guaranteed two years of college for male students eligible for the military draft. High school administrators and school superintendents were displeased with this initiative. John Kemper, Headmaster of Philips Andover, a private secondary school located in Andover, Massachusetts, suggested altering the

FAE's first action. The proposed change was advancing students academically after being accepted into college (Rothschild, 1999).

In October 1951, educational personnel from Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Andover, Exeter, and Lawrenceville met to create an implementation plan. The General Education in School and College: A Committee Report (1952) contained the plan for advancing students academically. The term, advanced placement, is introduced in the document (Rothschild,1999). The proposal created academic concepts and assignments that appropriately fit students' intellectual ability (Blackmer et al.,1952). The target population is students in the 12th grade who participated in AP courses would take three-hour examinations to measure students' competence of the subject matter and placement at the postsecondary level of education (Blackmer et al., 1952). In 1952, the plan shifted again to focusing on secondary students taking collegiate courses within the secondary school setting. By September 1953, 17 high schools introduced AP courses to their campuses. The recommendation from Harvard University moved some of the high schools to participate in the pilot program (Rothschild, 1999). As time progressed, AP participation grew and adapted to the changes of an evolving America. Greater access to advanced placement courses occurred during President Lyndon Johnson's administration. Johnson urged educational leaders to bring equality to the educational program.

In 1970, 14 percent of secondary students participated in AP examinations. There was also a shift for better education for students of color rather than focusing on White students. Document-based questions were suggested by an AP reader to provide equal opportunity for Black students on the exam. The late 1970s saw a surge in AP exam participation, and between ten years, AP became a national program. In 1977, AP courses became more accessible to students from urban and rural areas. During the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, AP participation

continued to soar, and state legislatures supported AP participation in various ways. South Carolina mandated all high schools offer AP courses, and post-secondary institutions were instructed to accept three or higher examination scores. By 1994, several states paid a portion of the entire AP examination fee for students. By the following year, Texas reimbursed students who scored a three or higher (Rothschild, 1999).

 In his No Child Left Behind Act, President George W. Bush focused on many educational issues, including advanced placement courses. States and school districts were required to offer a minimum number of advanced placement courses. Advanced placement courses would be available to students in low-income schools and schools with a high representation of minority students. Also, states were required to create a plan to make college-preparatory courses open to all students (Davis et al., 2015).

In 2016, President Barack Obama awarded $28.4 million in advanced placement grants to forty-one states and Washington D.C. The grants' purpose was to finance most of the cost associated with advanced placement exams for students from low socioeconomic homes. The grants' objective is to encourage students to take advanced placement courses, pass the exam, and receive college credit. Earning a passing score on an advanced placement exam may reduce post-secondary expenses and time to acquire a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Segregated Schools in the Black Community

At the end of the Reconstruction era in 1877 and the turn of the century, Jim Crow laws emerged in southern states. The objective of Jim Crow laws was to restrict Black and White people from interacting, and the laws restricted Black people from utilizing the same public facilities as White peoples. The United States Supreme Court upheld Jim Crow laws in Plessy

vs. Ferguson, which supported separate but equal public accommodations. As a result, one aspect of segregation of the two races meant different schools for White and Black children (Walker, 1996).

Black schools possessed an odd number of amenities and funding compared to the white segregated schools. Segregated Black schools embodied a learning environment where collaborative support of the Black community, policies, and stability of the learning environment proved beneficial to Black children (Walker, 1996). In addition to teaching required curricula, Black teachers in segregated schools taught lessons not in textbooks but from the school of life that were honest lectures about Black Americans' plight in a racially biased and discriminatory society. The blunt reality bestowed upon Black students motivated them to work twice as hard as their White counterparts to compensate for the discrimination they would face due to their skin (Foster, 1997).

With the blend of love and authoritative voice, educational personnel displayed a positive attitude towards education. Professor Charles Lincoln Harper, principal of Booker T. Washington High School in Atlanta, Georgia, from 1924 to 1943, took students to visit college campuses to assist them in gaining admissions or scholarships during his summer vacation. Alumni of Booker T. Washington stated teachers provided homework assignments that were parallel to post-secondary studies. Yet with the high expectations, teachers were found to be a source of encouragement, and they would not allow students to fail. In New Orleans, Louisiana's McDonough 35 High School, teachers functioned in multiple roles beyond their job descriptions. Teachers acted in the parts of counselors and role models. Educators at McDonough instilled self-worth into students by addressing students as Mister and Miss, titles denied to Black adults in Southern communities plagued with Jim Crow norms (Sowell, 1976).

Brown (2016) stated that Black teachers cared about the students, communicated with a parent, prepared students academically, and demonstrated tough love. Black teachers were not merely people who students engaged with during the school hours, but they were members of the students' community. Black teachers were visible and interacted with their students within the neighborhood, religious organizations, and other social organizations (Brown, 2016). In Black schools, an unspoken rule established that all students who excelled academically would be black, and there would be no separation from associates (Tatum, 2003). While many critiques questioned the quality of education and academic rigor of segregated Black schools, some schools excelled beyond their White counterparts. For example, in Chatham County, North Carolina, an advanced math course was not offered until the White school created and implemented a parallel course (Foster, 1997).

Social Impact of Desegregation on the Black Communities

For some Black Americans, the Brown decision provided a sense of comfort that World War II's war efforts would provide a sense of freedom and equality in the United States (Bell, 1980). Others, such as W.E.B. DuBois, a Black sociologist, and author, questioned the need for integrated schools (DuBois, 1935). DuBois believed that Black students' best learning environment encompassed being taught by Black instructors, who understand what it means to be Black, and in an environment that treats children are treated civilly (DuBois, 1935). Integration created a sense of loss for Black students, and the social compact designed between Black students, parents, and educators dissolved. Integration meant that Black teachers were no longer an essential component of the public school system, and many lost their jobs. Members of the Black community who experienced the desegregation of schools agreed with the integration spirit but disagreed with the process. The integration process involved removing Black students

from a familiar environment into a newly established environment in which they felt defeated (Brown, 2016). Black teachers who were employed in segregated schools and witnessed the integration process were suspicious of the consequences of segregation. Teachers' concerns included not providing the life lessons absent in the textbooks for the Black students. The life lessons given to Black students could not be delivered by White teachers in integrated schools due to wrong interpretations by Black students (Foster, 1997).

Also, there was a tradeoff for access to more materials in integrated schools that came at the expense of the acknowledgment that Black students received (Foster, 1997). Rather than Black students receiving accolades for their accomplishments, special education classes became their assignments. Black students' education would not be enhanced with leadership skills, but with instructions to follow (Foster, 1997).

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological system was the theory that supported the research study. This theory examined domiciliary and cooperative relationships that students develop within their environments. According to Tate (2018), the relationships developed within the environment are associated with Bronfenbrenner's microsystems. The microsystem encompasses the relationships with the closest proximity to an individual, such as the home, school, religious organizations, and community (Tate, 2018). The home and community organizations have a more significant effect on student achievement than the school environment (Coleman, 1966).

The relationships between two settings in which an individual is involved are associated with Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem. The mesosystem shows individuals' effect through the collaboration and communication of mature individuals from two settings (Bronfenbrenner,

1979). Brendtro (2006) stated behavior is not a detached action but an interchangeable activity with individuals in a child's environment. Therefore, as a child begins and progresses through their educational career, they will be impacted by their teacher, and the child will affect their teacher. As a child enters adolescence, peer influences may become dominant over family and school influences (Brendtro, 2006). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979) showed the dynamics of relationships within the home environment and community organizations. Within the home and community organizations, expectations, and standards motivated Black students to seek academic rigor through AP courses.

Situation to Self

I am a Black woman in my early 40s, raised in a two-parent middle-class home in a suburban area in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. In my house, the expectation was for my siblings and me to excel in high school, pursue postsecondary education, and education beyond undergraduate studies. The reason for the high expectations was due to the humble beginnings of both my mother and father. Both of my parents graduated from high school and received additional training beyond the secondary level. My parents labored in Fortune 500 companies at which laborers earned decent wages and a middle-class living. As laborers in financially secure jobs, my parents desired more for their children and encouraged white-collar careers. Through parental expectations and self-motivation, one of my siblings and I earned two bachelor's degrees, four master's degrees, and one Education Specialist degree.

In honors courses and beyond, Black students are underrepresented (Kettler & Hurst, 2017). My motivation for the study stems from my experiences as a Black student and educator. I have firsthand experience with being the only minority in an honors class. I know what it is like not to have someone to relate to on a cultural level within a classroom. Despite being the

only minority in some classes, and being isolated from peers of my ethnicity, my motivation and desire for academic rigor were not deterred. As a Black educator, I have taught Black students who want to excel and others who are unmotivated when it comes to education.

The paradigm that guided this research is constructivism. The paradigm allowed me to be dependent upon those who have experienced the phenomenon to generate knowledge. Constructivism permitted a focus on a broad spectrum of lived experiences to be shared. Open-ended questions enabled me to focus on specific details of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As the researcher, I was interested to learn why some Black students enthusiastically embrace academic rigor while many of their peers are content with taking standard level courses. I was curious about the motivation of Black students and from where the motivation derives. While I have never taught an advanced placement course, as an educator, I wanted to learn what environment I can create that fosters Black students' thoughts of taking classes with advanced academic rigor.

Problem Statement

Despite open enrollment policies and incentives, Black students are less likely to participate in AP courses than their Asian and Caucasian counterparts (Kettler & Hurst, 2017). Some school districts within the United States have open enrollment policies for any student motivated to take advanced placement courses. In addition to open enrollment policies, the College Board has tried to encourage student enrollment by offering fee waivers for students with low socioeconomic status to cover the advanced placement exam cost at the end of the course (Warne et al., 2015). Black and Hispanic students' experiences in the educational environment are similar, as both ethnicities are underrepresented in AP courses (Kettler & Hurst,

2017). Limited access to rigorous coursework for students from low socioeconomic households and minority groups can affect the number of minorities who matriculate to top research universities (Baylor, 2016). Curbed access to advanced curricula may be the source of achievement gaps and may directly affect students' future career earnings (Scafidi et al., 2015). The problem is Black students are underrepresented in higher education and AP programs (Baylor, 2016; Kettler & Hurst, 2017).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand Black students' motivations to enroll in advanced placement courses in various regions of the United States. There is a paucity of current qualitative literature that gives voice to the experiences of Black students in AP courses (Kang et al., 2018). Motivation is when individuals and groups select specific behaviors and persevere (McInerey, 2019). The theory guiding this study was the ecological model of human development created by Urie Bronfenbrenner. The ecological model of human development was used to examine the interactions children have within the home environment and community to influence rigorous coursework.

Significance of the Study

This research study has practical, empirical, and theoretical importance that may give a voice to the experiences of Black students. The practical significance of the study is the improvements and advancements that will provide education. The study's empirical significance showed how the research corresponded to the United States' educational system (Patton, 2015). The theoretical significance of the study showed how theory connected to the research.

Practical Significance of the Study

This research will benefit teachers at the three levels of education for students. The elementary level of education lays the foundation and establishes the academic pipeline for students. Typically, academically gifted programs begin at the elementary level, and most Black students are generally not identified as academically talented at this level (Darity, 2006). While Tyson et al.'s (2005) and Tyson's (2011) research provides a brief insight into the motivation of Black AP enrollees, there is limited research that offers an understanding of the motivations of Black students within their home and community environments. The underrepresentation of Black students as academically gifted at the elementary level may block students from advanced courses as they progress from the primary level to the secondary level of their education. At the middle and secondary levels, educators may understand the impact of school tracking and ability grouping when students receive core class assignments.

Empirical Significance of the Study

From an empirical viewpoint, the current literature discussed how some Black students alienate themselves from their peers to achieve academic excellence (Kang et al., 2018). Also, teachers tend to have higher expectations for White students than minority students, even with parallel records of achievement (Rogers et al., 2018). No literature examines the quality of life and formal and informal relationships acquired by Black students that have motivated them to enroll in AP courses. This study provided a voice to Black students who enrolled in advanced classes and gleaned lessons from their experiences to inspire other Black students to follow in their paths.

This research may benefit Black students. This study captured Black students' lived experiences in the school environment, home environment, and social environment, leading to

enrolling and completing AP courses. No research reveals how Black students' home and community environments motivate their rigorous course selections. While the target population was Black students, students of other ethnicities can benefit, particularly students of Hispanic descent. Hispanic students are also underrepresented in AP courses and encounter many educational experiences that are parallel to Black students (Baylor, 2016). According to Theokas & Saaris (2013), more than 500,000 minority students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are absent in AP and IB classes. The missing students would benefit from participation in the courses like their counterparts of different ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Limited access to rigorous coursework may affect the number of minorities who matriculate to top research universities (Baylor, 2016). A small percentage of Black students enrolled in top universities in the public school system possessed large black communities. In North Carolina, Black students represent only four percent of students enrolled in high research universities (Baylor, 2016). One factor that may influence enrollment at the postsecondary level is selecting rigorous courses (Baylor, 2016). High school students have the option of standard classes, honors courses, AP courses, and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. According to the College Board (2020), high school students should be encouraged to enroll in honors and AP courses.

The College Board (2020) stresses the weight that college admission officers place on rigorous courses. College admission officers are not impressed by high school transcripts that lack challenging or advanced coursework regardless of the grade point average (College Board, 2020). Colleges' attention focuses on the distinction of the course level rather than the abundance of high marks (Adelman, 2006). According to the College Board (2020),

postsecondary schools that are more discerning in their admissions decisions look for students who take rigorous courses and students who enroll in several courses that are AP or honors. Many colleges determine college admissions by college prep courses, followed by the curriculum's rigor and grades in all courses (National Association for College Admission, 2015). College admission decisions may stress rigorous courses due to the link between rigorous courses and postsecondary performance. The College Board (2016) cites multiple studies that students who receive a three or higher on an AP exam will excel academically in postsecondary courses in the discipline and will more than likely graduate in four years.

Theoretical Significance of the Study

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development shaped the research (1979). The ecological model of human development developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner examines the interactions children have within the home and community that can shape different experiences (Tate, 2018). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory shows how students are affected by their environments. Values, expectations, and rules established in the home that may promote academic achievement mold students. In the school environment, students are affected by the existence or lack of high expectations and academic rigor that may affect their ability to strive for excellence. In the community, students are affected negatively and positively by peer associations and their activities, affecting their academic rigor motivation.

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Research Questions

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The purpose of the phenomenological study was to understand the factors that motivate Black students' AP enrollment. The following questions structured the research:

Central Question- What influences Black students' decisions to enroll in advanced placement courses?

There is a lack of research that focuses solely on Black students at the secondary level (Graham, 1994). The research on motivation focuses on Black collegiate students (Griffin, 2006; Cokely, 2003). Research reveals that there may be internal, external, or multidimensional (Hwang et al., 2002). According to Gurin et al. (1969), motivation based on external factors may yield positive results from low socioeconomic or minority students. External factors that may motivate Black students are a desire to dispel negative stereotypes of Black students' perceptions of education and dismantle the myth that intelligence is associated with race (Griffin, 2006). Influences of family members and educators can motivate Black students. The potential for future financial stability related to education can trigger Black students' academic motivation (Hwang et al., 2002).

Sub-Question 1. How does a Black student's home environment influence enrollment in advanced placement courses?

Family values bestowed upon a child are the foundation for developing skills that created academic excellence (Orrock & Clark, 2015). Parents' personal stories concerning their educational journey provide their children with insight that may help children develop a path to their academic success (McGee & Spencer, 2015). In homes lead by single mothers, three conventional means that are a part of the equation for educational success include a devoted parent, consistency, and a support system (Corley et al., 2019). Mothers' presence in schools and extracurricular activities, inspirational messages, and high academic expectations contribute to students' success (Corley et al., 2019). African American fathers hold high academic expectations for their sons despite deficit thinking that may occur (Allen, 2015).

Sub-Question 2. How does a Black student's school/community influence enrollment in advanced placement courses?

A sense of belonging to a school environment may increase engagement in academics (Orrock & Clark, 2015). Components of a school culture may invoke a mood that makes Black students doubt their intellectual ability to perform in rigorous courses (Jeffries & Silvernail, 2017). Educators believe that enrollment of minority students in rigorous coursework set minority students up for failure (Roegman & Hatch, 2016). Blocking Black students from rigorous courses may make them feel like they do not belong in advanced classes (Jeffries & Silvernail, 2017).

Adolescents served by organizations operated by Black people who are nurturing have higher academic achievement, self-confidence, and buoyancy than adolescents who are not involved with extracurricular or community-based associates (Gooden et al., 2018). Many extracurricular educational programs have objectives focused on tutelage and homework assistance (Toldson & Lemmons, 2015). Black leadership in community-based organizations may create beneficial programs for current students due to their own experiences (Gooden et al., 2018). Extracurricular academic activities play a useful role in Black students' success (Toldson & Lemmons, 2015).

Sub-Question 3. How do Black student's peers influence enrollment in AP courses?

Black students may suffer positive and negative consequences for their decision to enroll in AP courses. One positive aspect of enrolling in rigorous classes is the development of fictive kinships. Collegiate Black students may form fictive kinships with other like-minded Black students who may provide financial and emotional support, especially when biological families are not familiar with certain educational attainment levels (Brooks & Allen, 2016). The decisive factors that allow acceptance into fictive kinships are behaviors and attitudes (Fordham,1988).

Definitions

1. Advanced placement courses-Advanced placement courses that allow students to earn college credit (Kolluri, 2018).

2. Authoritarian Parenting-Guidance and behavioral expectations are provided to a child founded in religious beliefs with restrictive sovereignty (Baumrind, 1966).

3. Authoritative Parenting-Guidance and discipline are provided to a child reasonably with the child's ability to exist in a nonrestrictive environment (Baumrind, 1966).

4. Community-Community can be defined with four parts, membership, influence, integration, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (McMillian & Chavis, 1986).

5. Cultural Capital-Resources that are neither financial nor interpersonal provides upward mobility (Marcucci & Elmesky, 2017).

6. Honors Courses-A course teaches the same curriculum as regular-level courses but extends the curriculum with more in-depth content (College Board, 2020).

7. International Baccalaureate Courses-An international college preparatory program of study created in Europe developed for secondary programs that would be recognized globally (Kyburg et al., 2007).

8. Jim Crow- The name of a minstrel show character of the 1830s and 1840s used by black-face minstrel Thomas "Daddy" Rice that portrayed White perceptions of Black Americans. The name became synonymous with Southern laws that kept Black and White citizens segregated in public facilities and suppressed Black Americans (Guffey, 2012).

9. Motivation-The system by which individuals and groups select specific behaviors and persevere (McInerney, 2019).

10. Protestant Ethic-Joint examination and external administration of societal norms applauding hard labor and carefulness (Spater & Tranvik, 2019).

11. Second Generation Discrimination-An inconspicuous form of discrimination consists of irregularities in academic tracking and conduct (Meier, 1984).

12. Self-fulfilling Prophecy-A false claim of a situation that arouses conduct and brings the false claim to fruition (Merton,1948).

13. Settler Teacher Syndrome-A condition that some educators possess in which they act as cultural protectors. Educators preserve and uphold bias attitudes that promote social discrimination (Cherry-McDaniel, 2016).

Summary

The lived experiences of Black students were explored through a phenomenological study to understand what motivates Black students to enroll in AP courses. Representation of Black students in advanced placement courses goes more in-depth than seeing a diverse group of students in a classroom. The presence of Black students in advanced placement means that more minority students are getting rigorous coursework that can prepare them for postsecondary studies. Also, limited access to rigorous coursework for students from low socioeconomic status and minority groups can be the source of achievement gaps and affect their future career earnings (Scafidi et al., 2015). The home and the community significantly influence Black students' academic achievement (Coleman,1966). Through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), the impact of home and community organizations' shows the effect on academic motivation.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The literature review provides a context that informs this study of exploring the experiences that motivate Black student enrollment in advanced placement courses at the secondary level. The theoretical framework employs one theory, the ecological model of human development constructed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). Microsystems, and mesosystems, two components of Bronfenbrenner's theory, are examined to show their impact on academic motivation. The related literature covers critical race theory, motivation, school tracking, and ability grouping, peer associations, fictive kinship, religious affiliation and the influence on academic performance, underrepresentation of Black students in AP courses, acting White, educators' expectations and perceptions of minority students, gifted education, parenting styles, parental involvement, parental socioeconomic status, and Black educators. The related literature shows how barriers may prevent Black students' participation in AP courses and how certain factors may create greater access and motivation for AP course participation.

Conceptual Framework

One theory guided the theoretical framework of the study. The theory was the ecological model of human development created by Urie Bronfenbrenner. The theory consists of five levels: (a) microsystem; (b) mesosystem; (c) exosystem; (d) macrosystem; and (e)chronosystem. The microsystem and mesosystems demonstrate the impact of relationships on students' motivation for academic rigor (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Ecological Model of Human Development

Urie Bronfenbrenner created the ecological model of human development. The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the relationship between functioning and developing human beings and altering resources of the current environment in which a developing person exists. This process is affected by the affiliation of internal and external settings that are a part of a community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Bronfenbrenner, five systems affect human development, (a) microsystem; (b) mesosystem; (c) exosystem; (d) macrosystem; and (e) chronosystem (Tate, 2018). This study primarily utilized the microsystem and the mesosystem. The microsystem is closest to a person and consists of relationships developed in the home, school, neighborhood, and social organizations (Tate, 2018). The beliefs of people within the microsystem, such as parents, friends, and teachers, can be fundamental to an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

Microsystem. The foundation of the microsystem is a dyad. A dyad occurs when two individuals focus their attention on each other or are involved in each other's activities. There are three forms of dyad, observational, joint-activity, and primary. An observational dyad occurs when one person focuses their attention on the activities of the other person. A joint-activity dyad occurs when both parties are engaged in an activity together. A primary dyad occurs when both parties are separated but are present in each other's thoughts. According to Bronfenbrenner, the primary dyad is a sovereign force that motivates learning regardless of the other person's presence or absence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Mesosystem. The mesosystem is the interactions that occur between two or more settings. The four types of mesosystems are multisetting participation, indirect linkage, intersetting communications, and intersetting knowledge. Multisetting participation occurs when

an individual is engaged in activities in more than one environment, such as a student participating in activities in their home and school. The maturing individual who is involved in an activity in more than setting is called the primary link. Other individuals engaged in the settings are called supplementary links. Indirect linkage consists of creating a communication between the two settings with a third party involved due to a lack of participation from the primary link. Intersetting communication involves messages sent between the two environments that provide information. Intersetting knowledge is information that one setting possesses about the other location (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For this study, the mesosystem was used to show how relationships and communication developed between different environments can affect student motivation. Specifically, multisetting participation and intersetting communication show how parents, acting as supplementary links, can acquire knowledge that can impact their child's enrollment into rigorous courses such as AP.

In his mesosystem theory, Bronfenbrenner created many hypotheses about the interaction and communication between multiple settings. The hypotheses include conditions and ideas that can enhance the academic track of a student. For example, one hypothesis stated that a person's development could increase through continuous transporting of information between the settings. A person's development increases by different environments where the individual interacts with mature individuals in activities. Bronfenbrenner also believed that children from cultural backgrounds where relationships transcend settings would more than likely benefit from new and enriching experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For this study, multisetting participation shows the impact of the relationships developed between different microsystems settings.

Application of Bronfenbrenner's Theory in Studies

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was used in other studies that focus on African American students (Stipanovic & Woo, 2017; Orrock & Clark, 2015; Tate, 2018). Stipanovic and Woo (2017) used Bronfenbrenner's ecological models of human development to understand how environmental factors influenced 18 African American high school seniors' interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Using Bronfenbrenner's theory, the researchers discovered the importance of the microsystem level, particularly with school personnel such as school counselors and parental involvement before secondary level enrollment. Like Orrock and Clark (2015), researchers focused on students in high poverty areas. Participants did not have full access to advanced level courses. This limitation attributes to the lack of funding accessible to the schools (Stipanovic & Woo, 2017).

Orrock and Clark (2015) used Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory to assess Black boys' academic achievement. Orrock and Clark used participants of one gender who lived in at-risk environments and classified as achieving academically. In the study, academically achieving is a minimum of a grade point average of 2.5. Students were considered at risk if they were on track to graduate with a standard or advanced diploma, 16 to 18 years old, reared by a single mother, and eligible for free or subsidized housing (Orrock & Clark, 2015). The study results revealed that family values were the most constant theme that appeared to be the significant foundations for academic success. Family values associated with academic success were drive, motivation, independent thinking, and a strong work ethic.

Tate (2018) used Bronfenbrenner's theory to study students' academic success at an urban elementary school in Chicago, Illinois. Tate explained each of the five systems to explain influences that impacted the students' scholastically experiences and attainment. Tate's research

revealed how the Catholic church and school made a substantial image of the microsystem elements. Parents must positively interact with the school, possess a voter registration card, and both parents are required to come to the school to sign report cards. Parents were required to attend monthly meetings where parents received their child's classwork and discussed their academic progress. The school's requirements for the parents' role in their child(ren)'s education attributed to test scores among the highest in the United States (Tate, 2018), suggesting that collaborative efforts between the home and school may produce positive academic outcomes. However, the absence of active home involvement may have the reverse effect on a student's academic success (Quin et al., 2018). In a study conducted by Clayton (2017), 533 Black girls in their senior year of high school noted different support types that their families contributed to their academic success. Participants classified as middle and high achieving stated that their parents provided expectations and standards for their children to oblige. Participants in this category also cited their parents' expectations and consequences as a positive contribution to their success.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development demonstrated the significance of the microsystems and mesosystems by demonstrating the impact interpersonal relationships can have on education. Microsystems show the impact that relationships have on Black students' motivation to learn and strive for academic rigor. Specific relationships, such as parent/child, student/teacher, and peer associations, were examined. Mesosystems show how relationships within the microsystems can positively impact each other. One limitation of the theory is that it does not consider the unambiguous relationship between cultural expectations and historical bias (Cooper & Davis, 2015). Despite the limitation, utilizing Bronfenbrenner's theory in this study may demonstrate how Black parents implement academic expectations for

their children and how a combination of household expectations and knowledge acquired through mesosystems may motivate Black students to enroll in AP classes. It may also demonstrate how Black students can desire academic rigor regardless of negative or positive educational experiences in the school environment.

Related Literature

On March 31, 1960, W.E.B. Dubois gave a speech to the Association of Negro Social Science Teachers at Johnson C. Smith University entitled "Whither Now and Why." This speech is sixty years old, but it is still relevant to Black students' education in the twenty-first century. Who could imagine that DuBois could foresee the plight of integration for some Black students? Dubois stated, "Negro children will be instructed in public schools and taught poorly under unpleasant if not discouraging circumstances. Even more largely than today, they will fall out of school, cease to enter high school, and fewer will go to college." Unfortunately, many of the situations that DuBois described are current problems that some Black students have encountered in terms of the absence of rigorous classes at the secondary level and pursuing postsecondary education.

Many positive and negative factors may contribute to Black students' lived experiences at the secondary level of their education. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations can influence Black students' desire for academic rigor (Gurin et al., 1969). The literature exposed the bias Black students may face in the educational system from academic tracking to their teachers' perceptions (Stanley & Chambers, 2018). The prejudice that Black students may face will be connected to critical race theory in the field of education with significant contributions from Derrick Bell (1980), Gloria Ladson-Billings, and William Tate IV (1995). Black students may also suffer ridicule from peers and receive the label acting White due to their academic

excellence (Fenty & Allio, 2017). A decisive factor that may motivate Black students is the importance of fictive kinship that Black students may develop. Fictive kinships become a support system socially and academically for Black students (Fordham,1988). Overall, the abundance of negative experiences, biases, and perceptions that Black students may suffer is an indicator of the limited research that focuses on Black motivations for A. P. courses (Jefferies & Silvernail, 2017). This study can specifically provide the lived experiences, negative or positive, that impact Black student AP enrollment and provide details of familial expectations, educational relationships, and peer associations that led to AP enrollment.

Underrepresentation of Black Students in Advanced Placement Courses

In a report by the Education Trust, research revealed that if Black students enrolled in the advanced placement courses, like their counterparts, 80,000 additional Black students would participate in advanced placement courses (Young & Young, 2018). The Civil Rights Data Collection Data Snapshot on College and Career Readiness in the 2011-2012 school year revealed that Black students made up 16 percent of the total enrollment in high schools. Still, only nine percent enrolled in at least one advanced placement course (Siegle et al., 2016). The research revealed that Black students enrolled in advanced placement courses at lower rates without enrollment requirements than their peers of other ethnicities (Fenty & Allio, 2017; Kettler & Hurst, 2017; Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019). Other factors associated with low participation for Black students include the absence of teacher recommendations, a desire to be accepted amongst peers, and the lack of exposure to the rigorous academic curriculum (Ford et al., 2018).

Social pressures, such as being perceived as acting White or not being cool, may affect Black advanced placement enrollment (Fenty & Allio, 2017). In a study conducted by Greer et

al. (2018), one Black male participant stated he previously thought advanced placement courses were for White students, not Black students. In the same study conducted by Greer et al. (2018), one Black male believed that Black students' underrepresentation was due to a fear of failure. African American participation in advanced placement courses has increased (Judson & Hobson, 2016). Yet, the increase in Black participation compared to students of other ethnicities is minimal (Judson & Hobson, 2016).

To increase access to advanced placement courses, schools need to examine how teachers and counselors can guide specific subgroups away from advanced placement courses and students' fear of lack of success and isolation (Fenty & Allio, 2017). The solution to Black students' underrepresentation is not open enrollment (Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019). Other factors that are not related to students' effort or interest in advanced placement courses may exist (Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019). Gender and race played a role in course selection in a study on a North Carolina school district (Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019). Students in urban schools may evaluate advanced placement courses' quality by assessing teaching and the program (Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019).

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) developed through the significant contributions of Derrick Bell (Ladson-Billings,1998). My study uses the works of Derrick Bell, a lawyer, and law professor, who focused on issues such as American law and race during the aftermath of the Brown decision (Bell, 1980). CRT's foundation is in the intellectual beliefs of Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B DuBois (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). In The Miseducation of the Negro (1933), Woodson states that the United States' educational system operates with a double agenda. One half of the educational system motivates the dominant race. The other half of the

educational system demolishes any presence of intelligence within the Black individual by making him feel inferior to the dominant race. The education of Black people is under the authority of those who have kept them oppressed and separated. The dominant culture system trains Black people to assimilate to the dominant culture while simultaneously delivering a message that Blacks will not ever be a member of the dominant race (Woodson, 1933).

Woodson believed that people of another ethnicity could educate Black students, but they must comprehend and be compassionate to Black students. The objective of a good education should be to motivate individuals to begin their lives with the hand dealt with them and improve upon it. Black people have been restricted financially and segregated. This abuse will continue until a collaborative effort of different ethnicities commences, and Black people are no longer a symbol of racial exploitation (Woodson, 1933).

In 1903, W.E.B. DuBois wrote *The Souls of Black Folks*. DuBois stated that Black people possess a double-consciousness, which provides the capability to examine oneself through the dominant culture's eyes that looked upon the Black individual in ridicule and melancholy. Black individuals possess two identities: American and the other, which belongs to the Black ethnicity. The possession of both identities leads to locked doors, fortuity, and expletive words and actions from counterparts of the dominant culture. To be impoverished is difficult, but to be an impoverished race puts the race of people in a state vulnerable to hardships (DuBois, 1903).

Bell focused on American law and race and the Brown decision (Bell, 1980). Bell (1983) used W.E.B. DuBois's article, "Does the Negro need separate school?" (1935) to show the accuracy of DuBois's prediction of the displacement of Black educators and administrators with the start of integration. Bell believed that the romantic notion of the Brown decision did not

equate to educational opportunities for Black students (Bell, 1983). It was not enough for Black individuals to integrate with quality education promised (Bell, 1983).

In 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate IV extended the concept of critical race theory into the field of education. The critical race theory rests on three propositions. The propositions are a significant component that determines bias in the United States is race, the foundation of American society is property rights, and the collaborative relationships of race and property create an equation where inequalities socially and scholastically can be comprehended (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). The examination of race as a belief rejects the realities of the impact of racism.

The connection between property and education exists in some direct and indirect ways. A direct way of looking at property and learning is that individuals who have a higher socioeconomic status can acquire high-value property receive the right to better schools. An indirect way of looking at a property is that the curriculum is considered intellectual property. A neighborhood school's property values can determine the quality and quantity of a school's curriculum. Intellectual property cannot exist without real property, such as the science labs and technology that accompany the curriculum (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, is an example of a case that best expresses Ladson-Billings and Tate's viewpoint on the issue of education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). With the desegregation of American public schools, segregation of students of color has continued (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The integration of schools caused white flight and the displacement of Black educators and administrators (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; DuBois, 1935). The right to disposition pertains to being rewarded for complying with defined cultural practices (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The right to use and enjoyment relates to some

students' right to enjoy and use a specific curriculum (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In terms of education, reputation, and status, property pertains to providing a label or identification to a school or program that will denigrate the school's reputation or program (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The absolute right to exclude, from a racial perspective, initially pertained to the ability to deny Black students to education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Recent examples of the absolute right to exclude include white flight, tracking, gifted education programs, honors classes, and advanced placement classes (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Critical race theory demonstrates how skin color barriers can influence Black students' motivation to take AP courses. Critical race theory may also show how educators' negative perceptions of Black students can affect Black students' motivation. Moreover, critical race theory shows how negative perceptions of Black students' potential for gifted education in elementary or middle schools can impact AP courses' availability and preparation at the secondary level.

Sources of Motivation for Black Students

There is limited research that examines the motivation of Black high school students (Graham, 1994). The limited available data shows that Black high school students are motivated to enroll in AP courses due to their focus on future educational endeavors. Tyson et al.'s (2005) data reveal that Black students are encouraged to enroll in advanced classes to gain enrollment in specifically desired universities and prepare themselves for postsecondary academia. Tyson's (2011) data on the topic revealed that Black students wanted to increase their eligibility for scholarships believed that advanced courses enhanced their transcripts, and it was an appropriate fit.

However, there is an abundance of literature that focuses on the motivation of Black college students (Griffin, 2006; Cokely, 2003). In the 1970s, interest in Black students' motivation experienced a surge (Graham, 1994). During the 1970s, research on Black students focused on authority, confident assumptions, and elevated self-sufficiency developed. Gurin et al. (1969) examined the internal-external motivation of Black youth. When the literature was published, the United States had experienced the Civil Rights Movement and a transition to the Black Power Movement. The authors felt the need to focus on one aspect of their students' adjustment needed within the social system (Gurin et al., 1969). Gurin et al.'s research revealed that Black students who were more conscious of discrimination typically blamed society instead of Blacks themselves for problems in pursuing positions in society that were deemed "nontraditional" for Black of the mid-twentieth century. Gurin et al. (1969) analyzed this as an external direction promoting higher ambitions. External direction coincides with behaviors that produce virtuous conduct. Internal guidance would allow Black people to blame themselves for their status, limiting what Black people can do or accomplish according to societal norms (Gurin et al., 1969). Gurin (1970) stated that making external factors a focal point may be beneficial for Black individuals when determining the real expectations of achievement to divide standardized and societal difficulties from circumstance constraints. Students who internalized blame for the situation upon themselves, rather than society. To resolve the problem, Black students believe in self-improvement (Gurin et al., 1969). While early literature suggested that extrinsically motivated students underperformed, Gurin et al. (1969) believe that extrinsic motivation may yield different results for people of low socioeconomic status or minorities who focus on economic or discriminatory factors are essential when determining achievement or deficiency.

External factors' focus may be beneficial if it stems from evaluating the opportunity for accomplishments against standardized and valid hurdles rather than unreliable chance.

The examination of Black students' motivation is essential because the perception of a lack of motivation may contribute to the achievement gap between Black and White students (Graham, 1994). The motivation of Black college students can stem from different sources that are intrinsic and extrinsic (Griffin, 2006). In terms of extrinsic motivation, their ethnicity can be a source of motivation. Some Black students desire to dispel racial stereotypes associated with their ethnicity.

Some Black people are motivated to disprove that Black students are academically lethargic and to disprove the myth of high intelligence connected to ethnicity. John McWhorter coined the terminology cult of anti-intellectualism (Cokely, 2003). The anti-intellectual strain derives from the historical, educational oppression of Black people by White people. Due to education oppression, Black people, who deem themselves as legitimately Black, refuse access to education. The anti-intellectual strain affects all Black people, regardless of socioeconomic status (McWhorter, 2000). Cokley (2003) challenged the anti-intellectual myth and found that Black students who attend historically Black colleges and universities are motivated academically. Black students do not possess lower self-esteem or lower academic self-concept except for White students on historically Black college campuses with higher academic self-concept (Cokley, 2003). If driven to the extreme, motivation to dispel racial stereotypes can impact student achievement in a negative manner (Griffin, 2006). However, Smalls et al. (2007) found that grasping ethnic identity may strengthen school engagement.

Hwang et al. (2002) found that Black college students' motivation was multidimensional. There were intrinsic, extrinsic, present, future, and social goals that shaped academically

successful Black college students' motivations. (Hwang et al., 2002). In a study conducted with 60 participants, the data revealed that nearly 60 percent of the participants were intrinsically motivated to select their college major. Sixty percent of intrinsically motivated participants when choosing their major are extrinsically motivated by familial or teacher influences. (Hwang et al., 2002). Forty-eight percent of the participants saw obtaining postsecondary education as a connection between their education and their future. Participants who valued education and their future saw obtaining acceptable employment and prosperity. Ninety percent of the participants who saw school as creating a future path to financial stability acknowledged extrinsic factors or values (Hwang et al., 2002). This study is evidence that infuses different sources of motivation to advance their goals (Hwang et al., 2002). Griffin (2006) stated that high-achieving Black students perceive their motivation as being intrinsic. However, extrinsic factors contribute to their motivation, such as the approval of family members, career goals, and acting as a genuine asset to their ethnic community (Griffin, 2006). Daoud et al. (2018) research also support multidimensional motivation. Through their study, Daoud et al. (2018) found that Black students elaborate on social identities that contain internal feelings and external viewpoints that emerge over some time.

Cultural Capital

According to Yosso (2005), there are six types of cultural capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. Aspirational capital is the ability to be hopeful for the future, despite adverse circumstances. Linguistic capital is the thought that students of color have multiple ways of communicating. Familial capital is the responsibility to the welfare of biological family members and members of the community. Social capital is the association between people and community resources. Navigational capital is the ability to operate in

establishments that are not traditionally established for people of color. Resistant capital is

knowledge and skills cultivated through adversarial behavior that challenges bias (Yossi,2005).

The six types of capital collectively provide insight into how students of color amass success at

the collegiate level. Possession of a narrow perspective on the valuable cultural responses

promotes deficit-oriented approaches to aiding students of color. Deficit-oriented perspectives

view students of color as needing adjustment rather than the institutions. Expanding the

understanding of cultural capital with cultural harmony between students of color and higher

education institutions can assist in a shift to an asset-based orientation (Samuelson & Litzer,

2016).

Limited research focuses on Black high school students' cultural capital, but there is

research on Black college students' cultural capital, in particular males. Also, limited research

focuses on minority middle school students. When examining the inspiration for Black males'

college attendance, the following factors are essential: upward mobility, monetary independence,

parental persuasion, educational goals, and ambition (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Brooms & Davis

(2017) conducted a study with 59 Black male college students. The focus of the research was

aspirational, familial, and social capitals. The findings of the study revealed that mass media

impacted one-third of the participants through two television shows, "A Different World" and "A

Cosby Show," and one movie, "School Daze." The three media forms highlighted the college

experience and college perception as feasible and attainable due to early exposure. Images of "A

Different World" alleviated one participant's doubt of possessing the intellect to attend college.

A participant connected with the middle-class fictional character through the Black race, not

socioeconomics (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Means (2019) also collected data from Black and

Latinx middle school students that revealed that television or movies drove students' career aspirations.

Minority collegiate students have found multiple ways to find support as they progress through their programs of study. Samuelson & Litzler (2016) conducted a study with Black and Latino engineering students to understand what types of cultural capital were used to progress their engineering programs. Sixty-eight of the participants described at least one form of navigational capital, 61 percent references one or more forms of aspirational capital, 39 percent referenced familial capital, and 39 percent referenced a form of resistant capital (Samuelson & Litzler, 2016). While several participants stated their families were a source of support and motivation, some participants became a source of comfort and encouragement for individuals within their communities. Six participants provided social capital by supporting younger students through community service projects with elementary students, tutoring first-year college students, mentoring incoming first-year students, teaching in minority summer programs, and acting as sponsors for first-year students from their high schools (Samuelson & Litzler, 2016). Samuelson & Litzler (2016) stated these forms of community support indicate students' recognition and pledge to the community's prosperity. Strayhorn (2017) said that peers' support at the collegiate level is beneficial to Black males who attend PWIs with lower Black or minority students.

It is also important to examine social capital through relationships developed between Black college students and Black high school students and between collegiate students and their mentors. Cox (2017) conducted a study on mentor/mentee relations of a program focused on minority enrollment in boarding schools. Cox (2017) stated vertical ties that developed between younger and older students provide the emotional support of socially maneuvering through

boarding school. Horizontal ties provide access to various academic resources, and they can encourage students to create dialogues with teachers, such as asking for help (Cox, 2017). Luedke (2017) studied mentoring the roles of staff and administrators for first-generation Black, Latinx, and biracial students at a predominately White institution to analyze social capital. The research revealed that White staff and administrators focused on the students' academic experiences without focusing on nonacademic factors such as familial or personal concerns that may affect students' educational experiences (Luedke, 2017). The research revealed that minority staff and administrators nurtured students by focusing on the whole person rather than the student's identity. One participant's relationship outside of the academic environment allowed the adviser to guide course decisions due to understanding the student's academic strengths and weaknesses (Luedke, 2017).

In a study conducted with Black and Latinx middle schoolers in a rural setting, Means (2019) found most participants were motivated to attend college through familial support. One participant's father started a dialogue about college before his son's entrance into high school. The participant's father's collegiate experience and the dismal plight of some family member's lives sparked an interest in college education. Participants stated that future career endeavors were influenced by their family members' success in their chosen careers or through learning skills in the home environment. Education was the main priority, and extracurricular activities were nonexistent without good grades (Means, 2019). Brooms (2019) conducted a study with Black graduates of an all-boys secondary charter school. The data revealed that the participants' possessed multiple sources of encouragement for future endeavors through relationships developed with caring and encouraging teachers, peer relationships, mentors, and family members. The possession of high expectations for Black males does not exist in isolation, but it

must be a collaborative effort amongst support systems rooted in appropriate academic rigor (Brooms & Davis, 2017).

School Tracking & Ability Grouping

School tracking is a method to organize students by perceiving their academic ability (Stanley & Vanzant Chambers, 2018). In 1920, school tracking began; it faded out for a period and resurfaced in the 1950s during the Space Race era and desegregation (Stanley & Venzant Chambers, 2018). Supporters of tracking believed that students grouped by ability make individualized instruction easier and provide rigor for advanced students (Modica, 2015). Supporters also think that grouping allows students to learn without being overshadowed by advanced learners (Modica, 2015). The students in lower tracking groups receive subpar quality instruction, and the teachers do not have vast experience, curriculum materials, or high expectations for the students (Giersch, 2018). The experiences of being assigned to lower track classes create an environment where students are vulnerable to individuals who have low self-concepts and less attentiveness to school (Giersch, 2018). Many researchers believe that tracking is not only inefficacious for students who are not advanced learners, but it preserves a racist system of inequality (Modica, 2015).

Academic tracking typically begins when adolescents are in middle school, during the developmental stage for identity formation. During identity formation, students' educational experiences are essential to answering questions about who they are and who they will be. Therefore, students who develop a positive image of their academic ability and potential have better grades. Courses that are not considered rigorous or labeled as a standard level course have large percentages of Black students (Legette, 2018). Tracking may leave students unable to control their educational endeavors (Venzant Chambers & Spikes, 2016). Research has shown

that tracking provides a dominant influence on students' expectations of their academic ability

with little room for peers to influence them (Karlson, 2015). Tracking has a significant role in

how school-created hierarchies can dictate students' academic ability and preparedness in their

entire academic career (Venzant Chambers & Spikes, 2016). The school created hierarchies that

can reflect students' participation in class, motivation for learning, and achievement (Legette,

2018). Another adverse effect of tracking is the way high-track and low- track students perceive

each other. Minority students in low track courses view minority students in high track courses

with contempt (Kotok, 2017).

Peer Associations

When Black students enroll in advanced placement courses, they must evaluate the cost

of feeling alienated in a less diverse learning environment but a rigorous learning environment

(Kotok, 2017). Andrew and Flashman (2017) found that a combination of 20 percent to 60

percent of middle school peers and the inclusion of new peers at the secondary level shine a

positive light on ninth-graders' postsecondary aspirations. The absence of collaboration may

harm postsecondary goals (Andrew & Flashman, 2017). Racial opportunity cost is the tradeoff

that minority students must give up being academically successful in a majority White learning

environment (Tabron & Venzant Chambers, 2019). Black students must choose the identity that

provides them options of being referred to as an "Oreo" or ghetto (Modica, 2015). Research

reveals that Black students view education more favorably than their peers of other ethnicities

due to the upward mobility that it can create (Kotok, 2017). One Black student in advanced

placement courses believed their peers were not in advanced placement courses due to a lack of

motivation for academic success and the guidance of parents who are adequately informed about

advanced placement courses. Another Black female student stated that some Black friends tried

to discourage her from taking advanced placement courses (Kang et al., 2018). Black students should not have to make a tradeoff between academically challenging coursework or honoring their cultural identity. When Black students decide to enroll in academically rigorous courses, it comes at the expense of feeling isolated, lonely, being a token, suppressing their cultural identity, and having their academic ability questioned (Tabron & Venzant Chambers, 2019).

Oppositional culture is a minority group's historical relationship with the most influential mainstream society group and how education will yield benefits (Blake, 2018). According to Tatum (2003), oppositional culture is associated with American public schools' post-integration era because there has not always been a rejection of Black students' academic achievement. For some Black students, isolation may be an option that allows them to alienate themselves from peers of their home environment to achieve academic excellence (Kang et al., 2018). For others, isolation is out of their control due to course selections. Enrolling in courses such as honors courses may eliminate many opportunities to associate with Black peers. In this situation, Black students outside of rigorous classes may be acquaintances, not close friends (Tabron & Vanzant Chambers, 2019).

Fictive Kinship

Peer associations are essential in microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and through fictive kinships (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Fordham, 1988). Fictive kinships are familial relationships that resemble biological relationships. Black children may learn the concept of fictive kinship from their parents. When learned early in life, life opportunities and accomplishments are associated with the relationship (Fordham, 1988). Fictive kinships develop with peers, members of the local community, and educators. Fictive kinships may be financial and emotional support, particularly for students at the collegiate level who may be away from

home (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Acceptance into fictive kinship is not based solely on skin color, but on behaviors and attitudes (Fordham, 1988). In terms of peer associations, fictive kinships can be a source of support for students. When students have attained educational levels that their biological families have no familiarity with, peers within the same educational level can be a source of support (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Within the kinship, peers could act as role models for each other (Wilson, 2017).

Religious Affiliation & The Influence on Academic Performance

Religious organizations and schools are two settings that may be a part of a Black student's microsystem. Despite the different purposes that may serve in a student's life, religious affiliation may impact academic performance in what Bronfenbrenner called the mesosystem. (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The Black church multitasks in providing parishioners' spiritual well-being while stressing the importance of education, preparation, and preservation of society's inhabitants. The Black church historical has been an advocate for quality education and a voice against inadequate and inequitable education in the community (Holland, 2016). Brooks and Allen (2016) conducted a study with 14 Black students attending a historically black college and university. One objective of the study was to examine the role that religion played in academic persistence. Participants described the dependence of faith on their continuation in their educational journey. God is the source for sustainment through their college experience. The church is an edifice of refuge from life stressors (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Churches may serve the congregation's youth by creating activities and services and making an effort to provide social support to the target population (Gooden & McMahon, 2016). Members of the congregation may serve as role models to the youth. The adult members of the

congregation who have obtained their career goals may provide advice to the youth who may desire to follow in their footsteps (Holland, 2016).

Religiously inactive participants attributed their status in life to their religious background. One of the participants felt that a higher power watched over her due to the possibility that events that occurred in life could have been worse (Brooks & Allen, 2016). The participants' declaration of religion's attributions to their current state in life is reminiscent of Proverbs 22:6. Parents instill biblical principles into their children for future reference in adulthood.

Acting White

The phrase acting White has existed in American society since the nineteenth century (Christie, 2010). The term was introduced to America through Uncle Tom's Cabin, written by Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1852 (Christie, 2010). Stowe developed Tom into a literate, innovative, and free thinker individual, which collided with the stereotype of a Black man in the nineteenth century (Christie, 2010). Members of the Black community equated a Black man's literacy and ability to interact formally and informally with the White community as being an Uncle Tom (Christie, 2010). One significant aspect of Tom's persona is literacy, which was associated with the White community rather than the Black community (Christie, 2010). A stereotype formed and followed Black people through time, that education equates with acting White (Christie, 2010). According to Fordham & Ogbu (1986), subordinate minorities develop an oppositional cultural frame of reference that allows them to preserve their identity and create barriers between themselves and White Americans. Therefore, certain behaviors and actions are not appropriate because they are attributes of White America. To act in a manner associated

with White Americans' behaviors and activities is acting White, and it is met with opposition from the minority community (Fordham, & Ogbu, 1986).

Acting White has become a myth that has been proven and disproven through scholarly research (Buck, 2010). Data reveals different results from Black students on acting White. When associating acting White with high school students' rigorous course selections, Tyson (2011) found that Black and White students select courses that they perceive to be scholastically and socially appropriate for them. Also, Tyson (2011) found no Black students who were concerned about acting White. Black students' primary focus was the rigor of courses (Tyson, 2011). Fryer (2006) found the myth to exist in schools where the student body demographics were less than 80 percent Black. Tyson et al. (2005) found the existence of the myth in learning environments where students in rigorous courses were exclusive and comprised of white students, typically from affluent backgrounds, or in learning environments where a low number of Black students can participate in rigorous classes. The acting White label occurs in a learning environment with integrated facilities and segregated curricula due to tracking (Darity, 2006). Ferguson (2006) acknowledged the existence of the acting White label; however, he believed that the pattern is subtle. Webb's (2018) research reveals that acting White accusations are common among students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, mainly when focusing on specific behaviors and preferences. During the adolescent stage, academically successful Black students are more likely to be labeled as acting White due to their enrollment in advanced courses, even in a joking tone by their friends (Tyson, 2011). The assumption exists that Black students in advanced classes have rejected their Black peers and occasionally their identity to adopt aspects of a White personality and relationships (Ferguson, 2001). Fordham and Ogbu

(1986) found that participants in their study perceived acting White as using standard English, studying in the library, and getting good grades.

For black students perceived as acting White, the responses to the label have varied. Reactions to the label, acting White, range from destroying the myth of Black students' academic inferiority and embracing Black intellectualism to appearing unmoved by the comment and focusing on future endeavors (Mickelson & Velasco, 2007). Unfortunately, some Black students cannot cope with the label and conform to stereotypical perceptions of Black students' academic practices, such as not completing assignments or displaying their emotions (Mickelson & Velasco, 2007). Fordham & Obgu (1986) found that some academically successful Black students avoid the negative stereotypes bestowed upon them by using humor. The use of humor may distract others from the reality of their academic performance and ability. Academically successful students may also downplay their academic performance to avoid negative connotations such as brainiac, avoid academic-oriented activities, and create inconsistent school attendance patterns. Black students who are motivated to excel academically and fit in with Black peers must be current in pop culture, particularly music, fashion, and television shows (Ferguson, 2001).

The perception of acting White affects Black males and females differently and, in the case of Black males, harshly (Fryer, 2006). For some Black males, enrollment in AP courses caused peers to question their sexuality (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Also, an inverse relationship formed that Black males who did not earn good grades were more than likely heterosexual (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Some Black males are socially isolated in rigorous courses and believe that classmates will not converse with them (Ferguson, 2001).

While there is evidence that supports the existence of the acting White label, other data reveals that every academically successful Black student does not encounter cynical ridicule for the academic achievement (Tyson et al., 2005). In their research, Tyson et al. (2005) found high schools in North Carolina where Black peers did not shun academic success. Black students stated that peers focused on the rigor of the course selections, and for some Black students, their course selections were never a topic of conversation. In one predominately Black high school in North Carolina, academically successful students in AP and IB courses were admired by students in regular classes (Tyson et al., 2005). Fryer and Torelli's (2010) data mirrors Tyson et al. (2005), and they further conclude that the existing of the label is present in low socioeconomic minority schools. While Tyson et al. (2005) have data that dispute the acting White label, their research also found data to support the myth. Participants in one high school in North Carolina acknowledged the existence of the label acting White. One participant experienced the perception of members of the Black and White races. While Black peers viewed her as acting White, White peers questioned her affiliation with the Black community due to her use of standard English and rigorous course selections (Tyson et al., 2005).

Educators' Expectations and Perceptions of Minority Students

Research on school personnel reveals that minority students are thought to have the lower academic ability (Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019). Research shows that teachers, on average, have higher expectations for White students compared to minority students who have parallel records of achievement (Rogers et al., 2018). When examining Black teachers and non-Black teachers' expectations, non-Black teachers have lower expectations for Black students than Black teachers (Gershenson et al., 2016). Also, White teachers make more positive comments and encourage White students. Holding higher expectations, giving more positive feedback and encouragement

to White students can limit educational opportunities and create a negative classroom tone (Vega et al., 2015). Gershenson and Papageorge (2016) clarify that all teachers are encouraged by their students. However, the distinction is that White teachers are inspired more by their White students than their Black students.

When teachers develop expectations for their students, their pedagogy will center around their student expectations. Partisan teacher expectations can be instrumental in students' self-fulfilling prophecies (Papageorge et al., 2016). According to Rosenthal and Jacobson (1997), self-filling prophecies overlaid on individuals, which is accurate. Students may fulfill their teachers' expectations when higher standards of expectations are bestowed upon them (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1997).

Teacher recommendations are also influential in influencing students' academic outcomes. Recommendations for advanced placement courses and completion of the class can impact college admissions (Fox, 2016). Educational personnel's perceptions of students based upon their race place minority students in less academically challenging courses. If advanced placement courses are filled based upon what students are worthy of taking the classes, minority students and students with a low-socioeconomic status will be disqualified (Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019).

Gifted Education

The Civil Rights Data Collection Snapshot on College and Career Readiness in the 2011-2012 school year revealed that four percent of the Black student population was enrolled in a gifted education program (Siegle et al., 2016). Black students are underrepresented in gifted education and higher education, particularly at top universities (Ford & Whiting, 2016). Black males are underrepresented in gifted programs and advanced placement courses (Ford et al.,

2018). Black students represent nineteen percent of the public schools and only ten percent of the gifted populations (Ford & Whiting, 2016). Tyson argued that racially promoted ideas of giftedness by elementary school teachers and administrators cause Black students to lack confidence in the intellect, which produces fewer Black students to enroll in advanced placement courses. Black students' hesitation about majority White advanced placement courses due to feeling uncomfortable enforces assumptions about race and tracking patterns. The increase in minority teachers in advanced placement courses is seen as one possible solution to increase the diversity of advanced placement courses (Kolluri, 2018).

The lack of Black students in gifted education programs will contribute to Black students' low representation in advanced placement courses and, eventually, top universities (Ford & Whiting, 2016). At the secondary level, gifted education and advanced placement courses intersect. Advanced Placement courses are open to all students, regardless of an academically and intellectually gifted identification, there are little expectations of who should belong in these classes (Kettler & Hurst, 2017). However, research shows that being under referred by teachers provides low evaluations for minority students on checklists and nomination forms. Teacher recommendations are a significant factor for admission to gifted education. Other barriers to gifted education for Black students include teachers' lack of training in gifted education and multicultural education. As a result, teachers can ineffectively evaluate students' gifted academic potential if they lack talented education training (Ford & Whiting, 2016).

Parental Influence on Educational Attainment

The style in which parents rear their children impacts their child's educational results (Majumder, 2016). Majumder (2016) found authoritarian parenting styles produced children who obtain a high school diploma. Authoritative parenting style is more likely to have children

who earn a high school diploma and pursue postsecondary education through either an associate

degree or bachelor's degree than parents who are not involved in their child's education

(Majumder, 2016). A significant key to the benefit of authoritative parenting styles is the child's

positive perception of school and success (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2014).

Parental Involvement. Parental educational involvement provides essential support that

may impact academic success at the secondary level and beyond (Benner et al., 2016). The type

of parental involvement that benefits students can vary by socioeconomic status (Benner et al.,

2016). Parental involvement may vary by ethnicity (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Students

who originate from low-socioeconomic backgrounds benefit from school-based involvement.

Students from high-socioeconomic backgrounds benefit from parental expectations (Benner et

al., 2016).

Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) found that White parents frequent the school

environment more than Black parents. When Black parents participate in their child's school,

the child feels prepared to take on academic tasks (Ross et al., 2018). While White parents may

be more visible in the school environment, Black parents may be heavily involved in their child's

education in the home environment. Black parents create time, workspace and make materials

readily available for their children to complete academic activities within the home environment.

The reasoning behind Black parents' strong emphasis on academics within the home

environment may be a concern for the child's future endeavors. (Wang et al., 2014). The lack of

presence of Black students in the school environment may be due to negative experiences

associated with Black students in the public education system (Cross, 2003). Some Black

parents are involved in their child's education due to the skepticism of the school (Hill, 2017).

Black parents may uphold their child's behavior or challenge the teacher instead of creating a

partnership with the teacher (Hill et al., 2004). However, the parental trust of their child's school is a more reliable predictor of student motivation and engagement than parental involvement practices (Ross et al., 2018). The lack of presence in the school environment does not mean that Black children do not benefit from the parental involvement that they do receive. When examining participation by ethnicity, parental academic engagement, and attainment were more significant for Black students than White students (Hill et al., 2004). Parental involvement may shield students' academic performance from being affected by issues associated with low socioeconomic status or the family dynamic (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

Parental Socioeconomic Status. Parental socioeconomic status may impact how parents interact within the school environment and the expectations bestowed upon children (Hill et al., 2004). Parental socioeconomic status connects to the educational attainment of the mother (Carolan & Wesserman, 2015). Mothers, defined as highly educated, maybe advocates for their child's entrance into honors-level courses, may be equipped with more knowledge about the school process, and oversee their child's academic performance (Baker & Stevenson,1986). If educated mothers advocate for their child's placement in an honors course, they may also encourage their child's placement in advanced placement courses. Children may develop the skills necessary to maneuver in social establishments, such as schools, through experiences connected through the family's socioeconomic status. Middle-class families may discuss high school plans and postsecondary goals, and parents may engage in the college application process (Carolan & Wesserman, 2015). Parents, who are of low socioeconomic status, also participate in their child's education by establishing high expectations that center upon future achievements and advancement. Instead of helping with homework, parents have high expectations for their children (Wang et al., 2014).

Black Educators' Influence

The presence of Black teachers in the classroom is essential. Black educators may relate

to Black students as members of their immediate or extended families (Griffin & Tackie, 2016).

For future career options and visions for Black students, the Black teacher's presence allows

them to envision themselves as educators, principals, and higher education (Poloma, 2014).

Also, Black educators can act as an epitome and make connections with students by sharing

similar stories with their students (Poloma, 2014). The bond shared with a Black educator and

their Black students may provide a cultural awareness that may guide the teacher's pedagogy

(Ladson-Billings, 1995). The cultural awareness shared between the educator and students of

similar ethnicities may also increase students' academic expectations (Egalite et al., 2015). The

effect of higher academic expectations may cause Black students to adjust the hopes that they

hold for themselves and may positively impact their future educational outcomes (Gershenson et

al., 2017). Many Black educators may empathize with minority students' home circumstances,

but they incorporate rigor and high expectations to provide a sound education (Griffin & Tackie,

2016). Black educators may implement high expectations for Black students because they may

feel that their colleagues may not expect the same performance level or encourage it (Griffin &

Tackie, 2016). Black educators may feel obligated to guide their Black students due to their

commitments as parents of minority students (Griffin & Tackie, 2016). The cultural connection

created between the teacher and students can link gaps that allow minority students to obtain the

same privileges that White students possess (Magaldi et al., 2018). The cultural connection may

enable the Black teacher to reflect upon being a Black student in their shoes (Magaldi et al.,

2018). According to Poloma (2014), the most disturbing aspect of limited teacher diversity is

that the absence of minority teachers insinuates that minority teachers do not possess the

qualifications to succeed in education. The assignment to a Black educator may impact black males and Black students from low socioeconomic households. Black males from low socioeconomic environments assigned to Black educators may reduce their potential for high school dropout rates by 39 percent. Also, postsecondary ambitions and college entrance exams may increase. In the state of North Carolina, a Black student who is assigned to a Black teacher at least once during third, fourth, or fifth grades will more than likely pursue postsecondary education and are less likely to drop out of school (Gershenson et al., 2017).

From the early levels of primary education, assignment to an educator of the same race and ethnicity can positively impact teacher perceptions of behaviors and scholastic capability (Redding, 2019). In addition to the positive teacher perceptions of behavior and academic ability, Black students assigned to Black educators have an increased probability of being assigned to academically gifted classrooms, a lower likelihood of dropping out of school, and improved attendance (Redding, 2019). Grissom and Redding (2016) state that Black children are less likely to be placed in gifted education without Black teachers' presence. The presence of an educator that matches students' ethnic identity may create an environment that is easier to detect a student's gifted ability (Grissom et al., 2015). Black students have a higher chance of being accepted into gifted classes when they attend schools where there is a representation of Black teachers (Grissom et al., 2017).

While the literature explains the benefits of same-race matches between educators and students, Cherry-McDaniel (2019) cautions individuals not to assume that same race matches are the solution. However, they may be Black preservice students who may lead minority students into an unfair system that is not just for students of color (Cherry-McDaniel, 2019). Educators who teach minority students in an unjust system are known to suffer from settler teacher

syndrome. (Cherry-McDaniel, 2019). There is a small amount of literature that exists on minority teachers possessing settler teacher syndrome. However, as previously stated, it cannot be assumed that some minority teachers do not possess teacher syndrome (Cherry-McDaniel, 2019). Minority teachers have gone through the same or allied teacher preparation programs as White teachers. The corresponding teacher preparation programs may lack educational courses that focus on anti-discriminatory teaching practices. Some teacher preparation programs only focus on diversity may be a course on special education or multicultural education (Cherry-McDaniel, 2016). Black educators may share the same ethnicity as their Black students. However, all Black educators cannot relate to some Black students' socioeconomic status or culture (Griffin & Tackie, 2016). Matias and Liou (2015) stated that minority teachers might be colorblind to students due to the vertical mobility attached to their role as an educator. Kharem (2006) traces the lack of concern for diverse populations to the United States' historical foundation.

Summary

Current literature acknowledged that Black students are underrepresented in advanced placement courses. The theoretical framework consisted of Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development exemplifies how the internal and external environments shape an individual. The settings within the microsystem may also influence students' motivation and actions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Critical race theory began with significant contributions from individuals such as Derrick Bell. Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate IV extended critical race theory within the field of education to exemplify how access to the high-value property, physical and intellectual, can affect a child's educational access to quality education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). A proper representation of the Black community would add

80,000 additional Black students to AP courses (Young & Young, 2018). Many factors associated with the underrepresentation of Black participation include lower academic expectations and perceptions developed by education personnel, lack of involvement in gifted education programs in elementary and middle school years, peer associations, and fear of failing academically. Whether it is a single factor or a collaboration of multiple factors, the current academic environment's existence has led to Black students' underrepresentation in advanced placement courses.

A small percentage of the literature focuses on positive attributes that motivate Black students' postsecondary aspirations. Successful Black college students' motivation can be multidimensional- focusing on intrinsic, extrinsic, present, future, and social goals (Hwang et al., 2002). The six forms of cultural capital can collectively foster higher education success (Samuelson & Litzer, 2016). Positive images of Black college students in television shows and movies can alleviate the fear of not being smart enough to attend college. Positive images in the media can make college enrollment seem attainable (Brooms & Davis, 2017).

Much of the literature presented reflects the negative lived experiences that Black students have experienced within education. The literature heavily based on negativity represents the absence of research that explains Black students' motivation to enroll in AP courses (Jeffries & Silvernail, 2017). Some studies that have focused on Black students in rigorous coursework focus on students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The absence of a broader population of Black students who have experienced the phenomena fail to derive the root of motivation.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Despite open enrollment policies and incentives, Black students are less likely to participate in advanced placement courses than their Asian and White peers (Kettler & Hurst, 2017). This lack of representation may also be due to barriers such as academic tracking, low expectations from educators, restricted access to rigorous curricula, and lack of parental knowledge (Kang, Skinner, & Hyatt, 2018). Limited access to rigorous coursework for students from low socioeconomic status and minority groups can be the source of achievement gaps and affect their future career earnings (Scafidi, Clark, & Swinton, 2015). The purpose of this phenomenology is to understand Black students' perspectives of their experiences that influence enrollment in advanced placement courses. Advanced Placement courses are college preparatory courses that allow students to earn college credit (Kolluri, 2018). While the literature provides reasoning for the lack of Black participation, there is limited literature representing the student's perspective. Understanding student experiences in advanced placement courses may help educators in their pedagogy and advising, enhance parenting skills, and close the achievement gap between White and Black students. The chapter's focus includes the research design, research questions, the setting, the researcher's role, and procedures. Also, the chapter examines how data was analyzed, the creation of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Design

The study was conducted using the procedures involved in qualitative research. A qualitative study allows participants to discuss the perspectives and experiences that bring meaning to their lives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative inquiry involves collecting quotes from

individuals, verifying quotes, and analyzing their implications (Patton, 2015). Qualitative data is based upon three types of data: in-depth; open-ended interviews, direct observations, and written communication (Patton, 2015).

A phenomenological study was the research design utilized. A phenomenological study describes the purpose that individuals bring from experiencing a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological study's features include an emphasis on experience to collect broad descriptions (Moustakas,1994) and examine the phenomenon with individuals who have experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In a phenomenological study, the researcher needs to refrain from making any inferences. Instead, the researcher should approach the topic from a new perspective (Moustakas,1994).

Transcendental phenomenology is the approach utilized. Transcendental phenomenology allows for a dependence on the participants' descriptive experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transcendental phenomenology requires the participant to be intentional and aware of the internal experience (Moustakas,1994). Intuition is another transcendental phenomenology feature that launches knowledge of the human experience (Moustakas,1994).

A significant emphasis of phenomenological research is the lived experience, the noema. The noema is the lived experience that is the core of the research design because it provides insight into an individual's experiences (Moustakas, 1994). For example, the research topic focused on Black students' lived experiences that motivate their enrollment in advanced placement courses. Only Black students currently enrolled or who have taken an advanced placement course in the past know with the noema under examination in this study.

The three significant transcendental phenomenology steps are epoche, transcendental phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche, also known

as bracketing, involved me as the researcher removing my experiences with AP courses that enable me to view AP courses from a new perspective. After removing my experiences, the phenomena were revisited to analyze the data from a new perspective. The transcendental phenomenological reduction is a step that allowed each experience to be independent (Moustakas, 1994). The independence of each experience gave voice to a specific perception through concepts such as emotions and reflections (Moustakas, 1994). This step was relevant to the proposed research topic because each participant's experiences with parents, educators, peers, and community organizations highlight how students were motivated to enroll in advanced placement courses.

The imaginative variation also made the phenomenological study the appropriate research design. The main objective of imaginative variation was to understand the core of the participants' experiences that motivated their AP courses enrollment. As previously stated, every Black participant will not share the same lived experiences that influenced their decision to enroll in advanced placement courses. Each experience will be analyzed to find commonalities that help address the research problems.

Research Questions

Central Question-What influences Black student decisions to enroll in advanced placement courses?

Sub-Question 1-How does a Black student's home environment influence enrollment in advanced placement courses?

Sub-Question 2-How does a Black student's school/community influence enrollment in advanced placement courses?

Sub-Question 3- How do Black student's peers influence enrollment in AP courses?

Setting

The chosen setting is a cohort of 12 Black individuals, who reside in different regions of the United States, and who are connected through their passion for the areas of the performing arts of music and theater. This is an informal cohort with no leadership. Many of the individuals interact via social media, some of the cohort members are affiliated with the same PWI in a southeastern state. Many of the participants share the same performance arts major. This cohort was chosen due to their postsecondary educational goals. All of this cohort's members are either pursuing their undergraduate studies, graduate studies or have obtained a minimum of a bachelor's degree. Therefore, individuals in either of the three educational journeys have likely enrolled in advanced high school courses. Also, participants who were educated in different regions of the United States can provide a comprehensive examination of AP courses throughout the country, rather than participants based in one central location.

Participants

Purposeful sampling is the primary type of sampling procedure for this study. Purposeful sampling involves selecting participants for the study who meet the desired criteria. Purposeful sampling was used in the study because only certain individuals can understand the research problem and the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful sampling is the best way to illuminate the study's research questions (Patton, 2015).

The sample size of the study consisted of 12 participants. Conducting phenomenological research requires a range of five to 25 participants (Moustakas,1994). The sample size consisted of high school graduates in different life stages, such as undergraduate students, graduate students, and professionals. Participants had to be Black at least 18 years of age to participate in

the study and have taken a minimum of one advanced placement course. The participants confirmed proof of completion of an AP course. The participants' demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics

Participant's Name	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Region of High School	Year of High School Graduation	College Major	Year of College Graduation
Angela	19	Black	Female	Southeastern State	2018	Acting	2020
Warren	24	Black	Male	Southeastern State	2014	Music Performance	2019
Zoey	20	Black	Female	Southeastern State	2018	Theater Education	2022
Yolanda	22	Black	Female	2 Southeastern States	2020	Choral Music Education	2020
Veronica	28	Black	Female	Southeastern State	2010	Theater & English	2014
Zaira	20	Black	Female	Southeastern state	2018	Choral Music Education	2022
Michelle	21	Black (Haitian)	Nonbinary	Midwestern State	2017	Musical Theater	2022
India	31	Black	Female	Southwestern state	2007	Spanish & Journalism Minor: Theater Arts	2011
Jonathan	23	Black	Male	Southeastern State	2015	Theater	2019
Kim	55	Black	Female	MidAtlantic State	1982	Mechanical Engineer	1987
Rodney	26	Black	Male	Southeastern state	2012	Sociology	2019
Corey	19	Black	Male	Southeastern State	2019	Biology	2023

Procedures

Documentation for the study was submitted to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval before the start of data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). (See Appendix A for IRB approval.) After receiving approval from the IRB, participants were solicited through a social media post that asked if any individuals fit the criteria interested in participating in the study. After posting the announcements, interested individuals responded by providing their telephone numbers or email addresses. I contacted every person that provided their telephone numbers. Each individual that I spoke with was provided with the purpose of the study, the research procedures, and I stressed how their participation could impact future Black AP students. After my presentation, I asked individuals if they were still interested, and every individual expressed their continued interest in the research study. To restate the main points of my research I emailed the recruitment form (See Appendix B), and I emailed participants the consent forms (See Appendix C for participant consent form). Individuals that provided their email addresses as their contact information were provided with the recruitment form and a request to reply to the email. I texted the research information to individuals that did not respond to my telephone call, and I requested their response to the message if they were interested in participating. The consent form was uploaded into Adobe Sign that allowed participants to electronically signed the document. In the email, I also asked participants to provide the days and times of their availability. Dates and times for one-on-one interviews were confirmed via email. Before the one-on-one interviews, I verified the completion of the consent form through Adobe Sign.

To ensure that I had a diverse group of first- and second-generation college students/graduates, I asked one colleague if her son would be interested in participating in the

study. His mother provided his email address, and I emailed him the research proposal. After he agreed to participate, I emailed him the consent form and requested his availability days and times.

Due to the spread of Coronavirus and the participants living in various regions of the United States, one-on-one interviews were conducted using a MacBook Air feature, FaceTime. Dragon and Otter, transcription applications, were used to transcribe the one-on-one interviews and the focus group interview, and the interviews were recorded on an iPhone using Voice Memos. Also, I wrote the participants' responses in an interview protocol worksheet. (See Appendix D). The interview protocol worksheet consists of the questions to be asked and space for writing responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After the one-on-one interviews, I emailed participants journal entry prompts (See Appendix E). Participants wrote their responses to the prompt emailed the document. Participants had one week to complete and email the journal prompt. Five participants submitted their responses to the journal prompt.

After receiving the journal prompts, I scheduled the focus group interview. I wrote a mass email to the participants, and I asked about their availability in participating in the focus group. Due to the study's timing, many participants could not join due to their work schedules. Four participants responded to an email request, but only three participants could join the specified day and time. The participants involved in the focus group interview were Veronica, India, and Yolanda.

The focus group interview took place through a Zoom conference due to the participants' location and to prevent the spread of Coronavirus. Veronica and Yolanda are in states on the west coast, and India is in a southeastern state. The focus group interview was recorded using the voice Memos on an iPhone, and the interview was transcribed manually. I also wrote

participants' answers in an interview protocol worksheet. (See Appendix F). After data collection was completed, I used the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method to analyze the data. I only utilized statements that are pertinent to the study. The focus of the analysis was what participants experienced and how the experience occurred. I wrote a composite description of the phenomenon that reflected the study's objective (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The Researcher's Role

My role as the researcher in the study consisted of being a veteran Social Studies in a secondary setting and a doctoral student at Liberty University. In my professional position as a teacher, the norms and procedures of advanced placement pedagogy and curriculum are not a part of my training or knowledge. I have no training in teaching advanced placement courses. My understanding of the underrepresentation of Black students in AP courses comes from sixteen years of experience at the secondary level and observing the demographic makeup of AP classes.

The bias that I bring to the research comes from conversations with colleagues and background information that I possess about Black students in AP courses in my work environment. In my time at the secondary level, I have heard colleagues discuss students' academic abilities, and I wonder if teachers' perceptions of students develop into self-filling prophecies about their academic skills. Some educators and administrators are sympathetic to students based upon their zip codes, rather than being empathetic and having high academic expectations. When I look at the Black students in AP courses, I wonder how their parents' knowledge influences their enrollment decisions. I believe that parental involvement and educational status can tremendously impact students' class selections, regardless of if the perception is negative or positive. Some students have parents who have excelled academically,

and they can assist their children in course selections based upon prior knowledge or access to academic knowledge. I also believe that some Black students see their parents' career and life paths, and they are motivated to achieve more than their parents.

Of the 12 participants, I knew one participant who graduated two years ago from the school where I am employed. I have never had any interactions with the other 11 participants. As a researcher, I established specific procedures to ensure that I was not biased while collecting data. During the one-on-one interviews, I asked participants questions and guarded against swaying their answers. During the focus groups, I was the facilitator. As the facilitator, I asked questions and enable the participants to steer the conversation without asserting any bias.

After data was collected, I continued to reframe from invoking bias by making sure all transcripts were accurate, and the meaning of the participants' responses was correct (Polkinghorne, 1989). The analysis was based solely on the participants' descriptive accounts from each data form (van Manen, 2016). To clarify my bias, I continuously allow myself the opportunity to journal my thoughts about experiences and perspectives that might surface during data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After each interview, I journaled to make connections between the participants and between the literature and the participants' experiences. In terms of data analysis, I was open to all possibilities. While analyzing transcriptions, I ensured that all possible conclusions were acquired (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Data Collection

Examining the lived experiences of individuals requires multiple types of data collection. Data collection includes interviews, observations, journals, and forms of art (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For phenomenology, the most common data collection type is interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomena. The main themes discussed in interviews are the

experience of the phenomenon and the circumstances that have influenced the individual's experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Usually, phenomenological studies involve interviews that are not formal and use open-ended questions and comments. When conducting interviews, one of the obstacles that a researcher may face is the formulation of questions. A phenomenology may not thrive if questions in a true or false format are presented (Adams & van Manen, 2017). One objective of phenomenology questions is not to offer the questions as problems that need a solution. Questions must be transparent and specific. Word choice is crucial because it should align with the objective of the research. Before starting interviews, researchers may decide to indulge in an ice breaker conversation with the participants. The purpose of an ice breaker conversation is to create a relaxed mood. It is also vital that the researcher is free from bias, previous knowledge, or any information that may navigate the interview. The researcher must also receive written approval from the participants to interview them and transcribe the conversation (Moustakas, 1994).

Data collection consisted of one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and journal entries. A pilot study was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the interview questions. The individual involved in the pilot study was a 16-year-old Black female who registered for an AP course for the 2020-2021 academic school year. After parental permission, I conducted a mock one-on-one interview with her using the interview questions. One question was eliminated due to the similarity to another question. Next, she read the journal prompt and provided feedback about the prompt and the time allotted for completion. Finally, she read through the focus group questions and provided feedback.

The order of the data collection was one-on-one interviews, journal entries, and one focus group interview. A MacBook Air and the FaceTime feature were used to see participants during the one-on-one interviews. I used voice Memos, a recording device on an iPhone, to record the one-on-one interviews, and the focus group interview. I used Otter and Dragon, transcription apps, to record audio and transcribe the interviews. I also manually transcribed indecipherable transcriptions. Notes were taken during the one-on-one interviews and the focus group interview if the recording device failed (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Notetaking requires a researcher to listen attentively and scribe main ideas. After one-on-one interviews concluded, participants received a journal reflection prompt before leaving the interview location. After each one-on-one interview, I explained the journal prompt to each participant. After the interview concluded, I emailed each participant the journal prompt. Participants were given two weeks to respond to the journal prompt. Based upon the interview date, I emailed participants to check on the status of their journal prompt response. Seven participants submitted journal reflections to me via email. Finally, data was coded, analyzed, and trustworthiness was established.

Interviews

Interviews are planned discussions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). There are three major parts to the interviews: main questions, follow-up questions, and probes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The traditional social science research interview method was the manner used to conduct interviews. Traditional social science research consists of general questions so that each participant receives a homogenous stimulus, and the interviewer effects are diminished (Patton, 2015). The questions for the participants addressed the research questions specifically. Questions were required to be transparent and detailed (Moustakas,1994). Interview questions produced eloquent descriptions. Eloquent descriptions of accounts were acquired by asking for anecdotes

or chronological descriptions of an event (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The questions were created based upon the interest of the topic (Moustakas,1994). Interview questions were peer-reviewed and revised as needed. Due to Coronavirus and most of the participants' distant location, the 12 interviews were conducted using a video telephone Apple product, FaceTime, and recorded using Voice Memos on an iPhone.

One-on-One Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your experiences as a student in high school.

2. How would you describe your experiences socially in high school?

3. How would you describe your experiences academically in high school?

4. What influenced your decision to take AP courses?

5. What advanced courses did you take before entering high school?

6. Describe your experiences taking AP courses.

7. How did your parent(s)' opinion(s) affect the decisions that you made when selecting courses?

8. What influence did teachers, guidance counselors, or administrators have on your motivation for your course selections?

9. How did your peers' opinions affect your course selections?

10. How have your college aspirations been affected by your decision to take AP courses?

11. How have your college choices affected your decision to take AP courses?

12. What AP courses have you taken?

13. What are your postsecondary educational goals?

14. What extracurricular activities were you, or are you involved in?

15. What community organizations were you, or are you involved in?

Questions one through six are experience and behavior questions. The objective of this style of questioning was to provoke the interviewee to specific experiences, conduct, or events (Patton, 2015). Questions one through three are relevant to the interviews because they invoked vividness. There are multiple ways to invoke vividness, such as asking background questions and asking about descriptions of memorable moments (Rubin & Rubin 2005). Questions seven through 11 are opinions and values questions—this style of questioning questions interviewees about values, beliefs, and perceptions rather than actions or attitudes. The responses to question four described the interviewee's goals and ambitions (Patton, 2015). Like questions one through three, question four invoked vividness.

Questions 12 through 15 are background and demographic questions. Background and demographic questions are connected to information about current life experiences (Patton, 2015). Knowledge of participants' career goals showed a connection between goals and postsecondary education. Knowledge of extracurricular and community activities provided a link between peer influences and the development of fictive kinships that may influence AP enrollment.

Journal Entries

Participants received the journal writing prompts after one-on-one interviews. The journal prompt was: What are your lived experiences as a Black student who strives for academic rigor through advanced placement courses? Please describe direct accounts of lived experiences that motivated your enrollment in advanced placement courses. Your response should include specific lived experiences in your home environment and community organizations.

Seven participants responded to a writing prompt that focused on internal perceptions about advanced placement courses and intentional experiences with advanced placement courses (Moustakas,1994). Journal entries were reflective of the participants' role in the phenomenon. Participants were encouraged to write about a candid narrative of an intimate experience that they have lived through (van Manen, 2016). The journal prompted participants to write about family expectations, peer associations, college preferences, and career aspirations that motivated their AP courses enrollment. A minimum of one page typed was required of each participant. Fortunately, some participants exceeded the minimum requirements and provided two to three pages of information that provided a greater understanding of their lived experiences. Upon completion, the participants emailed the journal prompt responses to me. Participants were given two weeks from the one-on-one interview to complete and email the journal response. Based upon the date of their one-on-one interviews, I sent emails to participants to ask about the progress of their journal prompt entry.

Focus Group

The focus group interviews' objective was to collect data in a setting where participants can reflect upon their opinions with other participants. A research focus group allows for the interviewing of people with similar experiences (Patton, 2015). I scheduled the focus group interview based upon participants' schedules. The focus group took place online in a Zoom conference room due to the participants' locations and to reduce the spread of Coronavirus. Using this application allowed participants to engage without being contained geographically or increase the spread of Coronavirus. The focus group enabled me to understand their motivation and further understand how advanced placement rigor impacted their collegiate academic

performance. I compared the responses from the focus groups to find similarities and differences.

Focus Group Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to the group and tell us a little bit about you and your background.

2. What barriers have you experienced in enrolling in AP courses?

3. What motivated your enrollment in AP courses?

4. How involved were your parents in school activities or communication with your teachers?

5. How has your home environment influenced your enrollment in AP courses?

6. How have your teachers influenced your enrollment in AP courses?

7. How have your guidance counselors influenced your enrollment in AP courses?

8. How has your involvement in community organizations influenced your enrollment in AP courses?

9. How have your peers influenced your enrollment in AP courses?

   Three themes were the focus: experience and behavior, feeling, and knowledge. Question one was an icebreaker intended to set the participants at ease in being part of the focus group. Questions two and three were experience and behavior questions that encouraged the participants to reflect upon actions, experiences, events, and behaviors. Question four was a feeling question that required participants to think about emotions connected to an experience. Questions five through nine were knowledge questions that required participants to think about factual information (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis consists of four steps. The steps are preparing and classifying the data for analysis, condensing the data into themes for coding, compressing the codes, and presenting the data in a table, figure, or discussion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A simple version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method was used to analyze the responses from one-on-one interviews, journal prompts, and the focus group interview. The Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method begins with a list of every articulation that is relevant to the study (Moustakas, 1994). I recorded statements pertinent to the study. Responses that were not vague, monotonous, and coincidental should be list and organized into themes. Responses were collaborated into a description of the experience. I articulated their textural description and created a textural-structural description of the meanings and substance of their own experiences with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The method consists of me, as the researcher, describing my motivation to take AP courses. To remove my personal experience and focus on the experiences of the participants, I documented my experiences. I created a list of notable statements from the data collection of interviews, the focus group, and journal prompt entries. The significant statements were organized into themes. The organization of themes created clusters and removed repetitive statements.

What the participants experienced that motivated enrollment in AP courses is described. This description is referred to as a textual description and includes specific examples and what occurred (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the textual description created an understanding of what motivated students' enrollment, such as parental expectations, college choices, or career aspirations. How descriptions reflected upon the environment and conditions in which the phenomenon was experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the

structural description created an understanding of the origin of motivation. For example, did AP enrollment motivation originate from the home and parental expectations, school and peer associations, or community organizations' participation? A description of the phenomenon included the textual and structural descriptions. The description captured the experiences' substance and provided the overall ultimate aspect of the phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This description gave the motivating factors that led Black students to take AP courses.

Trustworthiness

Validity occurred after data collection. Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability establish validity. The collection of the three forms of data built credibility. The triangulation of three types of data collection, interviews, journaling, and focus groups created dependability. An audit trail established confirmability. The creation of an electronic journal created transferability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Credibility

There were four features of credibility. The features included fieldwork that produces high-quality data, data analysis with attention to credibility, the credibility of the researcher, and an appreciation for qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2015). Multiple data collection types occurred to ensure credibility with the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The three types of data collected were one-on-one interviews, a focus group, and journal prompt entries. All one-on-one interviews were conducted using a MacBook Air and the FaceTime feature. I used Voice Memos on an iPhone to record, and interviews were using transcription apps, Dragon and Otter. When there was difficulty in interpreting transcriptions, I manually transcribed the interviews. Member checking occurred after the completion of interviews, and journal entries were submitted. The

objective of member checking was for participants to check for the accuracy of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I contacted participants via email to read a rough draft of the study. I emailed participants the draft and followed up with them with their feedback via email. Participants received a one-week deadline to review the rough draft.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability involved the research process and the researcher's responsibility in making sure the analysis is coherent, accountable, and chronicled (Patton, 2015). Triangulation occurred to ensure dependability. Triangulation involved utilizing multiple means of data collection to show consistency in results (Patton, 2015). Through the one-on-one interviews, the focus group, and the journal prompt entries, dependability was established (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I compared responses made in the one-on-one interviews, the focus group, and journal entries. I also completed an analysis of the data to see if participants' comments are consistent throughout the three data collection types. Consistency present in the data from different sources or valid reasons for differences in data from various sources may enrich the findings' credibility (Patton, 2015).

Confirmability establishes that the data collected was real (Patton, 2015). Confirmability involved making connections with interpretations, findings, and assertions so that data is apparent (Patton, 2015). An audit trail established confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The audit trail included my thoughts as the researcher, data collection process, data analysis, and data interpretation. Confirmability was beneficial for assessing the development of conclusions because I stated the patterns present in the data categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability involved the researcher's responsibility to provide adequate information to readers so that the study's findings could be transferred (Patton, 2015). A rich, thick description developed transferability. I established transferability by providing details of the participants. Physical movement and activity descriptions are the basis of the details. The thick description included quotes and verbs that allow for precise descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Several issues involve ethical consideration. First, to conduct the study, permission was sought from the Institutional Review Board, and approval was provided (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Secondly, I revealed the study's purpose to each potential participant. The documentation explained the purpose of the study to potential participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Third, no participants were forced to sign consent for participation. Participants' cooperation was voluntary and could end at any time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Fourth, the identity of the participants, county, or school district may be recognizable. Using pseudonyms for all participants concealed each participant's identity, the public organization, and the setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Multiple perspectives revealed a true reflection of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Sixth, the security of the collected data could be in jeopardy. Paper documents are locked and stored in an undisclosed location. Access to electronic files is available through a password (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

The study was a phenomenology. The study examined Black students' perspectives of their experiences that influence enrollment in advanced placement courses. The participants were individuals in different regions of the United States who fit the criteria. The selection of individuals in other areas of the United States provided access to advanced placement courses

and open enrollment processes in various high schools. One-on-one interviews, focus groups,

and journal responses were the forms of data collection. A journal stored the opinions and biases

of the researcher. After data collection, I manually coded the data using the Stevick-Colaizzi-

Keen method (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The next chapter will present an exposition of the data.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of the transcendental phenomenology is to understand the factors that motivate Black students to enroll in AP. In this chapter, I describe the twelve participants to provide a detailed description of each participant. Pseudonyms conceal the identity of each participant. The data's cumulation offers a detailed look into Black students' lives whose educational journey was shaped by their curiosity for rigor. The analysis occurs using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. From the study, codes are created and organized into themes. The creation of codes and organization into themes is presented in a table. Five themes emerge from the analysis: peer influence, peer influence, college preparation, desire for rigor, and educators' recommendations.

Participants

As a result of purposeful sampling, I recruited 12 individuals from four United States regions: the Mid-Atlantic, the Midwest, the Southeast, and the Southwest. The participants represented individuals in different life phases as undergraduate students, graduate students, and professionals in various fields. The composite of their backgrounds created a unique look into Black students' experiences motivated to enroll in AP courses. Their distinct lived experiences exemplify how individuals can travel various paths with different backgrounds and arrive at the same destination, rigorous learning environments.

Angela

She is a third-generation college graduate who resides in a suburban county that neighbors a large metropolitan area in the southeast. The example of academic motivation was exemplified through Angela's paternal family's matriarch, her grandmother, who immigrated to

the United States from Guyana and obtained a doctorate in education. During high school, she described herself as a self-described introvert, socially awkward, and very self-conscious. Maturing during her college years has allowed Angela to develop a more carefree perspective of other's opinions. During the latter part of her elementary education, Angela's family relocated to the southeast. Angela attended a magnet high school, and she took one AP course, Earth Science. While in high school, Angela's extracurricular activities included theater and fencing. Due to her mother's affiliation with a Black women's international sorority, Angela participated in young Black females' activities. In the upcoming academic year, Angela will begin her junior year at a PWI in her home state.

Warren

Warren is a second-generation college graduate who resides in a southeastern state. Warren's mother has an extensive educational background as an elementary teacher to an early childhood center owner. While an assessment did not identify Warren as academically gifted, he has consistently demonstrated a strong work ethic and motivation in his academics. Warren is an extrovert and was well-liked by peers and faculty while in high school. During high school, Warren participated in the drama club, Key Club, student council, and theater. He was also a member of the National Honor Society and a member of the Superintendent's Council. Warren enrolled in five AP courses- Environmental Science, American Literature & British Literature, US History, and Biology. Warren also enrolled in AP Calculus, but he dropped the class. Warren possesses a bachelor's degree in music performance but has an interest in finance, politics, and writing.

Yolanda

Yolanda is a third-generation college student from the southeast. Academia is a family tradition as Yolanda's grandmother possesses a doctoral degree in leadership, and her mother has a bachelor's degree. Yolanda was a straight-A student from elementary to high school. When she was in the fourth grade, Yolanda identified as academically and intellectually gifted, and she continued the rigorous academic track during her K-12 education. Yolanda attended high school from 9th to 11th grades in one southern state and completed her 12th-grade year in another southeastern state. During high school, Yolanda took nine AP courses: Psychology, Music Theory, Environmental Science, Statistics, English Literature, English Language, US History, World History, and Physics. Yolanda received college credit for seven of the nine courses that she took, and she chose not to take the exams for AP Physics and AP Statistics. As a result of her exam scores, Yolanda was identified as an AP Scholar multiple times. An AP Scholar is a student who has taken a minimum of three AP exams and scored a three or higher on each exam. During high school, Yolanda's extracurricular activities included chorus, theater, marching band, and church choir. At the time of the study, Yolanda relocated to the southwest to begin a graduate program in music performance and opera.

Rodney

Rodney is a first-generation college graduate reared in a southeastern state. Rodney has accomplished two significant milestones in his family, as he is the only male amongst his extended family to get a high school diploma and a college degree. Rodney attended high school in a low-income area at a magnet school with a majority Black student population. The residential students assigned to the magnet school were Black, White students attended the school to take advantage of the STEM programs housed on the campus. Before enrolling in AP

courses, Rodney took classes at the standard level. Rodney took three AP courses, AP

Environmental Science, AP Biology, and AP English Literature. Rodney's extracurricular

activities were theater, soccer, track, and debate team. Currently, Rodney is pursuing his

master's degree in urban planning. His future career plans include employment in the

transportation field in municipal government. Rodney's municipal government's goal is to

resolve his city's issue of an inefficient transportation system.

India

India is a self-described socially butterfly, reared in the southwest. India is a second-

generation college graduate. India was an early learner who acquired the skills to read at the age

of two years old. India was identified as academically gifted in math in elementary school. As

she progressed through elementary school, India was consistently in the higher-level reading

groups. During high school, India's extracurricular activities included the Fellowship of

Christian Athletes, spirit organization, National Honor Society, librarian of the choir, theater

council (co-president during 12th grade), and choir council (president). While presented with

several opportunities to take AP courses in core subjects, India took one AP course, Spanish.

India's initial career goal was to be an anesthesiologist. However, India chose law over

medicine, and she is a lawyer and part-time actress living in the southeast.

Kimberly

Kimberly is a self-described nerd and follower from a Mid-Atlantic state. Kimberly is a

second-generation college graduate and the daughter of an English and History high school

teacher. Kimberly possesses a love for science, but her aptitude for writing inspired AP

enrollment. In high school, Kimberly took several AP courses in English and Sciences. She

enjoyed the AP English courses because it allowed for free-thinking and expressing personal

points of view. Despite her enjoyment of the AP curricula, Kimberly chose not to take the AP exams. After high school, she received her bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. Currently, Kimberly's occupation is a mechanical engineer, and one of her job responsibilities includes working with interns. While Kimberly believes that AP courses are essential, she believes that AP courses can minimize the college experience.

Corey

Corey is a second-generation college student who resides in a southeastern state. Corey's mother is currently a doctoral student, and his father has an associate degree. Corey attended high school at the school, where his mother held the position as a curriculum facilitator. Corey participated in cross country running, Spanish Club, Black Achievers, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Interact club (president). During his senior year, Corey was the president of the Student Government Association. Corey took two AP courses, United States History and English Language. Corey believes AP courses are worth enrolling in, and the classes are more manageable than what people think. Corey will begin his sophomore year of college at a PWI in the southeastern state where he resides in the upcoming academic year. Corey's future career aspirations include becoming a dentist.

Zoey

Zoey is a first-generation college student raised in a southeastern state. Zoey resides in a region home to several nationally recognized public and private universities. Zoey was identified as academically gifted when she was in the fourth grade. Zoey took two AP courses, United States History and Environmental Science. Zoey's extracurricular activities included theater and chorus (12th grade). In the upcoming academic school year, Zoey will begin her junior year at a PWI in the southeastern state.

Jonathan

Jonathan is a second-generation college student from a southeastern state. Jonathan was identified as academically gifted in math in the fourth grade. In the eighth grade, Jonathan's academic rigor motivation continued when he took Algebra I, a high school level math course. He loves math, and Jonathan's love for math continued throughout middle and high school. In middle school, he took Algebra I, which is traditionally a secondary level math course. In high school, Jonathan took one AP course, Calculus. Jonathan maintained a "B" average in the class but attributed his nerves to not passing the AP exam. Jonathan's extracurricular activities included tennis, dance, theater, choral choir, gospel choir, chamber choir, and show choir.

Zaira

Zaira is a second-generation college student, but she will be a first-generation college graduate. Zaire's parents' attended college, but they did not complete their degrees. Zaire was identified as academically gifted in elementary school, but she did not take advanced classes until middle school. Zaira took two AP courses, World History and Music Theory. Of all the participants, she was the only participant who took AP courses face-to-face and in an online format. Zaira's school offered AP World History in a face-to-face form and AP Music Theory online. In high school, Zaira participated in theater, Glee Club (president), and worked in community theater. Zaira is a rising junior at a PWI in her hometown. After completing her undergraduate studies, she plans to attend graduate school and major in music performance and voice.

Michelle

Michelle is a first-generation college student reared in the Midwest. Michelle was born in Haiti and raised in the Midwest by White parents. In middle school, Michelle participated in a Pre-AP honors program that allowed her to take high school level science and math. The entrance into the Pre-AP program was due to her history of above-average proficiency on standardized tests. Michelle attended two high schools that afforded her with different levels of rigor and opportunity. The first high school was a public high school, and the second high school was a nationally recognized boarding school. During high school at both schools, Michelle participated in the theater and honor choir. At the boarding school, Michelle and her friends observed the lack of activities celebrating Black History Month. They took the initiative to create Black History Month festivities for the school. Michelle took one AP course, United States History, and she enjoyed the class due to the Socratic method used. While Michelle passed the AP US History exam, she did not receive credit because her university required a score of five to earn college credit. In the upcoming academic year, Michelle will begin her senior year at an HBCU in the mid-Atlantic region. Upon graduation, Michelle plans to participate in a professional theater residency, write shows, and focus on writing.

Veronica

Veronica is a third-generation college graduate reared in a southeastern state. Veronica was identified as academically gifted in third grade, which put her on an academic track to take secondary level courses while still in middle school. As a result of her early enrollment in high school-level courses, she took many classes as a freshman with sophomores and juniors, which intimated her. Veronica took three AP courses during high school, Statistics, World History, and English Literature. Her extracurricular activities included the National Honor Society, an honors

art program, speech & debate club, tennis, and theater during high school. Veronica earned a bachelor's degree in English and Theater. Currently, Veronica resides on the west coast, where she works in the culinary industry. Her culinary skills have provided her with the opportunity to compete on nationally syndicated cable cooking shows. Veronica operates a culinary mentoring program to assist minorities in the food industry when she is not competing. Veronica's goals are to utilize her academic background and passion for food and intertwine entertainment and food.

Results

Theme Development

After collecting the three types of data, one-on-one interviews, journal prompt responses, and focus groups, I used the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method to analyze the data. I recorded statements that were relevant, distinct, and stimulating. I began with the textual description to determine how participants were motivated to enroll in AP courses. To find the textual description, I used codes to classify the motivation of the participants. The codes are the aligned themes listed in Table 1. The five themes that emerged from the codes are educational influence, parental influence, desire for rigor, college preparation, and peer influence. The structural description, the setting where the motivation took place is in the home and school environments. The participants' different sources of inspiration occurred in the home and school environments.

Table 2

Codes Leading to Themes

Themes	Codes
Educational Influences	Teacher Recommendations Guidance Counselor's Recommendation Combination of Teacher & Guidance Counselor Influences
Parental Influence	Mother's Influence Make Parents Proud Parental Academic Expectations
Desire for Rigor	Lack of Rigor Love for Content Area High School Graduation Requirements Pre-AP Program
College Preparation	College Admissions Prepare for College Curricula College Credit GPA Boost
Peer Influence	Friends' Course Selections

Educational Influences

Participants revealed that professionals who worked in teachers and guidance counselors' capacities were influential in enrolling in AP courses. Teachers, specifically, have the opportunity to assess a student's ability regularly, and guidance counselors have access to years of grades and testing scores that are evidence of a student's ability. Their influence was present through the words of affirmation and suggestions. Educational influences were coded

into four sub-themes: teachers, guidance counselors, teachers and guidance counselors, and observation.

Teacher Recommendations. The accessibility of knowledge about AP courses was not equal for all students. Rodney's guidance counselors never discussed AP courses with him, but one teacher observed his academic potential and encouraged him. Rodney stated, "The end of my sophomore year, she saw how interested I was in biology and anatomy (Then I had dreams of being a premed student) and suggested I look into AP biology."

Guidance Counselor's Recommendation. One job responsibility for guidance counselors are to help students prepare for college admissions. However, a small percentage of participants cited actions or guidance counselors' advice influential in their AP courses enrollment. Corey stated, "Guidance counselors told me that AP credits helped." The help refers to applying for college admissions. Zaria said, "Guidance counselors did not motivate. They stated what the options were."

Combination of Teacher & Guidance Counselor Influences. Warren benefitted from the collaborative influences of his teachers and guidance counselors. It is unknown if Warren's teachers and guidance counselor intentionally recommended AP courses; he benefitted from their advocacy. Warren stated, "I had a wonderful relationship with both the guidance counselor at my high school as well as my teachers, and it was really a communal effort that pushed me to challenge myself beyond regular and honors courses."

Like Warren, Yolanda also benefitted from her teachers' and guidance counselor's words of affirmation. Yolanda possessed a stellar academic transcript throughout her educational career, and the educational personnel in Yolanda's school repeatedly affirmed her intelligence and future potential. She was referred to as a smart student. Yolanda stated she was told, "I was

going to do well in whatever environment I was put in." In her first high school, Yolanda's academic record informed guidance counselors that she was ready to take AP courses and be on a rigorous academic track.

Kimberly also benefitted from the influence of her eighth-grade teacher and her guidance counselor. While Kimberly initially described herself as a follower, she also added a class clown to her descriptions list. Karen stated,

> We had just done a section on Les Miserable. We wrote a paper on it, and up until then, I was the class clown. When I wrote this [the paper], she was amazed. She had to recommend me in order to get in there. I did not know it existed.

AP Observation. After suggesting that Rodney enroll in AP courses, Rodney's teacher took her suggestion a step further by inviting him to observe her AP class. Talking about AP courses was one thing, but the ability to sit in an AP class was another. That opportunity allowed Rodney to see the dynamics of the class environment. He stated, "The observation gave him a better feel for AP." The observation was a turning point for Rodney's future course selections, and it transformed his perception of what demographic belonged in AP courses. Rodney stated, "I can keep up with AP kids because, before that, the AP kids to us was like the smart White kids who came to our school for engineering."

Parental Influences

Parental influences are a significant factor that motivated several participants to enroll in AP courses. The majority of parents have established academic expectations for their children. While expectations may differ in each household, their children's ultimate objective is to receive an education that allows them to be self-sufficient and productive members of society. Parental influences are categorized into three sub-themes mother's influence, make parents proud, and

parental academic expectations. The mother's impact ranged from encouraging AP enrollment to creating a home environment that encouraged academic excellence through extracurricular opportunities. For some participants, AP enrollment was encouraged through high expectations that offered no other options but academic rigor.

Mother's Influence. Several participants cited their parents' actions and suggestions that encouraged enrollment in AP courses. Corey, Kimberly, and Warren have mothers whose occupation is in the field of education. Veronica and Yolanda not only have mothers whose profession is in the field of education, but both of their grandmothers held leadership positions as school administrators. Each of their experiences shows how their mothers used their occupational knowledge to enhance their children's academic experiences and help their children prepare for their futures.

Corey's mother was a curriculum coordinator at his high school. Corey stated,

My mom told me about the AP courses, and she said that I should try it out. I was a little nervous. I didn't think I was going to do well. But then my mom and my dad encouraged me to do it again. I decided to take them [AP courses].

Kimberly's mother was an advocate for her. In the first grade, a teacher suggested that Kimberly be in a lower reading group, and her mother declined the request. By the end of first grade, Kimberly was the top reader in the class. Kimberly's captured the essence of her mother's contributions to her education in the following manner: "My mother is an educator. She always pushed for me to be in top classes."

Warren stated,

My mother was a schoolteacher during my early education and grew to own her own business in childcare as I finished up my studies in high school. I firmly believe that her

occupation as an educator played a significant role in the importance of academic success

in my life. The strong expectation placed on me to strive for academic success was

enforced by her not only through sincere encouragement but even through punishment

and revoking of free time privileges.

Veronica explained the two generations of educators in her family and their education

involvement during the focus group interview. Veronica stated,

My family also comes from education. So, they were super involved. They knew my

teachers personally, and also the administration. There were many conversations about

my success plan and my career path in schools. They were, now looking at it,

overinvolved. There was definitely a lot of family interactions as far as my education

went with teachers, especially when it came it my AP classes.

Veronica's response to her family's involvement in school activities or communication was not

surprising when Veronica described how influential her home environment was in her AP classes

enrollment. Responding to the question about the influence of her background, Veronica stated,

I didn't have a choice (laugh). Just wanting to enhance and further my education, so it

was my choice what AP classes I was going to take, but as far as was I going to do it or

not, that was not an area of discussion.

Veronica and Yolanda found common ground during the focus group interview through

academia's generational lines present in their families. The connection participants made in this

area also reflected in their similar responses to their family's influence on their academics.

Yolanda's reaction to her family's effect on her AP courses enrollment mirrored Veronica's

reaction to the topic's underlying authoritarian tone. Yolanda stated, "It was not directly spoken,

it was unspoken, 'You better take it.' It wasn't a direct you have to."

India's parents' academic expectations centered around letter grades and her actions within and outside the classroom. India stated, "They wanted to ensure we are doing our homework. We are going there and paying attention. We are putting forth our utmost effort, and if our utmost effort only denotes a 'C,' then she would be proud of us." She refers to India's mother.

Make Parents Proud. India's parents inspired India and her sister through their words. India stated, "My parents were not very strict, but they did ask that my siblings and I simply try our best." In her journal prompt response, India stated,

> It also gave me further satisfaction to know that my parents were proud of me and that I was setting a good example for my younger sister. I know many friends and colleagues who have been influenced by various mentors, community organizations, or even particular scholars or celebrities, but for me, it was much simpler than that. My family is what did and what continues to drive me toward excellence in all that I do.

Parental Academic Expectations. Yolanda, Angela, and Zoey stated specific grade expectations were present in their homes. Yolanda explained the authoritative tone present in her family that influenced her academic decisions. During the focus group interview, Yolanda stated there was an unspoken expectation to earn A's. Yolanda said, "You come home with straight A's, or you don't come home." Angela stated, "My dad pushed me to take AP courses." Like Yolanda's family, Angela's father also expected straight A's on her report cards. Angela stated, "If they weren't all A's, he wasn't satisfied. "Within Angela's household, her parents' academic expectations differed. Angela stated, "Mom was laxed because she knew I did well." Zoey said her parents were supportive, and the expectation was to receive a "C" or above, no failing grades.

Desire for Rigor

The participants' desire for rigor stems from various motivation sources; for Rodney and Angela, enrollment experiences in standard level or remedial level courses led to rigor passion. For one participant, the general adoration for a subject led to enrollment in an AP course. Another participant's fulfillment of high school graduation requirements through AP courses motivated enrollment in rigorous studies. Finally, trends of high proficiency results on standardized tests encouraged one participant to take AP courses.

Lack of rigor. Two participants, Rodney and Angela, experienced learning in standard level or remedial level courses. Rodney was in regular level core classes before his enrollment in AP courses, and Angela was assigned to standard or remedial level courses in elementary and middle schools. In his interview, Rodney described his experience in standard level courses as "Not the most challenging. Teachers did not require a lot of critical thinking skills. I was coasting by in regular courses." Rodney stated, "I valued education, and I was not being pushed enough."

Angela stated, "I always wanted to be the smart kid. I wanted to be good at anything academic. I struggled a lot in elementary school." Angela's entrance into the educational system was in a northeastern state in Montessori school. In her journal prompt response, Angela described her Montessori experience.

I went to a Montessori school, so most of my learning provided visual and physical stimulation. We only ever sat down as a class to learn new things. Our classes had up to three grades in one class. While I was in the first grade, my class was filled with other first, second, and third graders. Teachers could never really teach us as 'one' concrete

class like how they do in regular public schools. Teachers really had to cater to students individually, so they split us into groups within our grades.

When Angela was in the fifth grade, her family moved to a southeastern state, and she enrolled in an elementary school with a traditional learning style. Angela described her academic experiences in the southeast.

This was a major shift for me. We sat at desks, we had textbooks, and learning was much more linear. By linear, I mean that the class only included fifth graders, and we were all taught the same thing, and we all moved at the same pace regardless of our own understanding of the subjects. I struggled a lot because I was a visual learner and everything in public school seemed to be on paper. While in fifth grade, my teachers put me in remedial classes, and these classes continued until probably sixth or seventh grade. The remedial classes were okay in the fifth grade, but in middle school, they were just menial (it was basically busy work). I continued to work hard, and I always hoped that my teachers would put me in the advanced classes, but sadly my grades were never good enough to get in. All throughout middle school, I just took plain classes and watched all my smarter friends get in the more advanced classes. This made me work harder to up my knowledge and my grade. Also, I got into books in middle school. With the more books I read, the smarter I felt . . .By the time eighth grade hit, I had shown my teachers that I had the ability to be in more advanced classes. In my freshman year of high school, first semester, I took all honors classes.

Love for Subject. An individual's passion for a content area can drive motivation.

Jonathan's desire for rigor connects to his passion for math. Recognition of Jonathan's aptitude

for math began in elementary school. When I asked Jonathan, what motivated his enrollment in

AP courses, he stated, "Um, my love for math. I really liked math."

High School Graduation Requirements. Zoey had a different motivation than the other

participants. In the southeastern state that Zoey resides, some core courses are optional if there

are courses that simultaneously fulfill graduation requirements. Zoey stated, "If I took AP US

History and APES [AP Environmental Science] during 11th grade, I would not have to take

Social Studies or Science during 12th grade." In essence, Zoey saw AP courses as an opportunity

to "kill two birds with one stone."

Pre-AP Program. Michelle was the only participant who stated that she was in a Pre-AP

program. Michelle has performed with high proficiency on standardized tests since elementary

school. After learning about the program from a guidance counselor, she started the Pre-AP

program in the eighth grade. The Pre-AP program is an academic track that prepared students to

enroll in AP courses in tenth grade.

College preparation

College preparatory classes allow students to get acclimated to the academic rigor of

collegiate-level coursework before post-secondary enrollment. For some participants, AP classes

provided an opportunity to display a rigorous coursework transcript to appeal to preferred

college choices. For others, it merely meant acceptance into a college/university. India, Corey,

Rodney, Veronica, Angela, and Yolanda provided an experience connected to their post-

secondary educational plans.

College Admissions. India was motivated to take an AP course due to her college preferences, and she "strived to Ivy league standard." India describes herself as "competitive by nature." India took advantage of the opportunity to learn the concepts in AP Spanish. In her journal prompt, India stated,

> After completing honors Spanish courses during my freshman, sophomore, and junior years, I was then eligible to enroll in AP Spanish my senior year. This course was, by far, one of my most challenging courses in my high school experience. The AP course focused on conversation, culture, writing, and comprehension. It is very challenging to exceed in courses taught in your native language, but it is even more challenging to exceed in courses taught in your second language. Very little English was spoken by both the students and the teacher. It pushed the students to step outside their comfort zone. Even though I was typically accustomed to having the highest grade in any given course, I was most proud of my grade in AP Spanish because I worked the hardest to obtain it. . .

> While I may have only taken one AP course, it was very beneficial to me and helped me with my goal of becoming bilingual. It also demonstrated to college admission reps that I was able to succeed in rigorous coursework. I was accepted to every college to which I applied, and my AP Spanish course was directly related to my success in my Spanish major in college.

India's mastery of AP Spanish prepared her for the Spanish placement test before beginning her freshman year. India tested out of three levels of Spanish but chose only to skip one class. India's ability to score well on her Spanish placement test was likely due to AP Spanish.

Corey was the only participant who specifically stated his college preferences.

Corey said,

> Well, I wanted to attend Wake Forest [University], and they expect a lot out of their future students. So, if I took the AP classes, I thought that would help on my future transcript for Wake Forest or High Point [University]. Which it did for High Point, but not Wake Forest.

The college application process is different from what most students have experienced before, having their academic transcripts and resumes evaluated to determine acceptance into a learning environment. One benefit of AP courses is the curricula's reputation as a pinnacle of academic standards and rigor. Therefore, the presence of AP courses can make a high school transcript appealing to admissions counselors. Rodney stated, "She [English/theatre teacher] told me it would look good on my college application."

Preparation for College Curricula. Taking AP courses allows students to indulge in areas not available in the standard high school curriculum. The ability to test the waters in a potential college major can prepare students for their chosen majors' collegiate level curricula. Zaria also was motivated by the knowledge for college. Zaria believed that her enrollment in AP Music Theory prepared her for the collegiate level workload, and it also solidified her decision to major in choral music education.

College Credit. While AP courses are rigorous, another significant benefit is the opportunity to acquire college credit while in high school, upon passing the AP exam. Yolanda said, "The college credit was appealing." Yolanda stated AP courses allowed her to get many collegiate-level general education courses out of the way. Completing AP courses freed up her collegiate schedule for electives. Veronica saw AP as a way to fulfill high school requirements and see what collegiate-level general education courses she could complete.

GPA Boost. The grade point average (GPA) is the significant component of selecting the class valedictorian and salutatorian during high school. One aspect of calculating a student's GPA involves quality points based on the high school's course level. In her journal prompt response, Angela explained the quality points connected to AP courses. "If one took AP classes, not only would it give you more points towards your GPA, but it would boost your class ranking."

Peer Influence

Adolescence is a stage of life development when individuals become more independent, less dependent on parents, and seek relationships with their peers. During this time, peers' opinions may have a more significant influence than parents' views. The participants' experience with peer influence varied. For some participants, relationships developed outside the classroom and associations with individuals on the same academic track motivated some participants to examine their course selections. For other participants, the opinions of their friends and associates had no relevance in their course selections.

Friends' Course Selections. During the one-on-one interview, Kimberly reflected on her friendship with two girls. Typically, one may assume that followers attach themselves to individuals who indulge in malicious, which is not Kimberly's case. As a self-professed nerd, she found friends that were also academically inclined. Kimberly stated, "I followed my friends." Kimberly's peer association is reminiscent of the phrase "Birds of a feather, flock together."

Since elementary school, Yolanda was on the academically gifted track. Students who are on the same academic path have the same classes together. Yolanda observed her peers' class selections and followed them into AP courses. Yolanda stated, "For the most part, I was in

the gifted program [state omitted]. So, like all of my peers were taking all AP classes. Some of the classes, I just signed up because everyone else was going it."

Vanessa also had experiences like Kimberly and Yolanda. However, Vanessa had a cohort from freshman to her senior year that maneuvered through high school together. Like Yolanda, her affiliation with friends on the same academic track knew their AP course enrollment required completion together. Vanessa stated,

And also, the peer group that I was in, we were all going from honors to AP, so it was a natural progression that I moved along with the people in the peer group that I was with. We were all doing AP classes together, so it just made sense.

Warren stated, "Friends were taking courses." While their peers' decisions influenced Kimberly and Warren, both their friends' decisions affected them differently. Kimberly saw enrollment as an opportunity to follow her friends. Warren saw his peers' AP enrollment as an indicator that he could take AP courses. Warren stated, "I enjoyed being the book worm and competing for the highest GPA. I am intelligent and amongst the top students in my course."

Research Question Responses

This study's objective was to understand the factors that motivate Black students to enroll in AP courses. The research consisted of one central research question and three sub-questions. The data collected from the individual interviews, the journal response prompts, and the focus group answer the research questions. Significant statements were coded and organized into themes that capture the lived experience of Black students' motivation to enroll in AP courses. The participants' accounts are provided verbatim from interviews, journal prompt responses, and the focus group.

Central Research Question

The central research question for this study was, "What influences Black students' decisions to enroll in advanced placement courses?" Based on the five themes, participants made statements that reflected their motivation to enroll in AP courses. Educational recommendations were instrumental for Warren, Rodney, and Kimberly. In his interview, Warren stated, "Guidance counselors held my hand." Warren elaborated on the contributions of the educational personnel at his school. Rodney stated, "The biggest forces that pushed me to take an AP course would have to be my English/theater teachers; I guess you could say she saw something in me that I didn't at the time." Rodney also stated, "My English teacher allowed me to sit in on an AP course."

Participants Kimberly, Corey, and Angela stressed their parents' actions or words that motivated their AP courses enrollment. Kimberly attributed her motivation to a trio of sources, including teachers, her mother's requirement of excellence, and following friends who were academically focused. Corey stated, "My mom was the curriculum coordinator at my school, and she planned my schedule." Angela stated,

> "My dad knew that my grades were good but felt the need to push me more. Junior year was probably the worst year in high school; not only was my school environment toxic, but I was receiving tons of ridicule and pressure from my dad to get all A's. I still did well, but I didn't get all A's like my dad wanted me to. I think I probably took an AP class to shut him up.

During the adolescent stage of life, peers can have a tremendous impact on each other's actions. Adolescents can be motivated by their peers' opinions to make decisions that favor their favorably light. However, the participants in this research study, mostly students who engaged

in a range of extracurricular activities, were not necessarily swayed by their peers' opinions. Few participants cited their peers' influence as motivation for their enrollment in AP courses. Kimberly mirrored what her two friends did, and Warren was encouraged to take AP courses because his friends were enrolled.

Many of the participants thought about their post-secondary plans. They were motivated to enroll in AP courses based upon their collegiate rigor's opinions and the concern of their college acceptance. Veronica stated, "I wanted to get ready for college." Zaria was motivated by two benefits of AP courses. She stated,

> Partially the GPA boost, and then with music theory, this is something I'm going to have to do in college, and I just wanted to have the knowledge. Even if I thought I wasn't going to do great, I thought I needed to know these things. I was right.

In his journal prompt response, Rodney referenced a conversation he had with his English/Theater teacher about the impact of AP courses on high school transcripts. Rodney said, "I would stand out, which really sold me into looking into the AP course." Other participants provided short responses that exemplified a motivation connected to college preparation. Yolanda stated, "The college credit was appealing." Angela said, "I wanted the GPA boost."

Finally, the desire for rigor motivated many students to enroll in advanced courses. The sources of this motivation derived from the lack of difficulty available in standard or honors courses, fulfill high school graduation requirements, or the adoration for a subject. Veronica wanted to challenge herself. Zoey was motivated to take AP courses due to the ability to fulfill graduation requirements. Jonathan was encouraged to enroll in AP courses due to his fondness for math.

Sub-Question One

Sub-question one is, "How does a Black students' home environment influence enrollment in AP courses?" The main objective of the question was to understand each participant's academic expectations from their home influences. Also, the responses from each question allowed for comparing and contrasting of household academic expectations. Warren stated,

> Academic excellence was a requirement in my family. My mother allowed me to participate in any activity she felt advanced my education and increased my likelihood for future success. From her unwavering support, I was allowed to participate in afterschool activities and clubs, have both paid and free tutors when I was falling behind, and permission to pursue advanced courses.

Veronica's family has two generations of educators, her grandmother, a school administrator, and her mother, an AP science teacher. Her family's educational background and knowledge allowed them to steer Veronica in a manner that would prepare her for school. Veronica stated,

> My mom wanted me to go to school for English because I was going to school for theater. What gen ed [general education] courses I could knock out. Um, they did not really give me an option. This is what you are doing. I finished my coursework, so my second semester of high school was pretty much all AP and extracurricular because I was pretty much done the first semester of my senior year. My mom was like, 'Great, you can go to college. Take college work.' So, there wasn't really like a conversation, what do you want to do.

Angela stated, "Let me start off by saying education has always held a high status in my family." Angela described her maternal and paternal sides of her family. Angela said, "My mom and aunts and uncles never really mentioned my grandma pushing them academically (they did all attend college though); however, I do know she pushed them when it came to hard work. Concerning her paternal grandmother, Angela stated, "My grandmother pushed all of her children to get good grades and to value their education and best believe she did a damn good job." Examining the collective values from both sides of her family, Angela stated, "So on one side of the family, getting a good education was best, and on the other side hard work ethic was valued. Both of my parents carried these traits into my childhood." Angela was the only child of four children that her dad pushed to take AP courses. "If they [grades] weren't all "A's," he wasn't satisfied."

Yolanda comes from a multigenerational line of post-secondary graduates. Her grandmother holds a doctoral degree in educational leadership, and her mother will begin her master's degree in fine arts soon. In her journal prompt, Yolanda stated,

> Coming from a family of black female educators, I was constantly surrounded by academic role models. Getting straight A's was an expectation, not a goal I ever had to set. Growing up, I primarily lived with my grandmother, who was the principal in the local school system, my mother, who was an arts educator, and my great-grandmother, who was an educator as well. I was too young to understand that my grandmother being a black woman with a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership, among several other degrees, was completely uncommon in the deep South. I believe that my educational identity and my own teaching identity are mainly tied to her and her success in her career and the

community. I was raised to believe that this type of success was standard and that

striving for academic achievement was common.

Therefore, the prior knowledge and educational experience that Yolanda's family has

cultivated statements such as "This is what I did; this is what you need to be doing." Yolanda's

parents were supportive of her enrolling in AP courses and encouraged her to take upper-level

courses, but to be careful not to overload herself. Her younger sister, a 2020 high school

graduate, was also encouraged to take AP courses.

Kimberly's mother had a philosophy on academic achievement. Kimberly quoted her

mother's philosophy.

> Her philosophy was if you know you did your best, that's all you can do, and I am happy
>
> with that. She was always pushing me to do my best. She believed that if you are an
>
> intelligent person, it is going to come out. You can't hide that the intelligence will come
>
> out.

 Furthermore, Kimberly's mother never implied anything was too difficult. Her mother asked

questions such as, "Did you do your best? Can we do something to help you? What materials do

you need?"

India's parental expectations were similar to Kimberly's expectations; she was also

encouraged through her mother's philosophy. India stated, "My mom encouraged us to be our

best selves. Do homework and pay attention in class." India's mother was a strong supporter of

AP Spanish due to the large population of Hispanic/Latino individuals who live in their

southwestern state.

Although Rodney's parents were not familiar with AP courses, they knew standard level courses were not challenging. Their evolving support for Rodney's decision to enroll in AP courses fueled his motivation for academic rigor. Rodney stated,

When I told my parents, they were neither supportive nor disapproving. I don't think they fully grasped what an AP course meant to colleges or to high school academics. Once the year started, and they saw the caliber of the work I was doing, I would say their attitude changed for the better. They would humble brag to family. I became the spokesperson for AP courses in my family, word traveled fast, and everyone was proud of me, and perhaps to them, this meant that I would become something that they always wanted to be. Either way, the reception from my immediate and extended family really made me buckle down, and I went from one AP course to taking two.

Jonathan stated he does not believe that his parents' opinions affected his course selections. During freshman year, Jonathan planned his high school schedule to ensure that he would not get behind. While Jonathan was proactive in his planning, his mom attended parent/teacher conferences to learn about his strengths and weaknesses. Jonathan's mom wanted to be a mathematician, and she encouraged him to take advanced classes.

Michelle said her mom wanted them [Michelle and her siblings] to do their best. While Michelle did not speak a lot about her parents' involvement in her academics, she stressed the amenities available in their home. Michelle stated there was an extensive amount of literature to read from the family's library. As Michelle and her sister grew up, her parents added additional literature to the library that interested them.

Zaria's parents did not want her to take AP courses because they did not want her to be overwhelmed. Zaria stated her parents were concerned due to the AP paperwork that sent home

that said that each AP course would require an additional 1 hour 30 minutes outside of school daily. Despite their concerns, Zaria decided to enroll in AP courses, and her parents were supportive of her decision.

One of the advantages of having parents as educators, particularly at the secondary level, is knowledge availability. Through professional development and on-the-job training, educators learn vital components of the curriculum that can help students be successful and prepare for the academic futures. Corey was confident in his mother's knowledge of secondary curricula. Corey trusted his mother to select his courses, and he agreed.

Sub-Question Two

Sub-question two is, "How does a Black student's school influence enrollment in AP courses?" This question's objective was to reveal what actions promote AP courses and what conversations educational personnel such as teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators have with students concerning AP courses. The influence and recommendation of AP courses by school personnel varied by participants. Some participants stated specific, meaningful actions or words by either a teacher or guidance counselor. Other participants expressed positive experiences with a combination of teachers and guidance counselors. One participant did not state any motivational words or actions from a teacher or a guidance counselor that influenced AP enrollment.

While school personnel's motivation varied, it was apparent that Warren's teachers and guidance counselors positively impacted his high school experience. In his journal prompt response, Warren praised the educational personnel's collaborative efforts at his high school. Warren stated, "The importance of having a community of adults who believed in me and my intelligence proved by merits was paramount to my early academic success and decision to

pursue higher education." The statements made by Warren embody how every student should feel about the care provided by educational personnel.

Veronica stated,

> My teachers were super instrumental in my progress um personally and um in my education, like academia. They guided me towards making the rights steps to graduation. I had a lot of teachers that were super hard on me, like stay focused, like even when you have things going on in your personal life. There is still an institution of learning, so stay focused.

Rodney and Jonathan also provided experiences that demonstrate a teacher's persistence and guidance. Rodney stated, "My English teacher encouraged AP due to the way I analyzed To Kill a Mockingbird." Rodney's teacher went beyond a suggestion and allowed Rodney to observe her AP course. The observation solidified Rodney's self-confidence in his ability to be successful in an AP course. The teacher's persistent encouragement of AP courses changed the trajectory of Rodney's secondary and post-secondary endeavors. Jonathan stated, "English and math teachers encouraged AP courses. I was urged to take honors, then AP 11th and 12th [grades]."

Some participants cited their guidance counselors' actions or words as influential to their enrollment in AP courses. India stated she had an excellent relationship with her guidance counselor. Despite being a large school, India had a relationship with her guidance counselor, which made it feel like she lived in her office. According to Michelle, she learned about the Pre-AP program from her guidance counselor, and entrance into the Pre-AP program opened the door to AP classes. Kim stated guidance counselors encouraged her to enroll in AP courses due to her strong performance on standardized test scores. Corey was told by his guidance

counselors that AP credits helped the college admission process. Zoey's interactions with guidance counselors more frequent during freshman and sophomore years. Guidance counselors at Zoey's school encouraged students to take at least one AP course.

While school administrators usually do not know a student's capabilities, like a teacher or guidance counselor, I asked the participants about the motivation they received from their school administrators. Of the twelve participants, Zoey was the only individual who recalled an AP conversation with a school administrator. Zoey stated that when administrators observed classes or came to a classroom, they would encourage students to take AP courses.

Most participants were able to identify either a teacher or guidance counselor who discussed AP classes with them. However, Angela was the only participant who stated that guidance counselors nor teachers provided any motivation. Angela said, "They [guidance counselors and teachers] did not care as long as you were registered and ready to go."

Sub-Question Three

Sub-question, three of the study asked, "How do a Black students' peers influence enrollment in AP courses?" The objective of this question was to determine if participants' peers influenced their academic choices. The participants' responses to this sub-question varied, specifically when examining the value of their peers' opinions on course selections.

The influence of peers when enrolling in AP courses was an overall positive experience for most participants. Participants who were influenced by their peers are the quintessential example of positive peer pressure. Friends or classmates' actions caused them to strive for academic rigor through a competitive spirit or show their academic ability and sense of belonging on their academic track. Positive peer pressure is evident in the experiences of Yolanda and Warren.

In terms of peers' opinions or decisions within Yolanda's academic circle, she was guided by the proverb from Saint Augustine, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." Yolanda was an academically gifted student since elementary school. Academically talented students typically take the same classes. Yolanda stated, "Since most of the other gifted people were taking the AP classes, I kinda wanted to be included in that." The majority of the students in her gifted classes were White, and she felt her presence in those classes represented the Black community. Yolanda also stated,

> It felt like some people had elitist attitudes about taking AP classes, and um, so I wasn't doing it for that reason per se. I didn't want it to be like or feel like, 'Oh, she can't keep up. So, that's why she isn't taking the AP class for this.' I think that's why I pushed myself, even more, to take it because I kind of know how that looks on women of color in particular. 'Oh, they are not as smart, so they can't take AP classes.'

Reflecting upon critical race theory, I asked Yolanda to expound on what she wanted to show her classmates. Yolanda replied,

> I think it kind of showed them [classmates]. I tried to make sure I was at the top of my class in all of them [AP classes]. It kind of negated a lot of stereotypes about Black women, in particular. Just showing people because I am from a super like a rural area, I had a lot I wanted to disprove. I think doing that well in those things made a difference. I was competing with the preppy White boys in those classes too. I would be like, 'I gotta better grade on this test.' It was motivating for me that no matter where I come from or what I've been through, I still have my knowledge and all that stuff. I can compete with anybody I need to.

Yolanda also mentioned the support of other Black students in AP classes. Yolanda stated the Black students supported each other by "studying and offering homework help. But the mere fact that there were other Black students was support enough." In her interview, she stated, "It was supportive to have other people of color in the class. We kind of all stuck together in that environment."

Warren's motivation to enroll in AP courses stems from the thrill of competition. Warren competed with Amy and Gia to see who would get the highest score. Like Yolanda, Warren took AP courses if his friends were. Warren stated, "I enjoyed being the bookworm and competing for the highest GPA."

Their peers' opinions were beneficial in providing a review of the class for the majority of participants. AP courses' solicited marketing provided information about a class from the students' perspective, which may differ from a teacher's perspective. Most importantly, a review of the AP courses was from people who were trusted. Zaria stated, "Peers gave reviews of AP classes. They talked about how much they learned in the classes."

For India, her friends' decisions made her choose an honors course over an AP course. When discussing the next math course selection after Precalculus, India stated in her interview, "I wanted to be in class with my friends. My friends are taking this class. I will take it." India further expressed the desire to be with her friends in her journal prompt response. In her journal prompt response, India stated, "Many of my friends my senior year were taking a particular, honors math course, and I opted to enroll in that course versus the AP calculus." While her friends' decisions favored the honors course, it demonstrates positive peer pressure as the collective group of friends were engaged in rigorous coursework.

Like India, Kimberly and Jonathan were influenced by their friends to take specific courses. Kimberly stated, "I followed my friends. I had one of them in my classes." Jonathan said, "Friends' opinions did not affect course selections for core courses. For electives, I picked what friends picked."

For three participants, the opinions of their peers were not an influence on the classes they selected. Corey and Michelle said their peers' views did not affect their course selections. Zoey stated, "Peers did not affect course selections too much. I did not ask friends what they were taken." Angela's peers took several AP courses, but she chose to select one AP course.

Of the twelve participants, Rodney received the most negative responses from his friends about AP courses. It was through playing soccer that Rodney learned about AP courses from his teammates. Rodney attended a magnet school that drew students from other schools in his district, and his teammates took AP courses at their home school. Through developing relationships with his teammates, Rodney received a new awareness of educational opportunities. However, Rodney stated, "Friends did not want me to take AP. They felt like I thought I was better. I missed out socially."

Summary

Twelve participants from four different regions of the United States, ages, professions, and diverse academic histories possess distinctive motivations that led to enrolling in one or numerous AP courses. Three forms of data, one-on-one interviews, journal prompt responses, and a conversation from a focus group interview, were collected and analyzed using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, and the textual description of the sources of motivation for AP enrollment centers upon five themes. The five themes are educational influence, parental

influence, desire for rigor, college preparation, and peer influence. The structural description of where the motivation stems are the home and school environments.

One central question and three sub-questions were answered from the five themes. The central research question, "What influences Black students' decisions to enroll in advanced placement courses?" is responded to through the five themes' consolidated factors. Sub-question one, "How does a Black student's family influence enrollment in AP courses?" is answered through a family's academic expectations and affirmations. Sub-question two, "How does a Black student's school influence enrollment in AP courses" is answered mainly through teachers and guidance counselors' recommendation. Sub-question three, "How do a Black student's peers influence enrollment in AP courses?" is answered through various responses such as no influence, following friends, and peer disapproval.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand Black students' motivations to enroll in AP courses. In this chapter, each research question's findings are summarized, highlighting the connections with Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development and the literature. The theoretical, empirical, and practical implications are used to discuss Bronfenbrenner's theory. Recommendations for stakeholders within the home environment, school environment, and the community highlight how they can contribute to Black student enrollment in AP courses and educational experiences. Delimitations and limitations of the study are included. Recommendations for future research on the topic are included that may enhance the research topic.

Summary of Findings

This research study investigated the motivations of Black students that led to their enrollment in AP courses. The following research questions guided this study:

Central Question. What influences Black students' decisions to enroll in AP courses?

The participants provided varied responses to the central question. The answers to the question include educators' recommendation, family influence, peer influence, college studies preparation, and the desire for rigor. Participants' responses included teachers' recommendations, family influences, peer influences, and collegiate studies' preparation stemmed from similar sources. However, the desire for rigor stemmed from different sources, which included the need to be challenged. Participants who took standard-level or remedial courses expressed the need to be challenged. The desire for rigor originated from the love of a subject or a way to fulfill high school graduation requirements. A few participants contributed

their passion for rigor to their intrinsic motivation. Many of the participants listed a combination of the factors based on their experiences and expectations.

Sub-Question 1. How does a Black student's home environment influence enrollment in advanced placement courses?

This study solidifies the influence that the home environment has upon Black students' AP enrollment, and most families were supportive of AP enrollment. The participants represent families with diverse educational backgrounds, in which some families have multigenerational college degrees, and other participants are or will be first-generation college graduates. Also, for some participants, family members who are educators provided experiences and knowledge that encouraged enrollment in rigorous classes. Academic expectations varied. Some participants recalled specific requirements that mirror high levels of proficiency, and failing was not an option. Other parents did not state particular grade requirements but focused on principles of doing their best. Due to family expectations, some parents did not have to communicate with core teachers. Parents found trust in their children that they would behave and perform academically according to parents' expectations. Participants' parents were involved in the academic decisions that pertained to their children. Involvement included rejecting educational suggestions of enrollment in remedial courses for Kimberly's mother, and Corey's mother planned his schedule. Overall, participants' families were actively involved in their education.

Sub-Question 2. How does a Black student's school/community influence enrollment in?

AP courses?

The responses to this question focused mostly on the contributions or actions of teachers and guidance counselors. However, the administrators in Zoey's high school encouraged AP enrollment while visiting classrooms. Teachers supported AP enrollment based upon the

analytical skills used in school assignments. Some teachers encouraged AP enrollment, particularly for honors students, which they believed was the organic next step in their high school careers. When Rodney's English teacher allowed him to observe an AP course, it confirmed his ability to complete rigorous assignments. Collectively, teachers and guidance counselors motivated participants by stating how AP courses can boost their GPA. Also, AP courses look attractive on college applications and provide positive affirmations of students' abilities. Veronica and India did not need guidance counselors or teachers' suggestions because they made the decision independently.

Sub-Question 3. How do Black student's peers influence enrollment in AP courses?

The participants' reaction to peer influence was positive. AP course enrollment was motivated by participant peers' registration for AP courses due to academic tracking and academically gifted identification. Some participants saw their peers' enrollment in AP courses as an indication that they should also enroll. Yolanda wanted to show her White peers that Black students can succeed in AP courses and nullify Black students' academic ability stereotypes. Veronica developed a strong fictive kinship with a diverse group of mostly Black students who took classes together. This peer influence followed participants into AP courses as they progressed towards high school graduation. India declined the opportunity to take an AP math course and chose an honors level math course because of her friends' course selections. Rodney's participation received negative feedback from peers for AP enrollment; however, his peers' views did not hinder initial or future AP courses registration. A few participants were not affected by their peers' opinions, and conversations about AP enrollment were nonexistent in some participants' social circles, which support Tyson et al's (2005) research.

Discussion

I aimed to understand Black students' motivations to enroll in advanced placement courses during this study, given their historical low enrollment in AP courses. The theory that supports this study is Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development. This section will examine the connection between the microsystem, mesosystem, and the participants' experiences that led to their enrollment into an AP course. The data will show a confirmation or rejection of previous research found in the literature of chapter two. Based on the participants' responses, a new perspective is provided on the academic pipeline, specifically an AP pipeline.

Theoretical

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development examines the relationship between functioning and developing human beings and the resources within their environments. Two of the five systems created by Bronfenbrenner guided this study, the microsystem, and the mesosystem. The microsystem is a dyad that involves the attention or activities that exist between two individuals. The three forms of a dyad are observational, joint-activity, and primary. In this study, the observational and primary dyads are discussed. The mesosystem is the interaction that occurs between two or more settings. The four types of mesosystems are multisetting participation, intersetting communication, indirect linkage, and intersetting knowledge. To understand the relationships developed, multisetting participation and intersetting communication were used in the study. Multisetting participation is when a person engages in multiple settings, and intersetting knowledge is information that one setting knows about another location (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Microsystem

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development accurately reflects Black students' motivation to enroll in AP courses. Two dyads were present in this study, the observational and primary dyads. The observational dyad was present through the expectations and rules established in each participant's home that may promote academic achievement. The majority of the participants expressed how their parents created expectations with specific letter grade requirements or instilled philosophies centered around their academic success. The participants' responses in this area mirror the findings of Clayton (2017). A few participants cited grade expectations required by their parents. The anticipation for Zoey was to receive a "C" or above and no failing grades. Warren stated, "Less than a "B" was unsatisfactory." Jonathan noted the expectation for him was "A's across the board." Yolanda was told, "Bring home straight A's, or don't come home." While the specific grade expectations varied, each family required grades ranging from standard proficiency levels to high content areas' proficiency levels.

Some participants' parents did not provide specific letter grades to earn but provided affirmations or advice. Kimberley's mother stated, "If you know you did your best, I am happy. The intelligence will come out." India said she and her sister were consistently pushed to do their best, pay attention in class, and complete their homework assignments. Some participants' parents provide academic warnings. Yolanda's parents encouraged her to take upper-level courses but to be careful not to overload herself. Zaria's parents also warned her not to overwhelm herself. Overall, the participants exhibited a favorable execution of the primary dyad. The participants listened to their parents' advice and understood parental expectations as they progressed through high school.

Participants' families created the appropriate attributes and characteristics of a home environment conducive to academic success. In his journal prompt response, Warren explained his single-parent home environment. Warren said, "My mother allowed me to participate in any activity she felt advanced my education and increased my likelihood for future success. From her unwavering support, I was allowed to participate in afterschool activities and clubs, have paid and free tutors when I was falling behind, and permission to pursue advanced courses." In homes lead by single mothers, three conventional means that are a part of the equation for educational success include a devoted parent, consistency, and a support system (Corley et al., 2019). Warren's mother created an environment conducive for her son to excel academically.

After the data collection, I discovered some participants' family backgrounds were similar in postsecondary educational attainment. Three participants, Yolanda, Angela, and Veronica come from a multigenerational line of college graduates who have traveled the same academic path. The grandmothers of Yolanda and Angela grandmothers earned doctorates. The experiences of Yolanda's mother and grandmother led to statements, such as "This is what I did; this is what you will do." Angela said, "So on one side of the family, getting a good education was best, and on the other side, the hard work ethic was valued. Both of my parents carried these traits into my childhood." Parents' personal stories concerning their educational journey provide their children with insight that may help them develop a path to their academic success (McGee & Spencer, 2015). Vanessa completed her high school requirements during the first semester of her senior year. Her mother stated, "Now, you can go to college." Vanessa said she did not receive an option; her mother stated, "This is what you are doing." The experiences of Yolanda, Angela, and Vanessa are examples of Bronfenbrenner's observational dyad. Their family members' personal, educational experiences provided prior knowledge that made educational

decisions with or without the participant's approval. In essence, all of the participants' parents engaged in an observational dyad. Most parents were knowledgeable of the academic choices offered to their children. Regardless, parents provided advice, support, work ethics, or grade expectations for their children.

The primary dyad possesses a powerful force because it allows an absent person's words to resonate in others' minds in another setting. The primary dyad was so powerful that communication with core teachers was not necessary. For some of the participants' parents, the primary dyad eliminated the need for contact with teachers. Communicating with core teachers was not required due to the expectations that parents established in their homes. India and Yolanda stressed this point in the focus group interview during question four. In response to question four about parents' involvement in school activities or communication. Yolanda said, "It was kind of put out from the beginning. You go there, and you do what you are supposed to. It was kind of a level of trust." India said her parents did not talk to her teachers. Yolanda said, "I think it is interesting because Veronica and I both have the education parents, but my parents didn't talk to my teachers. I did introduce them to the band, chorus, and theater teachers because that was my extracurriculars." India said, "Exactly, it is not like, you know when you are in elementary and middle school where you have like the parent/teacher conference type of thing. It is a bit more independent when you are in high school." India and Yolanda's responses demonstrate how their parents established behavioral and academic conduct guidelines in school, and they followed them.

India's answer to focus group interview question five shows a connection with question four. India's responses reveal trust developed between her and her parents regarding her independence during high school. India stated,

The only thing my mom wanted me to take was accounting for beneficial life skills. Other than that, my mom and dad did not have any say in the courses that I took. They trusted that I was going to do well. All they wanted me to do was try my best.

Mesosystem

The mesosystem involves the interaction between two or more settings. Mothers' presence in schools, extracurricular activities, inspirational messages, and high academic expectations contribute to students' success (Corley et al., 2019). Several participants, particularly the children of educators, benefitted from their mothers' intersetting knowledge. Corey's mother was the curriculum coordinator at his high school. His mother's comprehension of the high school curricula provided her with the knowledge to plan her son's schedules. Warren, Kimberly, and Veronica's mothers' occupations as teachers and Yolanda and Veronica grandmothers' roles as school administrators provided a vast amount of educational system knowledge. Their experience inspired the participants to seek rigorous courses and participate in activities that may benefit them academically. Collectively, the five family members of the participants applied their professional knowledge to help their children.

Bronfenbrenner created hypotheses that included conditions and ideas that can enhance the academic track of a student. One hypothesis stated that a person's development could increase through continuous transporting of information between the settings. Of the participants, Jonathan explicitly said his mother attended parent/teacher conferences to learn about his strengths and weaknesses. Jonathan's mother's knowledge of his strong math comprehension may have encouraged him to take AP Calculus.

Empirical

As previously stated, no literature examines Black students' lived experiences that motivated their enrollment in AP courses (Jefferies and Silvernail, 2017). Through this study, the participants provided their lived experiences and motivation sources for admission in AP courses. Some of the participants' lived experiences correlated with previous research found in the literature. However, some of the participants' statements and opinions provide a new perspective on AP courses and the restrictive barrier it creates for academically gifted students or students who seek rigorous curricula.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development applied in Orrock and Clark's (2015) data is also relevant to this study. Orrock and Clark's (2015) results also showed that family values were the most constant theme that appeared to be a significant foundation for academic success. Family values associated with academic success are drive, motivation, independent thinking, and a strong work ethic. Family values were evident, particularly in Warren's family. In the interview and journal prompt, Warren consistently emphasized the word merit.

Warren stated, "I was immersed in a diverse school that constantly affirmed to me that focus did not have to rely on my skin color but instead on striving for academic excellence." After graduating from high school, Warren came to some realizations. "I started to grow aware that I belonged to a system that catered to Eurocentric perspectives in Western culture. I began to also realize how Eurocentric perspectives played a part in my education and how my overall education lacked representation of other cultures and groups of people, including my own.

In the Black family, family values may differ slightly from their White counterparts. The awareness of W.E.B. Dubois' double-consciousness (1903) is evident in Black families. While

some individuals may not be aware of Dubois' terminology, the Black family understands the historical, social, and economic barriers placed in Black people's progression due to their skin color. There is an emphasis on a strong work ethic in some Black families and the ability to obtain as much education as possible to compensate for any potential barriers or obstacles placed in the path to economic stability.

Angela stated,

> I always wanted to be the smart kid; I wanted to be good at anything academic. I made it my goal to get the best grades I could get. I looked at the smart students in the class, and I copied their work styles; if I saw that they marked up their papers during quizzes, I would do the exact same thing. Soon it started to work, and my grades went up. From then on out, I refused to feel dumb. I wanted to be the smart kid in class.

The majority of participants did not mention community organizations as advocating for academic rigor or AP courses. Corey said a local community organization discussion of AP, but there was no elaboration of the conversation. However, what has inspired two participants is conferences or events at which professional Black people speak to Black students. Kimberly's motivation to be a mechanical engineer was due to a Black mechanical engineer's presentation from a chemical company based in the Mid-Atlantic region. Although he was not a STEM major, Warren attended a minority STEM conference and was impressed by professional minorities' presence and presentations.

The presence of Black professionals is essential to Black students' career paths. Like the future career options and visions for Black students who see Black educators can allow them to envision themselves as educators, principals, and occupations in higher education (Poloma, 2014), the same principle can apply to Black students in other fields. Black students must have

visual representation from their ethnicity to further the vision for their lives. While conducting Rodney's interview, he began to ask me about my doctoral degree and pondered the idea of pursuing a doctoral degree. I explained my doctoral journey, and I encouraged him to continue his education after completing his master's degree. As a Black woman, I hope that my conversation with Rodney showed him that he could complete a doctorate if I can complete a doctorate.

Yolanda and Rodney's educational experiences demonstrate the reality of socioeconomic disparities. Yolanda did not discuss the racial makeup of her neighborhood. She describes her elementary school as an "extremely impoverished rural area" that offers minimal educational amenities. All students from impoverished or low socioeconomic backgrounds do not realize that their peers, whose parents are in higher income brackets, are afforded more academic opportunities. Yolanda observed this difference and took advantage of the educational opportunities that were available to her. Yolanda understands the lack of educational amenities afforded to her during her elementary years of learning. Yolanda stated,

> I attended elementary school in an extremely impoverished rural area in the deep south, and education was the one sure way to "get out" of the environment. Later in life, I realized that many of my peers in school growing up didn't have those influences in their homes and were' t pushed as hard as I was. This type of educational background led me to pursue honors and AP classes once I reached high school. I attended high school in a well-developed area outside of a major city. Learning that I had been deprived of so many academic opportunities because of the underfunded school, I attended in the south really frustrated me. Most of my peers were presented with opportunities that I would've loved to have growing up, yet; they never took advantage of them. It was then I started to

realize that I was raised with different experiences than my new peers. I took a total of nine AP classes, most of which were also following the "gifted" curriculum, got involved in as many arts programs and extracurricular activities as I could, and took on as many leadership roles as possible in an effort to make up for everything.

The academically talented program in elementary school transitions to middle school typically leads to freshmen level core courses in eighth grade. Upon entrance into high school, academically gifted students take honors classes in ninth and tenth grade and AP courses for the duration of their secondary education. Academically gifted elementary school programs establish the academic pipeline for the K-12 education duration, impacting college admissions. Rodney and Yolanda shared the experience of feeling ill-prepared for AP classes. One of the factors contributing to Black students' underrepresentation is the lack of exposure to a rigorous academic curriculum (Ford et al., 2018). AP course was AP Biology. When he enrolled in AP Biology, Rodney realized that he was behind his classmates. Rodney stated, "Also, because my peers in the AP Biology course were so ahead of me in Biology, and I wanted to match them and keep with the conversations, it encouraged me to work harder in that course." Rodney acknowledged the gap that existed between him and his AP classmates in Biology knowledge. Rather than be discouraged, the lack of knowledge fueled his motivation to engage with his classmates.

Yolanda stated,

> When starting to take these AP classes, it was apparent to me that my peers were a bit more prepared than I was to handle the rigor of the classes. I always chased a challenge, but it wasn't until now that I actually had a challenge that I found difficult.

Rodney described his high school in terms of ethnicity as majority Black. Rodney's school was a magnet school that attracted students from different school districts for engineering courses. The interaction that Rodney had with students from other home schools occurred on the soccer field. However, the depth of their conversations extended beyond soccer fundamentals. Their discussions continued to academics, and it was in those conversations that Rodney realized academic differences existed. Rodney stated,

> They would talk about what they were doing in geometry compared to what I would do in geometry and what I would learn. It just seems like we weren't being challenged or pushed to get a more well-rounded education on the topic.

Differences that Rodney recognized in the presentation of the geometry course at his residential school and his teammates also displayed the connections between property and education. In the education field, education, and status property provide identification to a school that created the reputation of the school (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Further, in the interview, I asked Rodney, "What factors motivated you to take AP courses?" Rodney stated,

> I value education. I felt like I wasn't being pushed hard enough. The same teachers were teaching regular courses, but I felt like it was like more emphasis because some of the kids on the soccer team were in the engineering program took AP courses at our school. I felt like if I were in classes with them, I would be getting the same education as them.

Rodney's desire to take the same classes as his teammates implies that his school's quality of education was not equal. Rodney described his teammates' schools as affluent. Also, Rodney was motivated to take an AP course after observing an AP English class. Rodney said,

"It made me realize that these kids aren't smarter than me. They may have more access to things than me, like better education at the other school. I can keep up with them." A direct way of looking at the connection between property and education is that individuals with high property values are granted the right to better schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Therefore, while some students at Rodney's schools may not have been challenged, students from affluent home schools who took courses offered in the magnet program would continue to receive the same quality education.

The study's findings confirm previous research in several ways. Motivation ensures previous research. Yolanda stated, "I wanted to show that women of color can be in AP." Yolanda's statement supports Griffin's (2006) research, which says ethnicity can be motivation to dispel racial stereotypes associated with their race. Also, Yolanda stated she has an intrinsic motivation, supported by Griffin's (2006) research. High-achieving Black students perceive their motivation as being intrinsic. India said that she wanted to make her parents proud. India's statement is an example of extrinsic motivation, including career goals and being a genuine asset to their ethnic community (Griffin, 2006). Limited research exists on the motivation of Black high school students. The study reflects the findings of Hwang et al. (2002), who found that Black college students' motivation was multidimensional. Multidimensional factors include intrinsic, extrinsic, present, future, and social goals that shaped the motivations of academically successful Black college students (Hwang et al., 2002). Daoud et al. 's (2018) research also supports multidimensional motivation.

Motivation is also evident through the research of Tyson et al. (2005). Their data reveals that Black students are motivated to enroll in advanced courses to gain enrollment in specifically desired universities and prepare themselves for postsecondary academia. The majority of the

participants confirmed the data. India was motivated to obtain Ivy League universities'

academic standards, and Veronica wanted to prepare for postsecondary studies. Corey was

inspired due to his desire for admissions into specific universities. Corey noted that the

enhancement of AP courses on his transcript did benefit him as he received acceptance into one

of his two college preferences.

School tracking and ability grouping in the study confirms previous research. Two

participants discussed enrollment in regular or remedial courses. Rodney explained his

registration in standard level courses, and Angela discussed her assignment in remedial and

standard level courses in fifth through eighth grades. In her journal prompt response, Angela

stated, "The remedial classes were okay in the fifth grade, but in middle school, they were just

menial (it was basically busy work)." In her interview, Angela stated, "Remedial courses they do

not do anything. It made me feel dumb and made me want to take advanced courses." Rodney

described standard level courses as "Weren't the most challenging. Teachers did not require a

lot of critical thinking skills." Rodney even noticed that his English teacher was different when

she taught an AP course. The accounts of Angela and Rodney confirm Legette's (2018) and

Giersch's (2018) findings. Legette's (2018) research found that Black students are overly

represented in courses that are not considered rigorous or labeled as a standard level course.

Giersch's (2018) study found that students in lower tracking groups do not have access to high-

quality instruction. The teachers do not have vast experience, curriculum materials, or high

expectations for the students. Peer associations in the study confirm and reject previous

research—the confirmation or rejection of the previous research varies by each participant's

experience. For the majority of the participants, their peers did not affect their core course

selections. However, Yolanda, Veronica, and India were influenced by their peers. Veronica

repeatedly talked about her cohort of friends that took classes together from freshman through senior years. Therefore, this cohort of academically like-minded friends did not require Veronica to decide whether to feel isolated from friends in a rigorous learning environment or being with friends in a less stringent learning environment. Veronica's experience rejects Kotok's (2017) statement about evaluating the cost of feeling alienated in a less diverse learning environment but a rigorous learning environment. Veronica's experiences also reject Tabron & Venzant Chambers (2019) statement about racial opportunity cost is the tradeoff that minority students must give up to academically successful in a majority learning environment.

Veronica's association with her cohort of high school friends, mostly Black students, demonstrates an example of a strong fictive kinship. While there is limited research on the impact of fictive kinships of high schools, Veronica's fictive kinship had resembled that of collegiate fictive kinships. According to Fordham (1988), fictive kinships are not based solely on skin color, but on behaviors and attitudes. The individuals in her fictive kinship shared similar academic expectations in taking honors courses and eventually AP in the latter years of their high school career. Also, they were a support to each through their formation of study groups. The structure of study groups mirrors the research of Brooks & Allen (2016) because the peers were on the same educational level that was at least a source of academic support for each other.

Rodney experienced adverse reactions from his peers about his AP enrollment. Rodney's peers disapproved of his AP enrollment decisions. Rodney's friends' disapproval of his AP enrollment mirrors research conducted by Kang et al. (2018). In their study, a Black female stated that some Black friends tried to discourage her from taking advanced placement courses. Tabron & Venzant Chambers' research (2019) found that when Black students decide to enroll in

academically rigorous courses, it comes at the expense of feeling isolated, lonely, being a token, suppressing their cultural identity having their academic ability questioned. In his interview, Rodney stated, "If you want to fit in the population at the school. It's [AP courses] not the move." Rodney's statement mirrors the research of Tabron & Venzant Chambers (2019) that suggests that racial opportunity cost is the tradeoff that minority students must give up to be academically successful in a majority white learning environment. Zoey said discussions about course selections never occurred with her peers. Zoey's experience mirrors the research of Tyson et al., 2005, who found that some Black students' course selections were never a topic of conversation.

The research study extends to the research presented in the Literature Review. Traditionally, academic tracking begins when adolescents are in the developmental stage for identity formation. During identity formation, questions about students' educational experiences answer who they are and who they will be (Legette, 2018). According to Venzant Chambers & Spikes (2016), academic tracking plays a significant role in how schools create hierarchies that may dictate students' academic ability and preparedness in their entire academic career. When looking at the participants' elementary background, six of the 12 participants were academically gifted in elementary school. Five of the 12 participants engaged in the advanced curriculums at the elementary level, and all six participated at the middle school level. At least 58% of the participants benefitted from an academic pipeline that directed them to AP courses. The progression of this educational pipeline was academically gifted classes to honors classes to AP courses. The elementary level of education lays the foundation and establishes the academic pipeline.

For the Black students not identified as academically gifted, they entered the AP pipeline through other factors such as their desire for rigor or their parents' academic knowledge. Rodney and Angela entered the AP pipeline through their desire for rigor. Corey and Warren joined the AP pipeline through their parents' experience with educational occupations coupled with their desire for rigor. Kimberly began the AP pipeline through a teacher's recommendation, her mother's advice, and peer influence. Michelle joined the AP pipeline through a middle school preparatory program due to her standardized test scores. As a result, the AP pipeline is like a secret society. Veronica, a participant, identified as academically gifted, stated, "I think that the opportunities of AP classes aren't really talked about unless you're already in honors classes, gifted programs, or the faculty sees potential. It didn't really seem like it was communicated and 'open' to all the students." Yolanda said her awareness of AP courses stemmed from her peers in AP. In the focus group interview, Yolanda said, "For the most part I was in the gifted program [state omitted], and so like all of my peers were taking like all AP classes. Some of the classes, I just signed up because everyone else was doing it." In the focus group, Veronica and Yolanda expounded on this theme when describing her peer group. Veronica said,

> The peer group that I was in, we were all going from honors to AP, so it was a natural progression that I moved along with the people in the peer group that I was with. We were all doing AP classes together, so it just made sense.

When discussing the motivation that her teachers provided, Veronica gave a similar sentiment. "My teachers would be like 'The natural next step is the AP course. Why wouldn't you take this AP course?'" Iris said,

Our honors Spanish teacher told us there is no reason why I shouldn't see all of you next

year in AP Spanish. You all are capable. But his opinion definitely didn't have any

bearing on my decision because I was going to do it anyway.

When responding to a question about her parents' involvement, India stated, "I naturally

was a straight-A student, naturally was an honors student, so that AP course was just what was

next." The statements provided by Veronica and Iris show that the expectation for gifted students

or students in rigorous classes, like honors, is to move to AP courses. Their use of the word

natural denotes that AP courses agree with students' academic ability who take honors courses

and the environment in which they learn. Based on Rodney's statement, there is a difference in

how AP teachers teach standard-level students. As stated earlier, Black students represent a high

percentage of students in courses described as not rigorous or standard level courses (Legette,

2018). Therefore, students who take honors are equipped with the essential skills to take AP

courses. Students in standard-level classes may not be equipped with the vital skills to take AP

courses, which leads them to a disadvantage for preparation for rigorous high school courses and

collegiate courses.

AP courses' restrictiveness provides an amenity that some students may not be exposed

to in standard classes, quality teaching. During the focus group interview, Yolanda's response to

question six concerning how teachers motivated their enrollment in AP courses signals that AP

teachers have reputations as the more superior teachers. Yolanda said,

I always noticed the AP courses had better teachers. The teachers that have been at the

school for a while, especially if it was like a newer AP course. They entrusted that to

someone who had experience in teaching. I guess that motivated me to lean towards that.

Also, if there was a subject that I felt confident in, my teacher would be like, 'You know

you gotta sign up for the AP course for this because you are good at this.' It was the encouragement, but it was also like I want the best teacher I can get.

Yolanda's reflection on an AP teacher's characteristics motivated me to ask her how she knew that AP teachers were the better teachers. Yolanda state, "It was word of mouth, and you don't see brand new teachers teaching AP classes either." Veronica said,

I am going to piggyback on that. A lot of people say that teachers had the great classes, or their classes are engaging; people are more successful in their classes were usually the AP teachers as well. Um, so naturally, you want to take their classes because you have seen the success rate in their classrooms. So, it kind of leads you to that.

Yolanda and Veronica's description of AP teachers paints a picture of an experience that is academically stimulating. Do AP teachers teach with the same passion and drive when AP students are not in their classrooms? Rodney noticed that his Biology teacher taught AP Biology differently. Rodney said, "For like my AP Biology teacher, I had the professor the year before for regular Biology, and it was like a whole new teacher. I felt like I was actually being challenged, and the material wasn't watered down." There is a lack of equality in the quality of education presented to students not identified as academically gifted. While Yolanda was motivated due to reviews of the AP teachers, Michelle believed that she had a better education due to her enrollment in honors and AP courses. Michelle stated, "I hate for this to be true, but I feel that the quality of the education that I got being in Pre-AP and being in AP classes was better. Most likely better than to be in the normal classes." The normal classes that Michelle referred to are the standard level courses.

The participants' collective observations, opinions, and lived experiences suggest a lack of equity between standard-level courses and rigorous courses. Some students in standard level

courses are not receiving the same quality of teaching that AP students receive. The inequity in the quality of education and the lack of exposure to higher-order thinking skills can prevent Black students' enrollment in top research universities and universities in general due to the lack of essential academic skills. A long-term effect of the inequities in teaching and exposure to rigorous courses leads to a continued disparity in Black doctors and other professionals.

The AP course pipeline is the educational restrictive country club because of the limited access to the general student body population. While the requirements for AP course enrollment may differ from county to county or state to state, registration may not be easy. For example, Veronica stated about her school system's requirements, "You had to go from an honors class. So, you couldn't take a basic course like basic Biology and go to AP Biology. You had to like come from honors biology to AP biology." This statement signals prerequisites that are needed to prepare for AP courses. Without possession of the requirements, access to rigorous classes may be denied to a student, discouraging them.

The experience of one participant in the study diverged from previous research. Tyson et al.'s (2005) data revealed one participant who experienced acting White from members of the Black and White races. In Tyson et al.'s research, the participant's Black peers viewed her as acting White, and White peers questioned her affiliation with the Black community due to her use of standard English and rigorous course selections. While Rodney never used the terminology acting White, he experienced perceptions from a White student with negative perceptions of his ability. Reflecting upon knowledge from his undergraduate studies, Rodney believes Imposter Syndrome existed in one of his AP courses. According to Mullangi & Jagsi (2019), imposter syndrome is a psychological term that refers to when a person doubts their abilities and possesses fears of being identified as a scam.

I remember one of my AP biology course mates who was shocked when I told him I was taking AP Environmental Science the following year and that I got a three on my AP exam, the same one he got a two on, 'I didn't realize you were that <u>smart</u>.' The smart, [in] this context was less of a compliment and read as 'You can't be smarter than me.' Both of these comments motivated me to continue to work hard in AP courses (more than my non-AP courses) because I felt like I had a lot to prove, not just to myself but the other students at my school.

According to Mullangi & Jagsi (2019), Imposter Syndrome is associated with women and minorities who lack role models. However, Rodney thought his White classmate possessed imposter syndrome. Rodney's classmate held lower expectations for Rodney, as some educators hold for minority students than their White counterparts. According to Rodgers et al. (2018), teachers have higher expectations for White students than minority students who have parallel records of achievement.

Tyson et al., 2005 research found in one predominately Black high school in North Carolina, students in AP and IB courses were admired by students in standard-level classes (Tyson et al., 2005). Rodney, who attended a predominately Black high school in a southeastern state, did not receive admiration from peers for his rigorous course selections. Rodney felt the need to silence himself. Rodney stated,

I had to constantly remind myself not to be too vocal or make them feel like I was smarter than them. This often took the shape of me not wanting to correct any friends when they said something wrong or give the answer to a question in class because then that would garner attention. Students would reinforce this idea of me being an AP kid. 'There does Mr. AP' or 'You're in AP, so you must be <u>smart</u> or something.' This smart,

in this context, was less of a compliment and always read more as 'You think you're better than me.'

The elementary level of education lays the foundation and establishes the academic pipeline (Darity, 2006). Six of the 12 participants identified as academically gifted in elementary school. Five of the 12 participants engaged in the advanced curriculums at the elementary level, and all six participated at the middle school level. At least 58% of the participants benefitted from an academic pipeline that directed them to AP courses. The progression of this educational pipeline was academically gifted classes to honors classes to AP courses.

Implications

Based on this study's findings, there are implications for Black students, Black parents, and educational personnel that can increase the motivation for enrollment in AP courses. The implications show that each stakeholder has specific areas of expertise that can contribute to Black students' motivation. Their contributions demonstrate the need for a collective body to help students succeed academically.

Theoretical

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development exemplifies and upholds the importance of parental involvement in a child's education. This study's examination of the microsystem supports Bronfenbrenner's belief that individuals within the microsystem can be fundamental to the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). In terms of the mesosystem, this study showed strong evidence of intersetting communication and multisetting participation. Intersetting communication is evident through the knowledge that several participants' mothers or grandmothers have of the school environment due to their jobs in the education field.

Multisetting participation is evident through the participants' engagement in activities in the home and school environments.

One of the microsystem dyads is the observational dyad, which focuses on the attention one has on another individual and their activities. While every participant's parents may not have been knowledgeable about AP courses, they were supportive. The observational dyad was apparent in this study. Rodney's experiences demonstrated that a child's actions could be extended beyond the immediate family's attention and draw attention from extended family members. In the journal prompt response, Rodney described how his parents understanding of AP courses caused a chain reaction of AP knowledge throughout his extended family.

> They would call and make that the only talking point: 'How is your AP class? What are you learning? How can I get your cousin into that at his school?' I became the spokesperson for AP courses in my family, word traveled fast, and everyone was proud of me, and perhaps to them, this meant that I would become something that they always wanted to be. Either way, the reception from my immediate and extended family really made me buckle down, and I went from one AP course to taking two.

The news of AP traveling through Rodney's family is a testament to how one person's experiences, a trusted individual, can impact others. If Rodney's parents had kept silent about his AP course, this would have affected his relatives' possible enrollment or knowledge about AP courses. Many teachers and guidance counselors act as gatekeepers and withhold information about AP courses. Rodney's experience may have provided an awareness that may not have been available within the school environment. While I failed to ask Rodney about his relatives' enrollment in AP courses, I imagine Rodney's decisions positively impacted his entire family.

Another component of the microsystem is the primary dyad, which involves others' thoughts in their absence. Evidence of a primary dyad was also strong in the study. The primary dyad is a dynamic force that motivates learning regardless of an individual's presence or absence with another party (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, the behavior and academic expectations were stated and upheld in the participants' households that there was limited interaction between parents and teachers about their child's academic progress. Even in Yolanda, whose mother and grandmother are educators, there was little interaction between her parents and core class educators. Yolanda and Iris made a note of this in the focus group interview. Yolanda stated, "I think it is interesting because Veronica and I both have the education parents, but my parents didn't talk to my teachers." I did introduce them to the band, chorus, and theater teachers because that was my extracurricular." Iris stated, "My parents never talked to any of my teachers. I was very independent in that way. My mom met my theater teacher at some point after a show."

The participants' responses to community organizations' impact do not reflect the transcending mesosystem evidence in this study. When I asked participants in the one-on-one interviews and the focus group interview about how community organizations contributed to their motivation for AP courses, Corey was the only participant to recall a specific organization that discussed AP courses. While Corey recalled a particular organization, he could not elaborate on what the discussion entailed. Community organization activities are a missing component of the study that could yield positive results for Black students. Interacting with mature individuals in different environments can help the positive development of an individual. Bronfenbrenner believed that children from cultural backgrounds where relationships transcend

settings would more than likely benefit from new and enriching experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

One can imagine how AP enrollment could increase if religious organizations had youth programs, mainly used on academic activities. Also, Greek organizations, filled with college graduates, could mentor Black students. Through the participants' interviews, the African proverb use of the village concept of raising and educating children is not apparent in society. The lack of mesosystem activity creates an environment of the haves and has nots. Some students have access to the knowledge that prepares them for their postsecondary lives, and others are left with a lack of knowledge and sources to help plan for adulthood.

Finally, when analyzing Black students' lived experiences and utilizing Bronfenbrenner's theory, race must be considered. Of the 12 participants, Rodney experienced the most disparities in the educational opportunities offered to White and Black students. Rodney learned about AP courses from his teammates rather than his guidance counselor, which is concerning. Despite Rodney taking three AP courses, conversations about rigorous courses were almost nonexistent with Black students in his school. Yet, Black students at Rodney's school received information about vocational programs available at school, such as cosmetology. Based on Black students' experiences at Rodney's school, the AP courses appeared to be intended for other students, who were not Black.

Empirical

Six empirical implications can be deducted from this study. The first empirical implication is Black students, identified as academically gifted, progress through school taking gifted classes, honors classes, then AP classes. The three-step series of academic progression is seen as the natural progression in high school classes. Veronica's and Jonathan's teachers

explained that honors students proceed to AP classes as they continue their high school education.

The second empirical implication is Black students, who have parents in the education field, receive knowledge that helps prepare them for postsecondary studies. Several participants' mothers and or grandmothers are employed in the education field. The knowledge acquired on the job allowed them to apply the information to benefit their children. For example, Corey's mother's role as a curriculum facilitator provided access to curriculums in all disciplines. This knowledge helped his mother analyze curriculums and advise her son with information that would benefit his postsecondary endeavors.

The third empirical implication is Black students will seek rigor in AP classes when they are not challenged at other levels. Rodney and Angela explained their progression to AP courses, which began with regular-level or remedial courses. Rodney's and Angela's academic experiences involved assignments that lacked the requirements of higher-order thinking skills and were summarized as busywork. Rodney knew that he was not being challenged in regular-level courses, and through knowledge gained from his soccer teammates and the encouragement of a teacher, he was able to enroll in AP courses. Angela was able to advance beyond remedial classes through consistent hard work, the transition to honors as a high school freshman, and enroll in an AP course during her senior year. Rodney's and Angela's experiences demonstrate there is no set method for seeking rigor, but a Black student must possess the motivation.

The fourth empirical implication is Black students want to dispel myths that they cannot be successful in AP courses. Many Black students are aware of the negative stereotypes about Black students' academic performances or ability. Of the 12 participants, Yolanda and Rodney demonstrated a desire to dispel the stereotypes. Yolanda expressed a need to enroll in AP classes

to show that Black students can be successful, and in some cases, receive better grades on AP assignments than their non-Black peers. Yolanda did not want her absence in AP classes to symbolize a lack of ability to achieve at that level. Rodney's experience with myths about Black students occurred during a conversation with a non-Black classmate. In the conversation, Rodney and his classmate discussed their scores on the AP Environmental Science exam. The classmate was surprised to learn Rodney a three while he earned a two. The classmate said, "I didn't realize you were that smart." Rodney did not take the statement as a compliment, but it increased his motivation to work harder in AP classes.

The fifth empirical implication is Black students are inclined to follow the academic paths of their peers. When students are placed on academic tracks, they typically are assigned to the same classes, and in some cases, students have been classmates since elementary school. Consistent patterns of the same course assignments help students equate their academic level to their peers. Therefore, when Black students see their classmates enroll in AP classes, they believe they should also.

The sixth empirical implication is that many participants were placed on the academic track due to their identification as academically gifted put them on an AP course pipeline. The AP course pipeline is an educational restrictive country club because of the limited access to the general student body population. While the requirements for AP course enrollment may differ from county to county or state to state, registration may not be easy. For example, Veronica stated about her school system's requirements, "You had to go from an honors class. So, you couldn't take a basic course like basic Biology and go to AP Biology. You had to like come from honors biology to AP biology." This statement signals prerequisites that are needed to prepare for AP courses. Without requirements, access may be denied to a student. Without

exposure to rigorous classes, like honors, a student may be discouraged. However, Rodney's and Angela's lived experiences are a testament to the ability to create your academic path.

Practical

Three practical implications can be deducted from this study. Black students should share their perspectives and experiences with AP classes with other Black students. Black students often feel isolated from their Black peers and lonely when they are in the AP environment (Tabron & Venzant Chambers, 2019). Sharing experiences about AP classes can deter Black students from thinking that the classes are exclusive to White students like Rodney initially thought. The knowledge received about AP classes from their Black peers could increase enrollment and allow Black students to develop support systems, like Veronica, where students know they can depend on each other to maneuver through the class. As they take AP classes, they can support each other by creating study groups and assisting with assignments. According to Yolanda, aside from the support systems, they can develop, another Black students' presence is merely enough.

Parents should establish realistic and high academic expectations for their children. Several of the participants stated their parents set specific grade expectations, and the participants' parents checked to make sure homework was completed, and any assistance was needed. Some parents did not place particular grade expectations on their children but encouraged their children to do their best. One parent used their academic experience to guide the expectations established for their child and justified the expectation by saying, "This is what I did; this is what you will do." While all of the parents were not knowledgeable of AP courses, they were supportive of their child's enrollment. The majority of the participants' parents established high expectations for their child, and their child worked to fulfill the expectations.

Guidance counselors and teachers should tell Black students about the benefits of AP classes. When Black students are well-informed about AP classes' postsecondary benefits, they may be inclined to enroll. Some educators have acted as gatekeepers to AP classes, only recommending or informing students who they believe belong, which often leaves Black students out. Educators cannot allow implicit bias to determine who should be privy to information about AP courses. Guidance counselors and teachers should share AP information with students in standard-level classes to be aware of their options.

Recommendations for Parents

Parents should establish high academic standards for their households or encourage their children to do their best in school. Parents should have conversations with their children about their academic progress and ask if additional assistance is needed in terms of tutoring. Parents should also schedule parent/teacher conferences to discuss their child's progress. They should create dialogues with children about their postsecondary plans and use their academic experiences and knowledge to advise their child in high school course selections.

Recommendations for Guidance Counselors

Guidance counselors should encourage Black students to take AP classes. Information about AP classes should not be kept secret. Students, who seem hesitant about enrollment, should be explained the benefits of AP classes, and they should be encouraged to try. When Black students enroll, guidance counselors should not doubt their ability to complete the class. They should encourage their enrollment and monitor their progress through the academic year by checking grades and talking with students at least once a quarter.

Recommendations to Teachers

Teachers at all levels should pay attention to their students. Teachers should make personal connections with students. Classrooms that retained Black boys in advanced math classes possessed quality interaction between them and the teacher (McGlamery & Mitchell, 2000). Teachers should assess students' abilities through their oral and written communications of the curriculum, specifically examining their ability to utilize higher-order thinking skills. Rodney's English teacher saw his ability to analyze "To Kill a Mockingbird." The English teacher's recognition of Rodney's ability to analyze led to an invitation to observe an AP English class. Kimberly's eighth grade Reading teacher saw her natural writing ability and recommended her for advanced English for the ninth grade.

The presence of analytical skills should not merely be complemented or adorned with a high letter grade. Instead, the students should be challenged with additional higher-order thinking assignments and encouraged to take rigorous courses. Before Rodney's enrollment in AP courses, "Teachers did not require a lot of critical thinking skills." Rodney believes he did not get a well-rounded education, and he coasted through standard level courses. Angela described remedial classes in middle school as busywork. Without internal and external motivations, Rodney and Angela may not have enrolled in AP courses based upon their previous educational experiences. Their prior learning experiences did not prepare them for any rigorous coursework.

When teachers see potential in students, they must provide those students with a trial run or sample of advanced-level work. Challenge students to see their capabilities. Allow students to enter advanced learning environments, observe the classroom, participate in class discussions, and attempt the class assignments. This type of field experience from Rodney's English teacher

allowed him to conclude that "I can keep up with them." Karen emphasized the word' exposure.'

Karen stated, "AP for minorities is important for the exposure and right instruction." Karen

defined her use of the word exposure as more in-depth content. Zoey stated, "10th grade English

was boring and slow." Zoey's English teacher suggested that she take honors or AP courses.

Zoey's English teacher did not merely give her a high mark, but she/he took the time to suggest

more challenging options for Zoey.

To be academically gifted, students must take a test and have a teacher recommendation

in elementary school. Qualifying into gifted programs requires a specific score. Davis et al.

(2015) suggested the cancellation of teacher referrals and minimized standardized test scores and

grades. Historically, minority students have been under referred by teachers or provided with

low evaluations (Ford & Whiting, 2016). Instead of the traditional forms of gifted requirements,

Davis et al. suggest implementing methods used by McGlamery and Mitchell (2000). Their

approach involves the implementation of a cohort group that provided an array of activities such

as active recruitment at feeder schools to encourage Black male students to contemplate a college

track in math, STEM summer programs for eleventh and twelfth graders, and critical thinking

activities (McGlamery & Mitchell, 2000). The lack of Black students in gifted education

programs will contribute to Black students' low representation in advanced placement courses

and, eventually, top universities (Ford & Whiting, 2016).

Recommendations for Community Organizations

The majority of participants did not mention community organizations as advocating for

academic rigor or AP courses. Corey said a local community organization discussion of AP, but

there was no elaboration of the conversation. However, what has inspired two participants, are

conferences or events where professional Black people can speak to younger generations.

Kimberly's motivation to be a mechanical engineer was due to a Black mechanical engineer's presentation at a summer program. Although he was not a science major, Warren attended a minority STEM conference and was impressed by professional minorities' presence.

The presence of Black professionals is essential to Black students' career paths. The future career options and visions for Black students who see Black educators can allow them to envision themselves as educators and principals (Poloma, 2014). The principle can be applied to Black students in other fields. Black students must have visual representation from their ethnicity to further the vision for their lives. While conducting Rodney's interview, he began to ask me about my doctoral degree and pondered the idea of pursuing a doctoral degree. I explained my doctoral journey, and I encouraged him to continue his education after completing this master's degree. As a Black female, I hope that our conversation showed Rodney that he could complete a doctoral program.

In the United States, there are nine organizations collectively known as the National Pan-Hellenic Council. The National Pan-Hellenic Council consists of Black Greek organizations, four sororities, and five fraternities. The organizations are overflowing with an abundance of Black professionals in an array of fields. The Greek organizations should create programs that allow their members to share their professional experiences with Black students collectively or individually. The African proverb, Each one, teach one, should be one of each organization's mottos. The National Pan-Hellenic Council should mentor students, create a version of Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day. Members of the Council, who are Black entrepreneurs, should create summer internships that allow Black students to work in some company capacity. Greek organizations and other minority-based organizations can connect with their local

education authority to seek prospective students who could benefit from Black professionals'

mentorship. Greek organizations can create criteria for admittance into the selection process.

Mentoring Black students can also be implemented at HBCUs and PWIs and alumni

associations. Many colleges require students to complete community service hours. One option

for community service could be for students to mentor middle and high school students who

aspire to follow their same educational path or college major. Middle and high school students

could shadow the college students for a day once per quarter, attend their classes, attend study

groups, and participate in other educational activities associated with their daily routine.

Samuelson & Litzer (2016) stated these forms of community support indicate students'

recognition and pledge to the community's prosperity. The idea of shadowing will allow them to

see a person on their desired path and let the middle and high schools experience their daily

activities. Professors can also participate. For example, an engineering professor could give

students an assignment to complete with their mentor. The task would provide the mentee direct

experience with the concepts they would encounter at the collegiate level. The program could

incorporate undergraduate and graduate students. If "A Different World" can alleviate the doubt

of possessing the intellect to attend college (Brooms & Davis, 2017), one can imagine what

impact a first-hand knowledge of collegiate learning and campus life can have on a Black

student.

If students enter the program as a freshman, they could conclude the program with their

mentor's collaborative project. High school seniors can pair with graduate students in their

chosen field. For example, an architectural graduate student could design a building with a high

school senior who has selected architecture as their future major. The mentor and mentee could

present the project in a class. In a study conducted by Hwang et al. (2002), the data revealed that

sixty percent of participants were intrinsically motivated when choosing their major are

extrinsically motivated by familial or teacher influences. Mentorship through the Pan-Hellenic

Council or interactions with Black college students may spark Black students' motivation.

Delimitations and Limitations

There are several delimitations and one limitation associated with this study. The

delimitations center around the theoretical framework, the AP experience, and my personal bias.

The limitations center around locating participants, the participant sample size.

There are three delimitations associated with this study. First, the participants were

required to be at least 18 years of age. The participants had the full high school experience to

provide lived experiences. Second, the cohort was chosen due to their postsecondary educational

goals. Limiting the participant pool to individuals with postsecondary goals would likely

increase the chance that individuals took AP courses. Also, using this cohort provided a broader

view of the lived experiences of Black students who enrolled in AP courses throughout the U.S.,

rather than focusing on a specific region that may not yield varied experiences. Third, I limited

the recruitment of participants to 12 individuals. Limiting the number of participants to 12

allowed me to get acquainted with the participants and understand their experiences.

There was one limitation associated with this study. COVID-19 prevented any one-on-

one or focus group interviews from occurring. The lack of face-to-face interviews did not allow

me to see how participants' body language changed with questions. While the focus group

participants were able to bond over their experiences via Zoom, I believe the connections would

have been more significant in a face-to-face format.

Recommendations for Future Research

One recommendation includes a phenomenological study of Hispanic/Latino students to determine what motivated their AP course enrollment. Like Black students, Hispanic/Latino students are also underrepresented in AP courses (Baylor, 2016). It would be interesting to know if Hispanic/Latino students' motivation and experiences are similar to Black students. Comparing Hispanic/Latino students and Black students could open the door to programs that focus specifically on the Hispanic/Latino community, similar to the programs suggested for Black students in this study.

A second recommendation for a future study is to explore Black parents of students who have taken AP courses. The objective of interviewing Black parents would be to understand the source of their child's academic performance, the structure of the home environment, their educational background, and their parental involvement in their child's schools. The suggestions that parents of academically motivated Black students can provide essential information for parents, particularly those with young children. Their experiences would not only be suggestions but proven to be successful through the accomplishments of their child.

The third recommendation for a future study is examining fictive kinships developed between Black peers at the secondary level. As previously stated, fictive kinships can be sources of support for students (Brooks & Allen, 2016). There is limited literature on fictive kinship that focuses on Black collegiate students. Brooks & Allen (2016) researched fictive kinships that Black collegiate students developed. More research should be conducted on Black students' fictive kinships at the secondary level to understand how fictive kinships are created and how members of fictive kinships support each other academically and emotionally through their education AP courses.

The fourth recommendation for future study is to examine the academic rigor and college preparation that community college courses provide for Black high school students. Angela stated that she would have avoided AP courses' stress and taken community college courses had she been aware of community college courses. A study could be conducted to determine if Black students who take classes at the community college level prepare for collegiate learning, like students who take AP courses. Community college courses may be another route to college preparation for minority students' entrance into top research universities or college in general.

The fifth recommendation for a future study is to examine AP teachers' professional development and pedagogy in the United States. Based on Warren, Yolanda, and Zoey's responses, the quality of AP instruction varies by school. For example, Warren stated he believes that his English AP teacher's assignments did not prepare him for the AP exam. Warren also noted that AP courses are designed to prepare for college but give unrealistic expectations of college. Zoey also said college peers viewed AP classes as easy. The ease of AP courses contradicted Zoey's opinion of AP as rigorous. Therefore, a future study can observe AP courses and compare and contrast the same class in different schools to ensure that AP teachers' lesson plans provide critical thinking and analysis opportunities. Also, examine the AP exam scores at schools to see how students perform on the tests to receive college credit. An examination of this type is necessary because if students are getting accepted into top research universities or any college but are not equipped with the essential academic skills to complete a program and graduate, students' time is wasted.

The sixth recommendation for a future study is to examine the professional development teachers have around cultural competency. I would suggest that middle and high school teachers at all levels be included in a study. Middle school teachers, specifically eighth-grade teachers,

can make recommendations to determine the academic track for freshmen. High school teachers, specifically those who teach ninth through eleventh-grade students, can encourage students to enroll in AP classes.

The seventh recommendation for a future study is to compare the teaching quality in AP classes to standard courses. Michelle, Yolanda, and Veronica believe they were provided with quality teachers in honors and AP classes. In this study, teachers' use of higher-order thinking skills should be examined, how teachers create academically stimulating learning environments for students, and how teachers prepare students for postsecondary learning.

Summary

This study aims to understand the factors that motivate Black students to enroll in AP courses. The study shaped by Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development showed how the home and school environments could affect academic performance. Using the literature review with diverse topics such as critical race theory and Black educators' impact, I showed the connection between the literature and the participants' lived experiences.

Using convenience sampling, I recruited 12 participants from different regions of the United States, diverse in age, background, and lived experiences. What binds the participants together is their participation in AP classes in high school. Twelve individuals participated in one-on-one interviews, five participants responded to the journal prompt, and three participants engaged in a conversation in the focus group interview. From the three forms of data collection, the central question and sub-questions were answered. The central question's answer is multidimensional. The sources of motivation for Black students' enrollment in AP courses are family influences, educational influence, peer influence, college preparation, and the desire for rigor.

Based upon half of the participants' experiences, many Black students who are motivated to take AP courses is an AP pipeline. For many, the AP pipeline begins in elementary school, with the identification as academically gifted. This label attaches students to rigorous classes and typically provides exposure to the eighth grade's secondary curriculum. At the high school, these students take honors and conclude high school in AP courses. Other Black students, they desire to be challenged based upon their experiences in remedial or standard level classes. Some Black students have family members who possess knowledge of the curricula due to their employment in the education field or educational attainment. Through their profession or their own academic experiences, families can help their children make sound choices in their academic endeavors for their future.

Every Black student is not fortunate to have the resources or amenities that the participants possess or their counterparts of other ethnicities. Nor will every Black student be identified as academically gifted. However, that identification should not hinder their opportunity to be educated and prepared for postsecondary education. Failure to provide quality education to all students may delay the increase in Black medical doctors or the next Black President of the United States.

As a society, we must turn the tide of Black students' under-representation in AP courses, the postsecondary environment, and DuBois's bleak forecast on Black students in an integrated learning environment. We must follow the instructions of Congressmen John Lewis and stir up good trouble. In this case, we must stir up good trouble on unfair educational practices and implicit bias and open the doors of restrictive AP courses. In the school environment, educators must observe and nurture higher-order thinking skills in their students, encourage Black students to pursue rigorous studies, and act as ushers rather than gatekeepers to AP courses. In the Black

community, professionals must act as mentors and be a living testament to what students could be in the future. Finally, universities should partner with local education authorities to provide students with exposure to the postsecondary learning experience. In this current era, that resembles a sequel to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, now is the time.

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APPENDICES
Appendix A IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 11, 2020

Konova Cornelius
David Vacchi

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY19-20-369 A Phenomenological Study of the Factors that Motivate Black Students' Enrollment in Advanced Placement Courses

Dear Konova Cornelius, David Vacchi:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the date of the IRB meeting at which the protocol was approved: June 11, 2020. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make modifications in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update submission to the IRB.
These submissions can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Recruitment Form

Dear Potential Participant:

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the factors that motivate Black students to enroll in advanced placement courses, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, a high school student or high school graduate, Black, have enrolled in at least one advanced placement course during high school. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an interview, write a journal response, and participate in a focus group. After the three forms of data have been collected, participants will be asked to check the accuracy of the findings. The interview will take between 60 to 75 minutes, the journal response will take 60 to 75 minutes, and the focus group will take 60 to 75 minutes. The total estimated time for participation in the three forms of data collection is 3 hours to 3 hours and 45 minutes. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

After agreeing to be a part a part of the study, I will email you the consent form. Please type your name and date on the consent form and email the document back to me prior to the interview or return it at the time of the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research.

Sincerely,

Konova Cornelius Leak

Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University

Appendix C: Consent Form
CONSENT

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study of the Factors that Motivate Black Students' Enrollment Advanced Placement Courses

Principal Investigator: Konova Cornelius Leak, doctoral candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to be in a research study on the factors that motivate Black students to enroll in advanced placement courses. Your participation could greatly impact the strategies that educators and school counselors implement into their conversations and interactions with students about course selections. You were selected as a possible participant because you are 18 years or older, a high school student or high school graduate, Black, and have enrolled in at least one advanced placement course during high school.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand Black students' motivations to enroll in advanced placement courses. Through interviews, completion of journal entry prompts, and a focus groups, factors such as parental support, educational personnel support, community organization participation, and peer associations will be analyzed to show their impact on course selections.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Participate in an interview that will be audio recorded. The interview should take 60 to 75 minutes.
2. Respond to a journal prompt on your motivation to enroll in an advanced placement course. The journal prompt should take 60 to 75 minutes.
3. Participate in a focus group that will be audio recorded. The focus group should take 60 to 75 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include the potential ability for educators, school counselors, and school administrators to motivate African American students to take rigorous courses such as honors and advanced placement; to potentially close the achievement gap between African American students and Caucasian and Asian students.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. You may be required to reflect upon negative experiences that occurred during your high school career.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. The focus group and interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Each journal entry prompt file will be labeled with participants' pseudonym.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Conflicts of Interest Disclosure: The identity of each participant will be kept confidential. Information collected through data collection will not be given to anyone that has/had a position of professional or grading authority over participants. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Any data collected from the focus group will be kept, but it will not be used in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Konova Cornelius Leak. You may ask any questions you have now.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____   _____
Printed Subject Name   Signature & Date

Appendix D: One-on-one Interview Protocol Form

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee Name

Questions:

1. Please tell me about your experiences as a student in high school

2. How would you describe your experiences socially in high school?

3. How would you describe your experiences academically in high school?

4. What factors influenced your decision to take AP courses?

5. What advanced courses did you take before entering into high school?

6. Describe your experiences taking AP courses.

7. How did your parent(s)' opinion(s) affect the decisions that you made when selecting courses?

8. What influence did education personnel (teachers, guidance counselors, or administrators) have on your motivation for your course selections?

9. How did your peers' opinions affect your course selections?

10. How have your college aspirations been affected by your decision to take AP courses?

11. How have your college choices affected your decision to take AP courses?

Appendix E: Journal Entry Prompt

Directions: Please respond to the journal prompts by writing a minimum of one page.

What are your lived experiences as a Black student who strives for academic rigor through advanced placement courses? Please describe direct accounts of lived experiences that motivated your enrollment in advanced placement courses. Your response should include specific lived experiences in your home environment and community organizations.

Appendix F: Focus Group Interview

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee Names

Questions:

1. What barriers have you experienced in enrolling in AP courses?

2. What motivated your enrollment in AP courses?

3. How did your membership in Teen Summit motivate you to pursue AP courses?

4. How involved were one or both of your parents in school activities or communication with your teachers?

5. How has your home environment influenced your enrollment in AP courses?

6. How have your teachers influenced your enrollment in AP courses?

7. How have your guidance counselors influenced your enrollment in AP courses?

8. How has your involvement in community organizations influenced your enrollment in AP courses?

9. How have your peers influenced your enrollment in AP courses?