A CASE STUDY OF THE PERSPECTIVES OF BLACK CHILDREN'S PARENTS

REGARDING THEIR ROLE IN ADDRESSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

by

Jennifer Harris

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study was to understand the perspectives of Black children's parents regarding their roles in addressing the Black student achievement gap in their Virginia school district. For this study, the achievement gap referred to the disparity of academic performance between Black and White students. The theories guiding this study were social constructivism and social equity as they both support understanding the world based on participants' experiences. The research questions are as follows: (1) What do parents of Black children identify as their roles in their children's education? (2) How do parents of Black children perceive the effect that their involvement has on their children's academic success or failure? (3) What additional support do parents of Black children need to facilitate better learning for their children? This study was bound to a Virginia school district, and the sample was composed of 12 participants from 2 schools: Harris Middle School and Sims High School. The data collection process included individual interviews, a focus group, and a historical document analysis provided by the school. Data analysis was conducted using pattern matching logic and consisted of coding, memoing, and transcripts interpretation. The study's findings indicated that parents largely believe that the burden of education lies within the schools. Additionally, parents feel that as their student reaches the end of middle school, the child should be held to higher accountability for their success. By performing this study, I offered a better understanding of Black parents' perception regarding their specific roles in addressing the minority achievement gap.

Keywords: achievement gap, achievement disparity, minority, parental involvement, perception.

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this transcript to my family and those who have been instrumental in this educational journey. First and foremost, I thank my heavenly Father, for without Him I am nothing. To my grandmother in heaven – Big Mama, I hope that I made you proud. To mother, Gloria Sims, who is the epitome of a Godly woman. You paved the way for greatness, and I pray that God makes me just ½ the amazing mother and grandmother you are. To my siblings, Sherinda, Samson (who is in Heaven), and John – we will forever be the incredible 4! To my niece and nephew, Lillie and Michael, you are my heartstrings. To my children, Matthew and Olivia, my heart beats for you. My most incredible honor is being your mother. To the memory of Mother Loretta Butts and Bishop Stanford Butts – your words to me in our last days together were to go forward and stop being afraid. Thank you for allowing God to use you in such mighty ways. To all of my friends and loved ones who have encouraged me along the way – I love you all to infinity and beyond.

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List of Abbreviations

Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA)

No Child Left Behind Act (No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Virginia's Department of Education (VDOE)

United States (U.S.)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a context for the proposed study and related background information. The background includes the historical, social, and theoretical frameworks. Following this is an explanation of the purpose and problem statement and the study's significance, and the research questions that will guide the study. This chapter also provides a situation to self, which allows the reader to gain more intimate knowledge of the researcher's relationship to the study. Chapter One ends with the definitions of terms used in the research and a summary of information.

Background

In an ideal world, all students would have equal access to a quality education regardless of cultural, racial, or ethnic background. Unfortunately, there is still an achievement gap between Black and White students in many countries that have been around since the creation of a formal educational system (Blad, 2016; Harris, 2008). Many temporary fixes, such as school and teacher reform, equitable access laws, and community partnerships, have tried to address this problem; however, none have been permanent enough to eliminate it (Blad, 2016; Chakrabarti, 2012; Epstein, 2010; Kendi, 2016; King, 2005). Optimism arose in the 1980s when there was a decline in the achievement gap; however, it was short-lived as a widening occurred in the 1990s (Blad, 2016). This cyclical trend is still seen today in most school systems in the U.S. with no definitive end in sight (Blad, 2016; Kendi, 2016; McKinsey & Company, 2009). Despite students being guaranteed by Federal law the right to an equitable education, the achievement gap shows higher regard for perception than reality, allowing this disparity amongst groups to linger (Harvard University, 2010).

There is a constant argument over whether the achievement gap is due to socioeconomic inequalities, racial discrimination, or systemic inequities (Marzano, 2003; Rodriguez, 2013). The case seems to go nowhere, only accusations and no one willing to take the blame and make a change that will be long-lasting. This qualitative collective case study aims to look beyond those factors and understand Black children's parents' perspectives regarding their roles in addressing the Black student achievement gap.

Historical Context

The achievement gap and educational disparity between Black and White students have existed for as long as there has been a formal education system in the U.S (Day et al., 2013). One of the first cases to address inequality of education was Plessy v Ferguson (1896). Although initially written to require Blacks and Whites to ride in separate railroad cards, its implications extended to all other areas, especially education (Plessy v Ferguson, 1896). The case ruled that states could have independent schools for Blacks and Whites, so long as they were considered "equal" (Day et al., 2013; Plessy v Ferguson, 1896). This determination meant that Black students would receive educational facilities and standards of learning equal to their White counterparts (Plessy v Ferguson, 1896). Unfortunately, time revealed that the separate schools were drastically different in any way imaginable, amounting to unconstitutional segregation based on race (Day et al., 2013).

The inequality of education seen in segregated schools was a major driving factor in the landmark decision of Brown v Board of Education (1954), which, among other things, implemented the racial desegregation of public schools. Up until this point, state-sanctioned segregation was guilty of depriving Black children of equal educational opportunities (Bell, 1980). Many of these minority students were illiterate, and the quality of education was

inadequate, resulting in them being inferior to their White counterparts (Brown v Board of Education, 1954). The physical changes called for took place, albeit slowly, but there was still a lag in the quality of education offered between Black and White students (Bell, 1980; Ipka, 2004; Olneck, 2005). It is undeniable that there has been substantial progress, even decades post-Brown v Board of Education (1954). However, not enough to create true equality and eliminate this gap (Olneck, 2005).

The No Child Left Behind Act (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) was the first law in recent years to shine a bright light on education disparity between minorities, primarily Black and White students. Immediately preceding it, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (P.L. 103-227), signed by President Bill Clinton, tried to make schools responsible for reaching students outside of the classroom by mandating that they implement deliberate practices to increase parent participation. However, there was not enough follow-through, and it opened the unfair misconception that most of the achievement gap is tied directly to what the school is or is not doing (Francis et al., 2017; Peterson et al., 2016). NCLB (2002) set a goal of examining schools' data and implementing plans that would look past disabilities, race, and socioeconomic status, seeking to close this gap. NCLB's (2002) mandate was unambiguous; all students should have the same access to a high-quality education. The backbone of NCLB (2002), referred to as Title I, outlined requirements for teachers and schools, such as professional development and accountability, and it also contained assistance with developing parental involvement. Initially, the timeline stretched to the 2013-14 school year; however, that time came and went, and the gap was still present. Notwithstanding NCLB, school districts across the nation continued to struggle with closing the achievement gap.

The next iteration of NCLB was the Every Student Succeeds Act (Every Student

Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015). NCLB (2002) focused on schools obtaining grade-level mastery in English, math, and science. For all students, ESSA (2015) allowed school districts to determine their academic performance indicators differently if equitable. ESSA (2015) also highlighted that efforts to close the achievement gap must start earlier in life than previously thought, creating a birth – 12th-grade continuum. One of the most championed components of ESSA (2015) is the importance of out-of-school activities for children, mainly a healthy family environment. ESSA (2015) is an ongoing project. However, there is still the hope that its innovative methods and accountability practices will help bring more equity and lessen the achievement gap between Black and White students.

Theoretical Context

It is a misconception that Black parents, regardless of their economic status, do not want their children to have a good education; they want it just as much as White parents (Nagel et al., 2015). Most research done on the parental involvement of Black children has focused on what is perceived by others instead of directly asking the parents for their perception. By asking parents of Black children what they feel their role is, there is a higher chance of identifying some of the reasons for their involvement or lack of involvement as well as the achievement gap causes (Koonce & Harper, 2011; Larocque et al., 2011; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016).

Getting the parents' viewpoints to show the different realities on the same subject correlates with the social constructivist theory by Lev Vygotsky (1978). The social constructivist approach (Vygotsky, 1978) posits that an individual's immersed community plays a significant role in developing meanings and influencing their actions. Through the research conducted using this theory, Vygotsky (1978) found that much of what children learn is dependent on their social interactions with the adults in their life. These interactions have the potential to shape who they

become later in life. I am using this theory as one of the fundamental frameworks because it will allow me to see the world from various perspectives and better understand the ways that these major influencers – parents – feel, thereby placing a high value on their opinions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). It is essential to discover the feelings of the parents of the Black children because they are the ones that are being directly affected by negative stereotypes and perceptions (Fan et al., 2012; Jeynes, 2012; Koonce & Harper, 2011). Additionally, Black children are continually undereducated, so their parents' lived reality is of paramount importance (Meiners, 2015; Williams et al., 2002).

Social equity theory is a foundational support for this research. While it does not speak to the causes of individual achievement variables, it does seek to explain the factors that create differences in achievement between groups (Frederickson, 2010). Social equity theory also examines the direct, contributing influences that cause systemic achievement gaps between races (Frederickson, 2010; McKown, 2013). Frederickson (2010) believed that outside stimuli, such as social and economic conditions, had to be considered when dealing with public citizens. Though everyone could not receive equal treatment, equity was possible.

Social Context

 A significant correlation exists worldwide between students' chances for academic success and their family circumstances (Mourshed & Whelan, 2010). Parents are their children's first and most important teachers, with many of their thoughts and views on education being fed to them starting at an early age (Jeynes, 2003; Mourshed & Whelan, 2010). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that students benefit and typically obtain tremendous success when their parents are active throughout their entire academic lives (Muller, 2018). This parental involvement is not dependent on race, ethnicity, social class, or financial situation. It is vital,

regardless of all these things, and is even more critical to groups that are already marginalized and often have more hardships than other students (Jeynes, 2003).

Many Black students, especially those from a lower economic bracket, have parents who work during the day and cannot be present. Having the parent out of the home makes the school-home relationship more strained, considering most parental involvement and support occurs during the school day. In addition to this, at-home parental involvement seems to be lacking in the minority community. In a survey done by The Brookings Institute in 2016, data showed that 90% of White parents read to their children three or more times a week, compared to only 77% of Black parents (Reeves & Howard, 2016). These numbers drastically change when you consider socioeconomic status; Black parents of a higher socioeconomic status scored 85%. The shift for White parents shows similar gains with 98% in the same survey (Reeves & Howard, 2016).

The longer the minority achievement gap exists, the more consequences for the country as a society. Researchers studying the difference have found that it affects the educational system and causes a domino effect on the nation's economic stability (McKinsey & Company, 2009). If Black students are not being educated and obtain the same academic success levels as White students, there will continue to be disparities in the workplace (Blad, 2016). Gone are the days of the agricultural workforce with a trade skill that was enough for an individual to obtain economic independence. Education is now mandatory for most jobs, and the training that comes with it is key to breaking the barriers that separate the financial situations of Blacks and Whites (Blad, 2016; Francis et al., 2017; Lynch & Oakford, 2014). Students that are not afforded this chance at life will be more likely to be high school dropouts and decrease their ability to earn a reasonable, middle-class wage, continuing the cycle of poverty and widening the gap (Francis et al., 2017;

Goss, 2017; Langham, 2009; Lynch & Oakford, 2014). Lynch and Oakford (2014) stated, "If the United States were able to close the educational achievement gaps between native-born white children and black and Hispanic children, the U.S. economy would be 5.8%—or nearly $2.3 trillion—larger in 2050" (p. 5).

Situation to Self

I grew up as a minority child in a single-parent household with a mother who was adamant that her children receive the best education possible. She was very involved in our school, even as she served in the military and worked a part-time job to provide for us. Not only did she spend time doing work with us at home, but she also made every effort to be visible in the school building. This involvement helped me keep my head up and continue to be motivated to do my best. As a mother and educator, I am careful to treat all my students equally and give them the same opportunities to succeed. However, I see an achievement gap, and I intentionally work towards empowering both the students and the parents of those who get caught in the downward spiral of achievement disparity.

When conducting this study, I considered various perspectives concerning philosophical assumptions. An epistemological assumption is subjective in that the researcher uses the information obtained from participants to form a closer relationship (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal is to become more immersed in the "worlds" of the participants to prepare a more thorough and concise context for the gathered knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The axiological assumption plays a part in this study due to the connection to values and their biases when shaping a narrative (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher's values and biases are evident and can include race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and personal belief systems (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The central philosophical assumptions used in this research were ontological and rhetorical. Ontological was chosen because it questions the nature of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The definition of the word ontology is the nature of being or becoming (Crotty, 2003). Ontology looks at the world around us and considers its reality (Bryman, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018). A distinct characteristic of ontology is that it considers the subject's existence and understands that it will vary based on the individual and their viewpoint of the situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus begins the quest to discover a person's essence and the effect on their existence and constructed reality (Crotty, 2003). Using an ontological approach in this study, I was able to get an in-depth look at various parental perspectives and thereby develop themes to report those multiple realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Rhetoric ties together all of the aforementioned philosophical assumptions. The use of rhetoric in qualitative research is geared towards the language choices, such as informal speech that is personal (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The language used with rhetoric is literary in nature and evolves throughout the course of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The primary focus of rhetorical assumption in a qualitative study is enhanced credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in the stories and narratives birthed from the data gathered (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Understanding the context in which to conduct the research is essential to accurately and effectively interpret the resulting data (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Thus, I used the interpretivist paradigm as it allowed me to view the world through my participants' lenses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My Biblical worldview also played a vital role in this study. I believe God desires for there to be equity in all areas of our lives, including our education. Proverbs 22:6 (N.L.T.) is the backbone of education, stating: "Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are

older, they will not leave it." This statement is directed towards parents and specifies the critical role in their child's life. Children are a gift from God, given to their parents, and they should be treated as such (Isaiah 1:17; Psalms 127:3, N.L.T.). This principle applies to all children, regardless of their race, ethnicity, culture, or socioeconomic status.

Problem Statement

The problem is that the achievement gap between Blacks and Whites has continued to grow over the past few decades, despite continued laws such as NCLB (2002) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (Every Student Succeeds [ESSA], 2015), which were put in place nationwide to try and reduce the gap (Alba, 2018; Blad, 2016; Chenoweth, 2016; Howard, 2010; Kendi, 2016). Few studies provide an in-depth look at Black students' perceptions regarding their specific roles in addressing the achievement gap that affects their students. Quantitative studies, such as those conducted by the Census Bureau (Alba, 2018) and the United States Department of Education (Blad, 2016), have also concluded that standardized testing plays a role in the widening gap, giving an unfair advantage to students who have higher socioeconomic statuses and receive more academic support (Hipp, 2018; Kendi, 2016). Some feel the achievement gap and disparity in learning links to what the school is or is not doing (Peterson et al., 2016).

Many of these studies ultimately point back to the lack of parental support and involvement as the most significant indicator of the consistent achievement gap between Black and White students' success (Biag, 2016; Castro et al., 2015; Reynolds et al., 2014). However, little attention has been given to the parents to understand their role and perception better. This qualitative, collective case study will explore the perspectives of parents of Black students at different schools within a Virginia school district by interviewing them to gather their multiple

views on the same issue. The study population comes from one high-performing school in the county, and one low-performing school in the county, with the participating parents, split between those considered actively involved in their child's education and those who are not. By conducting this study, I seek to identify the root causes and make an earnest effort to foster solutions, starting in the most prominent place for students: their home (Matteucci, 2016; Turner et al., 2015; Yeh, 2015).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study was to understand the perspectives of Black children's parents regarding their roles in addressing the Black student achievement gap in their Virginia school district. Additionally, this study sought to understand how parents defined their involvement at home and school and its effect on their child's success. For this study, the achievement gap was defined as the disparity of academic performance between Black and White students. This gap's measurement typically occurs through scores on standardized tests, benchmarks, and formative assessments (Anderson et al., 2007). The theories guiding this study were social constructivism and social equity theory as they both seek to understand the world based on participants' experiences.

Significance of the Study

The minority achievement gap in the U.S. is not a secret. There are often conversations about what is causing it, ways to address it, and solutions to close it (Auguste et al., 2009). There is constant finger-pointing with most of the responsibility placed on teachers and schools, who, in turn, give their own opinion on what the parents should be doing (Carpenter et al., 2006). There is a need for closer relationships between the various stakeholders that play a role in closing the achievement gap. From a theoretical standpoint, this study utilized social

constructivist theory to look at these preconceived notions and make logical assumptions about potential causes of the gaps. The desire was that there would be different and actionable connections uncovered concerning Black students' academic performance, their social contexts, and their parents' involvement in their schooling.

Empirical contributions are vital to the success of a case study. These contributions are closely linked to the theoretical contributions; however, they differ in that they are not linked to a particular theory and are less conceptual. This study's empirical contributions were based on what was observed during the interviews and focus group sessions with the participants. The knowledge gained during every phase of the research came not from hypothetical situations but real experiences and interactions and could be replicated in different settings. This resulting information was used to understand things from a parental standpoint better and move closer to formulating ways to close the minority achievement gap of Black students.

When there is a lack of parental involvement, there is a misconception that the parent does not want to be involved, when there are sometimes extenuating circumstances, such as difficulty with meeting times, inadequate school to home communication, and a poor understanding of their role (Carpenter et al., 2006; Goss, 2017; Koonce & Harper, 2011). One must be careful not to view parents through the lens of sameness, as they do not all participate in the same way (Larocque et al., 2011). Some individuals emphasize their personal, at-home involvement, while others believe in heavy school-level involvement (Park et al., 2017). It is a false impression that parents of Black children who are not heavily involved are disinterested in their child's success or, conversely, that those heavily involved care more. There must be an effort put forth to bridge the gap and find ways to connect with parents in a more effective and less judgmental way.

This qualitative study had practical significance in examining two schools in a Virginia district, one middle school and one high school, both having achievement gaps between their Black and White students. These two school levels were chosen as a focal point because there is typically more involvement during the elementary years, but it begins to wane and often becomes virtually nonexistent between middle and high school (Oates, 2017; Reynolds et al., 2014). The levels of parental involvement vary as well as the socioeconomic statuses of the Black children's parents. Hence, obtaining information from a first-hand perspective, without dwelling on the dividing factors like socioeconomic status, is essential to develop further plans and methods for reducing this gap with the parents' assistance. There is the significance of this to the body of literature because schools have increased expectations to involve parents in addressing the achievement gap. There has not been much direct study of Black children's parents' parents when it comes to this issue.

Research Questions

This study investigated the perceptions of Black parents regarding the achievement gap between Black and White students in their child's school. The study's central question was: "How can Black parents be more involved in closing the achievement gap between Black and White students?" The following research questions were developed to aid in conducting this study:

Research Question 1: What do parents of Black children identify as their roles in their children's education?

Though there is no consensus on what role a parent plays in their children's education, many parents express that they believe most of the burden lies within the schools and teachers (Castro et al., 2015; Koonce & Harper, 2011). Students spend much of their time in school; therefore,

some parents deem their at-home responsibility to be reinforcement, not instruction (Castro et al., 2015).

Research Question 2: How do parents of Black children perceive the effect that their involvement has on their children's academic success or failure?

Many parents feel as if their involvement at their child's school does not directly affect their child's academic success or failure (Castro et al., 2015; Goss, 2017). Instead, there is a sentiment in many Black homes that the most significant way to contribute to their child's success in school is to reinforce their learning at home (Jeynes, 2012).

Research Question 3: What additional support do parents of Black children need to facilitate better learning for their children?

Parents of Black children often expressed that they feel ignored. Their interactions with schools often have a negative tone, which prohibits them from effectively advocating for their children when needed (Goss, 2017; Koonce & Harper, 2011). Proactive school communication and creating a more welcoming environment are supports that help empower families to be more involved in their child's education (Trotman, 2001).

Definitions

1. *Achievement Gap* – The result of one group of students consistently underperforming compared to another group, typically Black/Hispanic, concerning White students (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2017). An identifiable skills deficit affects their learning performance, measured with standardized assessment scores (Anderson et al., 2007).

2. *Achievement Disparity* – A variation in grades or test scores that indicate academic achievement between students of various races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status (OECD, 2016).

3. *Minority* – An individual who is not a non-Hispanic white (Alba, 2018). The smaller part of a group within a country or state that differs in race, religion, or national origin from the dominant group (EEOC, 2016).

4. *Parental Involvement* - "The participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities (20 U.S.C. § 7801(32)." Ranges from knowing what assignments are due to setting high-quality expectations for the child and providing support to the teacher (Fan et al., 2012).

5. *Perception* – The process of higher-level thinking that forms our expectations, based on the primary input of raw data into one or more of our five senses (Denworth, 2014).

Summary

Laying blame has never been an effective way to solve problems, especially in education. Along with identifying the problem, there must be an effort to develop an inclusive solution for all parties involved. The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study was to understand the perspectives of Black children's parents regarding their roles in addressing the Black student achievement gap in their Virginia school district. This chapter has provided a background of the issue, including reviewing the historical, social, and theoretical contexts. The theories that guide this study were social constructivism and social equity theory, as they both seek to understand the world based on participants' experiences. The next chapter will provide a review of the literature relevant to the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review provides an understanding of the theoretical framework and significant themes regarding parental involvement and the Black student achievement gap. Research shows that the achievement gap in academics primarily reflects Blacks' and Whites' equity gap coupled with each group's parental involvement and support (Castro et al., 2015; Chomsky & Robichaud, 2014; Goss, 2017; Koonce & Harper, 2011). The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study is to understand the perspectives of Black children's parents regarding their roles in addressing the Black student achievement gap in their Virginia school district. Using the theoretical frameworks of social constructivism and social equity as the foundation for this research, further examination and explanation will also occur to the various perspectives and realities uncovered (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal is for this body of work to examine the participants' lived experiences to understand the perception better that parents of Black children have when it comes to their role in addressing the minority achievement gap. This literature review examines how the phenomenon, minority student achievement, is related to the minority students' parent's perception of their roles in the present achievement gap. An additional layer reviews the literature on perceptions of the school, teachers, and students.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks are used in qualitative research to limit the study's scope and focus on a specific viewpoint by answering the following questions: (1) What is the problem explored, and (2) Why is the approach being used appropriate for the research? (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). It also provides a way to give deeper meaning to the nuances of the phenomenon that is being studied (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). When conducting this study,

there were various perspectives about philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. This section will outline the reasons behind choosing a specific framework to analyze and interpret the data gathered throughout the literature review and the study itself.

Abend (2008) defines a theory as an "overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world (p. 170)." This definition of theory is conceptual and linguistic, offering a way to discuss phenomena in a syntactic (Abend, 2008). Using Abend's (2008) viewpoint of a theory, a theoretical framework is a structure that supports and holds together the theories in a research study. Maxwell (2013) describes it as the roadmap that guides the ideas and beliefs that the researcher holds about their studied phenomena. This is an essential component of qualitative research in that it helps narrow the topic's focal point. A robust theoretical framework is also crucial to revealing the information in a study that will help the researcher better process new knowledge and merge it with existing knowledge (Collins & Stockton, 2018; O'Leary, 2014). A robust scientific basis is another part of a robust theoretical framework, providing guidance to the research's assumptions and giving the research direction (Collins & Stockton, 2018; Maxwell, 2013; O'Leary, 2014). Guiding this research body were two different frameworks fitting for this study: social constructivism and social equity theory.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism takes the ontological assumption a step further and seeks to understand the world we live in by assigning subjective meanings to our experiences (Francis et al., 2017; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) created the theory of social constructivism to operate under the assumption that the underlying reasons for worldviews exist through interactions with others (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). These worldviews can be defined as biological concepts to those experiencing them, but those who have not had the same

experiences may seem like an invented reality (Harvey, 2012). Constructivism is highly

concerned with humans' lived experiences and posits that these experiences ultimately shape our

subjective realities (Bottiani et al., 2017; Vygotsky, 1978). Collaboration with others is essential

to taking the knowledge learned and determining how to apply it to various contexts (Amineh &

Asl, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). This collaboration typically takes place in conversations and

connections with others via open-ended dialogue, leaving room for the listener's interpretation of

thoughts (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Vygotsky (1978) pointed out that these lived experiences

conceptualize through active learning, and this all takes place within what he referred to as the

Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD.

 Vygotsky (1978) believed that for children to reach their full potential, they must interact

with and obtain the guidance of someone more knowledgeable than them. This idea of learning

revolves around children engaging in collaboration with others and increasing their social,

psychological, and academic skills (Vygotsky, 1978). As children learn and grow, the emphasis

is placed on their cognitive development along the way instead of just the outcome (Vygotsky,

1978). The ZPD addresses this growth timeline as "the distance between the actual

developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential

development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration

with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In an educational setting, this is considered

the distance between the work that a student can do without help and the things they need

additional support to accomplish.

 To help learners progress along the continuum of independence, Vygotsky (1978)

suggested providing additional supports to the student. Wood et al. (1976) coined this method as

scaffolding, breaking down large chunks of information into smaller, more manageable pieces.

To aid in this, teachers or more knowledgeable peers are used to provide support activities that will bridge the gaps in their zone and become more confident in their learning (Wood et al., 1976). Wood et al. (1976, p. 90) also note that by the teacher using the gradual release to control the task elements that are "beyond the learner's capability, he is permitted to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence."

Social constructivism operates on the belief that there is no single reality, and therefore what is experienced by one individual is influenced by their natural setting (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). These realities are subjective and socially and culturally constructed (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). The social interactions that take place over time help create a varying sense of reality and eventually shape each person's life story (Amineh & Asl, 2015). The product of the interactions and influences is the knowledge that each person has and uses in their everyday lives (Amineh & Asl, 2015). When examining the minority achievement gap, social constructivism plays a part in recognizing that each student and parent has a unique set of circumstances and knowledge that helps shape the way they view their academic journey. Additionally, these changing realities are the key to understanding each participant's role in their educational success.

Motivation is another area of application with the social constructivist theory. While motivation can be intrinsic, stemming from a natural desire to learn, Vygotsky (1978) believed that it is more so extrinsic and driven from a sociocultural level. These motivations often come as rewards and value-added propositions (Aidman & Leontiev, 1991). For example, if you praise a child for answering the question correctly, they will be more inclined to continue to try to answer questions in anticipation of receiving additional praise. Vygotsky (1978) also believed that all humans are born with a certain degree of biological constraints on the mind but that each

culture has a role in providing the tools needed for intellectual growth (Vygotsky, 1978). These constraints include human willpower and self-determination, which require nurturing at full potential (Aidman & Leontiev, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978).

In an educational setting, extrinsic motivation translates to a student having the ability to complete a task, however needing the direction and motivation from someone else in their knowledge community (Aidman & Leontiev, 1991). Whether it be someone in the school or a parent, children will be more apt to continue learning when they are motivated by someone other than themselves. The praise may seem like an in-the-moment reward; however, the child will remember this and associate it with the task, causing them to want to repeat that task and therefore move closer towards mastery (Aidman & Leontiev, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). Eventually, the goal is that the external motivation will no longer be needed, and the child will develop the internal means to continue that task (Aidman & Leontiev, 1991).

When conducting research using the social constructivism framework, the researcher must acknowledge that their background is relevant and valuable in understanding the data generated from their study participants (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Bottiani et al., 2017). These constructs also help the researcher make connections to the individuals involved in the study. The integration of social constructivism challenges the researcher's current thinking and broadens the knowledge base in terms of their reality. Giving special attention to the differing perspectives noticed throughout the study and the outcomes helps understand participants' varying views better. Each research participant's perception of the minority achievement gap and their role in addressing it is essential to this study and the future improvements because of the findings (Auguste et al., 2009). Using social constructivism theory in the coding process also allows for themes to be uncovered based on the participants' perceptions.

Social Equity Theory

Social equity's theoretical foundation is that everyone should receive treatment in a balanced and equitable way (Guy & McCandless, 2012). This equity must exist regardless of ethnicity, race, culture, religion, gender, or socioeconomic status (Guy & McCandless, 2012; Johnson & Svara, 2011). However, the distribution of fairness in the United States seems to ebb and flow, never entirely flattening in a way that proves to be sustainable and long-lasting (Guy & McCandless, 2012; McKown, 2013). The government is thought of as the catalyst that brings about change and narrows the gap between the haves and have nots; however, this has yet to come to fruition. Many minority groups continually experience the imbalance of rewards based on their performance, often feeling the distress of being under-rewarded for putting in the same amount of effort as their White peers (Johnson & Svara, 2011; McKown, 2013).

The educational system is not exempt from social inequities. There is continual talk about the need to understand and address students' individual needs and use it to create an educational experience that allows all students to be successful (McKown, 2013). There is often confusion with initiatives that are geared towards equality instead of equity. Equality is providing the same resources to everyone, not considering each person's unique needs. Equity ensures that the proper amount and type of resources are provided, not focusing on equal distribution, but on the individual need.

Frederickson (2010) created the social equity theory to level the playing field in public administration. Frederickson (2010) saw apparent differences in achievement between various racial groups and believed that outside stimuli, such as social and economic conditions, had to be considered when dealing with public citizens. The question asked of all is what is needed to make the provided services well-managed, efficient, and economical for everyone involved

(Frederickson, 2010). In other words, everyone could not receive equal treatment, but it could be equitable, regardless of race. These principles are now applied in a multitude of settings, not just public administration.

Social equity theory principles help education by recognizing that every student should be receiving the same opportunities regardless of their situation or circumstances (Carpenter et al., 2006; Goss, 2017). The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees "to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws (U.S. Const. amend. XIV)," addressed these inequalities. Adopting this amendment was a starting place for creating equality between groups, also known as block equality (Bell, 1980). However, just because segregation was no longer federally allowed did not mean that it disappeared. Throughout the past half a century, there have been landmark strides in desegregation, but there is still much work to be done before minorities will indeed have equality with Whites.

Social equity theory can be used correctly with research to address the minority achievement gap by looking at the contributing forces. From the school standpoint, social equity at work would focus on the students and the parents. It would be ensuring that all students in the classroom have what they need to be successful students. For parents, it means finding out what they need and then supporting them. A growing body of researchers targets home life and suggests that the parent-child relationship's quality is a reliable indicator of the student's academic success (Carpenter et al., 2006; Reeves & Howard, 2016). Research conducted by Clark McKown (2013) at Rush University Medical Center used social equity theory and its application to the Black student achievement gap to develop a set of proposed contributing influences: signal and direct.

"Signal influences are social events that signal to members of negatively stereotyped groups that their value is minimized because of their group membership (McKown, 2013, p. 1125)." These influences can be implicit or explicit and affect how the stereotyped individual feels about their capabilities and worth (McKown, 2013). An example of an implicit cue in the classroom would be the teacher giving a Black student a more minor, easier-to-read novel than their White peers, implying that they are not at the same reading and comprehension level. An explicit cue would be the teacher telling the Black students that they should not take an advanced level class because they cannot be successful. As children of the negatively stereotyped group become more aware of these and other cues, their achievement can be impacted (McKown, 2013).

Direct influence is thought of as the most influential factor for social equity theory. It can manifest itself in different settings, such as home, school, or the neighborhood, and is often unequally distributed amongst members of different racial groups (McKown, 2013). These influences are the quality of instruction and the relationships that students have with the adults in their building (McKown, 2013). Historically, most White schools tend to have a higher instructional quality than those that are majority Black, widening the gap of learning opportunities (McKown, 2013). Direct influence at home would be considered the strength and stability of the parent-child relationship. McKown (2013) suggested children of "parents that provided a combination of high support and high demand—what they called "authoritative" parenting—had better average academic, social, and emotional outcomes." In this study, social equity theory combines the direct influence of home with the first-hand parental perspective to determine how much of a direct or indirect influence the parent's perception is in the area of a minority achievement gap.

Related Literature

A thorough examination of the literature and research studies on the subject of the

minority achievement gap revealed that the foundations of this issue lie in the perceptions of the

major stakeholders (parents, teachers, and students) with regards to their responsibilities as it

deals with academic achievement (Biag, 2016; Carpenter et al., 2006; Howard, 2010; Ipka, 2004;

Matteucci, 2016). There is a high volume of research on the "what" of the achievement gap,

which are the numbers that show the variations in learning (Barton & Coley, 2010; National

Assessment of Educational Progress, 2017; Rodriguez, 2013). Unfortunately, there is no

comparable research that moves past this juncture and looks for a viable solution (Barton &

Coley, 2010; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2017). Numerous quantitative

studies have tried to determine the who, what, and why around the achievement gap, but there

are limited qualitative studies. However, there is a need for more qualitative studies to look at the

subject from an interpretive and subjective viewpoint (Patton, 2015). Further historical analysis

and explanation of these areas in a more targeted manner will lay the foundation for the gaps that

this study hopes to fill.

For this study, the achievement gap is understood as the disparaging result of one group

of students consistently outperforming another group, typically Black/Hispanic and White

students (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2017). The concept of this gap was

brought to light in 1966 when the infamous Coleman Report was published (Coleman et al.,

1966). The Coleman Report was born out of a mandate by President Lyndon B. Johnson, which

required a solution to the "lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals

because of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions (Coleman et

al., 1966)." Before this mandate, there was an overwhelming consensus that as long as all

children received free public education, they were equal, and there should not be gaps in learning (Coleman et al., 1966; McKown, 2013). After conducting one of the most extensive educational studies to date, Coleman et al. (1966) published data that analyzed everything from physical amenities in a school to federal funding given to the school to determine what was causing a gap in learning between races. The resulting conclusion was that while these things were of concern, as many initially thought, the most significant factor in a child's academic success was the student's family background, including socioeconomic status and parental support (Coleman et al., 1966). This revelation became a significant driver in the push for closer relationships between schools and families to help disadvantaged students reach success (Coleman et al., 1966).

As we know it today, the achievement gap is typically measured using standardized assessment scores and other summative data (Anderson et al., 2007). While there are varying opinions as to the underlying causes, which will be discussed further in the literature review, there is a common trend in the negative path leading towards the ineffectiveness of the No Child Left Behind Act (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) and Every Student Succeeds Act (Every Student Succeeds [ESSA], 2015). NCLB (2002) created a set of standards that every public school in the United States would be held to, along with assessments to measure the standards' outcomes. These assessments' results determined the amount of federal money each school would be able to receive (Bifulco et al., 2009; Chakrabarti, 2012; NCLB, 2002). NCLB (2002) also required schools to segregate data, specifically test scores, based on racial/ethnic group, disability, and economic status and use it to tailor the curriculum and address gaps in learning (Hipp, 2018). The data collected gave a clear picture of the achievement gap; however, instead of showing a smaller gap, the gap had widened in many school districts (Hipp, 2018).

Regarding parental involvement, NCLB (2002) made it a requirement for schools, specifically those receiving Title I funds, to establish more inclusive relationships with parents and the community. This was to align families, schools, and the community to work together and share the responsibility of closing the achievement gaps and promoting higher student achievement (NCLB, 2002). One of the significant mandates pushed out to these schools was the development of school-parent compacts, which NCLB (2002) defines as:

"outlines for how educators and parents will work together to support student achievement and "the means by which the school and parents will build and develop a partnership to help children achieve the state's high standards."

Each school was tasked with developing a localized compact in the form of parental involvement plans, which would focus on specific strategies that parents could use to increase their child's academic achievement (NCLB, 2002). Support strategies included collaborating with the community, improving volunteer opportunities, communicating with parents around student progress, offering parenting classes, and providing parental education goals and procedures in each school to fit their unique needs (Epstein, 2004; Oates, 2017). These plans were to be developed on a local level to support further the notion that there is no single definition of parental involvement and it varies depending on the school, community, and parent (NCLB, 2002). Schools were also required to articulate these plans to parents and keep them aware of accreditation status, teacher qualifications, and any underperforming indicators (Epstein, 2004).

When the figures for achievement were not moving in an upward trend quickly enough, even with the mandatory requirements for parental involvement, ESSA (2015) replaced NCLB (2002). Under ESSA (2015), schools and parents have more control over how educational plans

are developed. The goal is still that all students will receive an equitable, high-quality education to succeed. One of the provisions brought forth with ESSA (2015) is around resource equity. Historically, minority-heavy schools have received fewer resources than majority White schools. This disparity has created more significant achievement gaps as these students do not always have the necessities to learn on an equal level (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016). In an equitable learning environment, all students, regardless of race, can access learning more profoundly and critically (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016).

Another provision of ESSA (2015) is developing methods to enhance parents' communication patterns regarding their child's education. ESSA (2015) recognizes that the partnership between parents, families, schools, and the community is the motivating factor in student success, so assisting them is paramount. Because of these connections, ESSA (2015) also changed the word "involvement" to "engagement." The purpose behind this word change was to emphasize that parents should be able to have a voice in how they are engaged in their child's education, thereby empowering them more (ESSA, 2015; Fenton et al., 2017). While there are plenty of parents who want to feel more included in the educational process, there are also parents who feel indifferent towards educators and schools in general (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016; Fenton et al., 2017). For the latter parents, ESSA (2015) provides support, similar to NCLB (2002), in the form of targeted parental engagement plans created at a local level. However, this has left many schools in a state of flux as they do not have the resources needed to sustain the necessary types of programs (Chenoweth, 2016).

There are many effective parental engagement models funded and developed under the auspices of ESSA (2015) (Chenoweth, 2016). These models include home visits for failing students, motivating staff to act as champions for the programs, and creating supportive

community alliances (Chenoweth, 2016). The deployment of these models still causes deficits because of their widespread use and the lack of cultural responsiveness needed to reach all students and their families (Chenoweth, 2016; Fenton et al., 2017). Ultimately, the intended outcome is that the programs and strategies that were the rationale for ESSA (2015) apply in every state, especially to the marginalized, at-risk students and their parents. This will give them the long-awaited educational equity they need to help close the achievement gap plaguing them (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016; Hogheim & Reber, 2015).

The most challenging part of decreasing the achievement gap is the identification and targeting of causes. Aside from the parental involvement aspect, other identified causes of the widening minority achievement gap include poorly staffed and resourced schools, overuse of special education labels, and gifted identification underuse (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Goss, 2017). Schools with a large minority population are also often staffed with less qualified teachers, resulting in a less rigorous curriculum and lower teacher expectations than that expected of White students (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Studies have also shown that, while acknowledging that families play an integral role in addressing the achievement gap, many educators do not receive training on working with these diverse families (Larocque et al., 2011). When these things couple with outside factors such as socioeconomic status and low parental involvement in education, the gaps continue to grow (Goss, 2017). To see improvements, schools have to be committed to working with parents, and parents must believe in and embrace the value of these partnerships (Chenoweth, 2016; Epstein, 2004; Goss, 2017).

Historical Analysis of the Achievement Gap

One of the ongoing challenges of education in the United States is the racial differences between Black and White students' achievement (Bottiani et al., 2017). This is a problem that

experts have been trying to fix for the past 50-60 years, starting with schools' integration (Bottiani et al., 2017). To fully understand these differences, take a look back at the history of the exclusion and marginalization that has aided in widening the achievement gaps that we see (Bottiani et al., 2017; Howard, 2010). Historically, the achievement gap is linked to social and economic disparities between Blacks and Whites (Bottiani et al., 2017; Steele & Whitaker, 2019). Even though laws passed, such as Brown v. Board of Education (1954), Black students often were not given transportation options, and their schools were subpar, sometimes to the extent of having no desks or resource materials (Pinder & Hanson, 2010). This underfunding is still seen today, especially in areas with noticeable income differences between Blacks and Whites, adding to education inequality (Bottiani et al., 2017; Pinder & Hanson, 2010).

The two main areas at the center of the achievement gap are literacy and standardized testing. The literacy gap dates to the early 1800s, a period in which nearly all Whites were literate, while 90% of the Black population remained illiterate (Anderson, 2007; NAEP, 2017; NCED, 2007). One might say that during that time, slavery and laws against learning were the main culprits for this wide gap; however, there is still a significant disparity even in modern times, with 24% of Blacks and 7% of Whites remaining illiterate in 2009 (NAEP, 2017; NCED, 2007). Reading literacy is the learning foundation for children. It sets them up for future opportunities; however, many children are not given the essential skills for success (Park & Kyei, 2011). Children who do not have this firm foundation can easily fall behind their peers, suffering throughout life with a decreased understanding (Park & Kyei, 2011). A vital indicator of a child's future success hinges upon their ability to read - on grade level - by the time they enter 5th grade (Anderson, 2007; NAEP, 2017; NCED, 2007). When there are still glaring gaps

in the literacy levels between races, it is hard to believe that enough work occurs in this area (Anderson, 2007).

Whether on the local, state, or national level, standardized test scores are always a tense topic at the forefront of budget and staffing discussions. With the advent of equal access to education for all children, one would think that the of a leveler playing field and that students could be measured by these scores (Anderson, 2007; Matteucci & Helker, 2018; Reardon, 2003). With the investment of time and finances, the score gaps have narrowed and widened cyclically over the years, never holding steady long enough to declare victory (Anderson, 2007; Reardon, 2003). This lack of ability to sustain success has been a discouragement to many Black students and families, especially those who already feel disadvantaged in other ways and believe that the test is just another way to measure their lack of knowledge (Anderson, 2007; Matteucci & Helker, 2018). For a positive trend in narrowing the gap, the first step is looking intensely at what has worked previously. These lessons from the past have value and are significant determinants of what is lacking in overcoming the test score gap (Anderson, 2007; Matteucci & Helker, 2018; Reardon, 2003). The next step is to assess today's minority youth's current needs to determine what they want and need to succeed on tests, particularly biased language and federally mandated standardized tests (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2004). Heavy reliance on this research's data can build on these students' strengths to receive a fair chance at success on high-stakes tests.

In many of the lower funded, majority Black communities, there tends to be a higher propensity for significant variations in the parental educational levels (Huang, 2015; Huang & Sebastian, 2015). According to a Pew Research Study (2015), parents who have not obtained a college degree themselves are less likely to have overarching expectations for their children to do

well in school. Each family's history creates family norms surrounding the necessity or importance of education, and students often adhere to them (Huang, 2015; Huang & Sebastian, 2015; Terrion, 2006). This information leads one to believe that where there is a lower socioeconomic status, there will be lower levels of academic success, particularly among minority students, which is not always the case. While higher educated and higher-income parents typically have more personal resources to support their children's ongoing education outside of the regular school day, this does not mean that those who are not as fortunate should not receive the same opportunities to excel. These inequalities begin to manifest themselves while the students are of school age, later having the propensity to become stumbling blocks that hinder them throughout their lives (Coleman et al., 1966).

It is an undisputed fact that a child's family plays a significant role in their academic success. This finding's outcomes vary, depending on the family experiences and parental involvement level, whether negative or positive, and it begins as early as preschool or kindergarten (Koonce & Harper, 2011; Potter & Morris, 2016).

Many researchers believe that after a few years in school, the onus for success is more cumbersome for the schools than for the parents (Potter & Morris, 2016). While the teachers of these underperforming minority students are pedagogically sound, there is no proper training in cultural competence and racial equity (Steele & Whitaker, 2019). The institutional racism that is deep-rooted begins to come to the forefront with Eurocentric curriculums with which the minority students have difficulty connecting. Whether intentionally or subconsciously, by not being equipped to teach students of all backgrounds, teachers widen the achievement gap and become a part of the problem instead of the solution (Langham, 2009; Turner et al., 2015). Professional development around equity, diversity, and inclusion is essential, but even more so

for those who work in schools with more diverse populations. This training should focus on the awareness that challenges teachers to confront their own biases and historical denials while also giving them tools that they can use to enhance the learning experience for their minority students (Booker et al., 2016; Turner et al., 2015).

It is important to note that of the abundance of literature focusing on the effects of low income and low academic achievement, there is minimal literature that looks at those same students achieving at high levels. For those minority students who excel, there is often a stigma from their race that tells them they now think that they are better, which further adds to the lower expectation and lower production (Harris, 2008). Additionally, some teachers systematically underestimate higher-achieving minority students' potential, even questioning the truthfulness behind their scores, while not displaying the same level of scrutiny with the high-performing White students (Harris, 2008; Irizarry, 2015). The success of these students, despite their obstacles, is an area that warrants more in-depth investigation and perhaps the strategies for success employed in some of the lower-achieving schools to dispel these negative stigmas and motivate students to do better.

Internal and External Influences

What a child learns in their early formative years is of the utmost importance to their success later in school. During these years, their comprehension begins to develop, their verbal communication skills mature, and their written language begins to take shape (Brace, 2011). Although all children are born with a capacity to acquire knowledge, they must have good practices to nurture this capacity to fulfillment. This nurturing happens through interpersonal interactions, including placing the child in an environment conducive to enhancing their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth (Brace, 2011). However, the nurturing process

varies by culture, each embodying a unique experience, ranging from subculture and ethnicity to religion and sexuality. These experiences that the students have ultimately played a significant role in how they view education and its positive or negative impact on their lives.

The Role of Culture. Genetic composition plays a dramatic role in a child's attitude and aptitude in school; however, environmental factors such as physical surroundings and communication patterns in early childhood are just as influential. For example, children in America learn proper English conventions in school; however, if they are being spoken to in broken English or another dialect at home, that will influence their understanding. As a result, acquiring that child's language skills will be a compilation of personal and human biological capacity, coupled with their cultural community (Brace, 2011; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

Children that come from a home where the language skills are lacking will often be at a disadvantage in school, causing them to become disengaged from the learning process (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). A child's culture primarily drives their interpretation of knowledge, with different cultures learning in different ways. The exposed experiences of children in the interaction realm of family and community occupy a crucial part in what and how well they receive the instruction given to them in a school setting. The emphasis placed on education is also based on culture and can affect how children view the educational experience (Small et al., 2010). Culture is often thought of as being synonymous with religion and ethnicity, but it also includes socioeconomic status, household composition, sexuality, and parents' educational levels. All these areas are risk factors when used in a manner considered disparaging to the student (USDE, 2019). To enhance the learning experience for these students, schools must work towards developing more culturally responsive curriculums. This is done by gaining

an intricate knowledge of the cultures represented in their schools and then communicating in familiar ways to those students and their families (Brace, 2011; Small et al., 2010).

Contrary to popular belief, like any other race, the majority of Black children have parents that hold high expectations for them when it comes to education, providing them with a structured home environment that makes school a priority (Gregory, 2000; Heckman & Karapakula, 2019; Potter & Morris, 2016; Puchner & Markowitz, 2015). Even in some of the more urban neighborhoods where crime and poverty might be a threat to success, many Black children's parents are vigilant about protecting them and desire their children to have a quality education (Gregory, 2000; Heckman & Karapakula, 2019). These parents want their children to experience upward mobility and become productive citizens of the society in the same way as White children's parents (Bottiani et al., 2017; Heckman & Karapakula, 2019; Puchner & Markowitz, 2015).

Early Child Education. A child's early years are between birth and eight years old (Brace, 2011; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). During these times, those who care for them are responsible for providing a foundation for social and cognitive development, designed to lead to lifelong learning (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Unfortunately, when children are in an environment with high poverty or overwhelming external stressors, this is not always possible. Another factor is often race, in that there are not always the same quantity and quality of resources for minorities to have these positive stimuli in their childhood. Research has stated that Black toddlers are less likely to be read to and have less reading and educational materials than White toddlers of the same socioeconomic status (Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Reardon, 2003; USDE, 2019). When this type of information is shared, there is often an emphasis placed on reactive remediation of skills that are in place once children are in elementary school, but

consideration must also be to the benefits of proactive intervention during the early years, such as preschool or even as infants (Brace, 2011; Small et al., 2010; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

Hart and Risley (1995) conducted a well-known study on the word gap between socioeconomic groups. This study revealed that over time, children from affluent families learned over 30 million more words than those from impoverished or more destitute backgrounds (Hart & Risley, 1995). This type of deficit is bound to have rolling repercussions, resulting in a negative cycle of achievement disparities (Hart & Risley, 1995; Ramey & Ramey, 2004). One of the correlations pointed out in the study was that the affluent parents tended to engage in more conversations with their children and provide them with extra activities that focused on vocabulary and phonics, and IQ development (Hart & Risley, 1995). This cognitive development must occur before the child goes to kindergarten, as that is where their existing knowledge is built upon as they receive new concepts. Another correlation recognized was that parent-child interaction in higher-income families was more conversational with a greater potential for feedback. In comparison, it was authoritative in lower-income families, with minimal verbal feedback (Hart & Risley, 1995). The more conversational approach allows the child to practice language acquisition and improve upon it both at home and school (Hart & Risley, 1995).

Historically, many states did not offer free preschool programs that specifically catered to children ages three to five years old, which caused a lag in learning early on. Fortunately, there is enough data collected over the past decade that many states now earmark funds specifically for preschool programs, especially for those students who are considered at-risk (Brace, 2011; USDE, 2019). The inclusion of more state-funded early education programs comes with a unique challenge in that high access does not equate to high quality. The quality of early childhood

education is not always a matter of low-income vs. high-income; it affects both categories when

it comes to Black children. High-quality early childhood educational experiences for all Black

children are vital to their success throughout their schooling (Heckman & Karapakula, 2019). It

can help them break multi-generational poverty cycles and build the foundations for more

equitable access to education for future generations (Heckman & Karapakula, 2019; Reardon,

2003; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

Perceptions and Responsibilities of Major Stakeholders

An analysis of relevant literature and research studies shows that teachers' and parents'

perceptions connect to students' opinions regarding their academic achievement. Each of these

groups is separate stakeholders, yet all play an integral role in addressing the achievement gap.

"Success happens when families, students, and educators work together and holistically approach

a child's education, focusing on a child's academic, social, and emotional needs (Lathram,

2015)."

School perception and responsibility

Throughout society, minorities that adopt the norms, beliefs, and value systems of the

majority group – White Americans – are more likely to decrease social barriers and increase

success (Arai & Kivel, 2009). Often, educational systems will suggest that they have created

colorblind, neutral environments that enable all students to succeed. In actuality, they are still

silently and subconsciously feeding the majority group's power and self-interest (Smith-Maddox

& Solórzano, 2002). Even with the best intentions at heart, being colorblind causes one to miss

the connections between an individual's race and the social and educational conditions they

experience as a result of this (Dixson & Anderson, 2017; Matsuda, 1995; Smith-Maddox &

Solórzano, 2002). When you ignore the race and identity of minority students, it sends the signal

to them that they do not matter and perpetuates the mistreatment that they already experience in society (Matsuda, 1995; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). The best strategy is to bring the issue of race to the forefront, opening the communication channels for those in decision-making positions to find the resources that will help strengthen and empower minority students (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). When this step is made, work will progress towards fixing the decades of unequal education that has been given to minorities.

School is the common ground where teachers and students meet to grow and learn together. If either side of the equation – teachers or students – is off-balanced, it will cause issues. Thus, school leaders need to be sure that they provide an environment conducive to learning and teaching. School leaders' support is vital for teachers to feel productive and teach in even the most difficult situations (Donohoo et al., 2018; Grabmeier, 2017). Collective efficacy is the ability of one group to influence another group: in this case, school leaders affecting teachers and teachers affecting students (Donohoo et al., 2018; Grabmeier, 2017). Along with collective efficacy, there has to be a network of relationships between all stakeholders cohesive and focused on all students' academic achievement, regardless of their race (Donohoo et al., 2018; Grabmeier, 2017). The result is an achievement that surpasses expectations and goes beyond a students' socioeconomic status (Donohoo et al., 2018).

Schools must be significant champions of collective efficacy to effect change regarding the minority achievement gap between Blacks and Whites. A realization must be made that closing the gap is not as much about developing a systemic approach as it is about providing a supportive and challenging environment for Black students to learn in (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Developing effective schoolwide leadership teams and making the initiative of achievement across the board a schoolwide effort are the foundations for schools that have successfully closed

their gaps. Every member of the school community must work to come together with a common language, one that is built on high expectations and exemplary performance for everyone (Donohoo et al., 2018). This collective effort is what will drive up student achievement, which ultimately drives down the achievement gap.

In some schools with larger Black populations, there are still unique challenges that make the goals of collective efficacy and shared vision building challenging to meet. One challenge is the broken link between performance and efficacy beliefs on school leaders' part (Goddard et al., 2017). When the significant stakeholders in the school building do not put forth a high level of effort and persistence towards the mission and vision of the school, changes will be minimal and unremarkable (Goddard et al., 2017). School leaders drive their building's culture and are direct influencers on the progress made by both teachers and students (Goddard et al., 2017).

Another challenge is that they do not have enough revenue being sent to their schools to ensure a high-quality and enriching curriculum for all of their students (Blad, 2016; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Epstein, 2010). Compared to wealthier schools, those in lower-income neighborhoods often receive fewer funds per pupil, causing them to find ways to stretch the funds in an inequitable manner (Blad, 2016). Tied to the lack of revenue funds, these schools are often unable to offer as many gifted and advanced courses to their students as other schools (Blad, 2016). If given the funding, these underprivileged and underperforming schools could develop a culture steeped in high expectations for all students, providing them with equitable opportunities for success, thereby producing more exceptional results (McKown, 2013).

Teacher perception and responsibility

Teachers and schools have a very high mark to reach when it comes to educating today's youth. Even in the face of adversity, teachers must educate each child equally and help them

obtain success; this is because their school provides them with the tools to make this happen (Peterson et al., 2016). Many teachers feel the burden of motivating students to learn, making it fun and exciting, and ensuring that everyone passes the state-mandated tests; even with the students this seems impossible for (Matteucci & Helker, 2018). Some research has noted that when teachers have low expectations for students, they will perform appropriately, often with the self-fulfilling prophecy (Ipka, 2004; Langham, 2009). This deficit thinking by the teacher often places the blame for lack of academic success on the student and his/her family (Brace, 2011). This does nothing more than add momentum to the detrimental cycle of student disengagement and poor performance, thereby widening the achievement gap (Clark, 2012; Langham, 2009; Matteucci, 2016). All of this, coupled with growing class sizes, rigorous curriculum, and constant scrutiny, is a cited reason why many novice teachers leave the profession in 1-3 years (Clark, 2012; Langham, 2009).

Many teachers in schools with a wide achievement gap or a sizable Black population do not feel that they have received adequate support or training to handle the complicated situations that often contribute to the learning gap (Matthews et al., 2014; Turner et al., 2015). One of the foundational steps should be pre-service coaching for aspiring teachers. This front-loaded knowledge can help prepare them for their challenges when dealing with a minority population. Once teachers are in the field, they should have continuous professional development, especially around equity, culture, and diversity. These constant growth efforts will enhance the interaction, especially between White teachers and Black students, allowing them to attain similar academic and social advancement as their peers (Gershenson & Dee, 2017).

Unbeknownst to them, teachers often have an illicit bias towards students based on their backgrounds, work habits, and behavior (Peterson et al., 2016). This bias causes some teachers to

treat Black students differently than White students, even when they have the same academic abilities (APA, 2012). These biases manifest in ways such as having a lesser expectation of achievement from the Black students, which also relates to the Black students' prejudice having a lower intelligence level (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Rowley & Wright, 2011). Palardy (2015) conducted a research study examining the opportunity to learn, and the results showed that a student's ability to succeed directly links to the opportunities given to them by their teachers. Negative perceptions that a student cannot or will not do their schoolwork can cause a strain on the teacher-student relationship, which is often hard to repair and causes damage to the overall school experience (Gershenson et al., 2016). When the self-fulfilling nature of a teacher's perception and expectations on a student come to life, it makes the difference between the success or failure of minority students who may already be at a disadvantage with regards to the support of their education (Gershenson et al., 2016; Peterson et al., 2016).

Teachers who have been successful at narrowing the achievement gap in their school have stated that not only did they have to learn how to be more culturally sensitive and relevant, but they also had to ensure they were holding all students to the same standard of learning (Bottiani et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2015). By choosing instructional techniques inclusive and innovative, teachers could capture students' interest and promote more meaningful engagement. While being sensitive to a diverse student body's needs, they also had to maintain equity and help students reach their own personal best in their studies (Gershenson et al., 2016; Matthews et al., 2014; Reynolds et al., 2014). Allowing students to integrate their own experiences, such as using student choice in assignments, is a way that enables a melding of creativity, individuality, and intelligence (Garcia, 2018). This continual affirmation to minority students could achieve just as high as anyone else, resulting in the desired gains in test scores and grades (Turner et al., 2015).

Student perception and responsibility

Many minority children, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, enter school without having a proper support system (Hipp, 2018). This lack of support causes them to be less trusting of the adults they encounter in school, often not trusting that they are there to help them succeed (Hipp, 2018). These feelings are confirmed when a teachers' nonverbal behavior suggests that they have low expectations for the student from the onset (Bottiani et al., 2017; Peterson et al., 2016). High levels of distrust and a lack of nurturing relationships cause students to have inferior performance and disassociate themselves from their schoolwork (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). These negative relationships lead to teacher-student conflict, which is often void of mutual understanding (Yu et al., 2018). To reverse these negativities, students who have encountered these poor relationships with teachers need to receive a positive perception of learning, with parents and teachers joining as resources to cultivate feelings of confidence and assurance of ability (Hipp, 2018; Yu et al., 2018).

Students' perception of their family's socioeconomic status also plays a role in the achievement gap (Bottiani et al., 2017; Steele & Whitaker, 2019). Often, the disparity begins before students enter school with a lack of formal education, such as preschool, before entering kindergarten (von Hippel et al., 2017). Families with limited income tend to be more mobile, causing students to change schools frequently, thereby negatively impacting their ability and willingness to learn (Hipp, 2018; Steele & Whitaker, 2019). Parents of poor students do not have access to the same resources as more financially stable students, so they cannot get their children additional assistance when they fall behind in school (Hipp, 2018). This directly affects students, and they will often try to hide their inability to get extra help due to embarrassment and not wanting to call additional attention to themselves (Steele & Whitaker, 2019).

The lack of minority teachers is the final connection that many students have mentioned regarding their school success (Berchini, 2015). The disproportionate number of minority teachers leaves these students with no one who is ethnically, racially, or demographically like them for whom they could use as a role model or mentor (Egalite et al., 2015). Many minority students stress that they do not believe that their White teachers understand them and feel more comfortable if they had a minority teacher with similar personal experiences, especially when it comes to racial stereotypes (Berchini, 2015; Cherng & Halpin, 2016). They rarely have someone like them in race or ethnicity to form a common cultural bond, leaving them feeling misunderstood (Bottiani et al., 2017; Hipp, 2018). In schools with more minority teachers, students can better identify with someone like them and face similar struggles and oppositions in society (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Hipp, 2018; von Hippel et al., 2017). This bonding experience could influence the achievement gap by giving the students a feeling of connectedness that will change their attitude towards academics and their self-worth and ability (Biag, 2016; Steele & Whitaker, 2019).

Parents' perceptions and responsibility

Parents are the most constant force in a child's life, and therefore they are the first teachers that they will have, responsible for placing the foundational building blocks of learning (Matteucci & Helker, 2018). They are also the role models that children learn from at an early age, and this carries over into their academics and how they respond to authority figures in school (Matteucci & Helker, 2018; Park et al., 2017). When children are aware that their parents have high academic expectations, they are more likely to strive for success than those whose parents have low expectations or express no concern either way (Castro et al., 2015).

Unfortunately, research has shown that parents' involvement and direct support tend to decrease as students get older, causing negative repercussions (The Parent-Teacher Partnership, 2016). As students' expectations to become more independent grows, and there is less communication from the school, parents sometimes pull back and allow their children to navigate without as much guidance (Castro et al., 2015; The Parent-Teacher Partnership, 2016). Another critical component to address is that many Black parents feel that they are responsible for rearing the child at home and sending them to school to learn, where they are under the leadership and rule of the teachers and administrators (Castro et al., 2015). Thus, they do not overly involve themselves after the primary years for fear of infringing upon the responsibilities of what the teachers are supposed to be doing during the school day (Castro et al., 2015). This is not the conclusion that they do not care about their child's education, but more so, it is a separation of power embedded in the Black culture.

Studies have shown that most parents are aware of their responsibility to be co-educators and be equally responsible for their children's future success (Matteucci, 2016; Matteucci & Helker, 2018). However, when questioned in a study by Matteucci (2016), a significant degree of parents felt that the considerable burden of educating their children lay with the school and teachers. They believed that since their child spent such a significant amount of time at school, it was up to that establishment to set the tone for success that would positively affect their children (Williams et al., 2017). This includes providing an environment that is safe and conducive to learning so that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed (Matteucci, 2016; Williams et al., 2017).

Parents have assorted reasons for why they are or are not actively involved in their children's education. Some have work obligations that prohibit them from participating, while

others do not know where to help (Matteucci, 2016; Park et al., 2017). Some parents feel that a hands-off approach is best and that if their child or teacher needs them, they will be notified (Matteucci, 2016; Park et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2017). Even still, some parents feel they are looked down upon by the schools and ignored, thereby feeling unwelcome and unwanted in their child's school or the educational process (Biag, 2016; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016; Reynolds et al., 2014). This feeling gets addressed with more parent-teacher communication, which acts as an empowerment tool for parents, especially those who have struggling students (Kraft & Rogers, 2015; Reynolds et al., 2014). Once parents feel that they are welcomed and invited by the school or teacher, they are more apt to openly communicate how the school can help them and, in turn, help their students succeed (Reynolds et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2017).

Summary

The education of children is an activity that requires input and assistance from many different outlets. Schools must work hard to attract and retain highly qualified teachers from diverse backgrounds who can effectively handle a diverse student body (Matthews et al., 2014; Turner et al., 2015). To eliminate racial stereotypes and cultural ignorance, schools also have a responsibility to provide teachers with professional development around working with diverse cultural groups (Egalite et al., 2015; Garcia, 2018). Once they have the support they need, teachers must be willing and able to form relationships with students to become trusted adults (Turner et al., 2015). With this will come the need to differentiate their curriculum so that the disadvantaged students are no longer disengaged but instead be as motivated to learn as their peers (Turner et al., 2015; Yeh, 2015). This does not mean requiring fewer students who fall behind; it means giving the material to them to understand better and be more apt to participate in the learning process (Matthews, 2010).

Once a bridge positively connects home and school, gains become evident in achievement, and the gap decreases. Parents that feel more empowered produce children who feel more empowered. However, even if a parent refuses to try and achieve more when a student receives life-affirming reassurances at school, they often develop higher self-esteem and feel that they can accomplish more and be successful, despite their circumstances (Turner et al., 2015; Yu et al., 2018). Students who feel that their teacher has created a safe classroom environment are better capable of concentrating on learning, regardless of what may be going on at home (Yu et al., 2018). The best way for this to work is for everyone to work together on the common goal - educating children and addressing the issues causing the achievement gap (Matthews et al., 2014; Turner et al., 2015; Yeh, 2015).

As evidenced in this literature review, there is no clear-cut answer to the question of who is directly responsible for addressing the achievement gap. There are issues on the sides of parents, teachers, schools, and students, all being vital parts of the equation (Bottiani et al., 2017; Yeh, 2015). When schools make it a priority to employ teachers that have a passion for delivering high-quality education to all students under their purview, they will begin to teach in a more culturally responsive way that will reach even the most resistant student (Clark, 2012; Garcia, 2018; Heckman, 2011). This causes a trickle-down effect, with students becoming more invested in their education as they begin to feel that the teachers and school care about them and their success (Matteucci, 2016). These are all things that occur within the in-school setting, but children spend most of their lives with their parents and in the home, the most crucial starting point (Matteucci, 2016).

Parents must also play their part in providing their students with a firm foundation that values and encourages educational success, beginning even before they have formally entered

school (Heckman, 2011). Factors such as parenting style, parenting expectations, and socioeconomic status are all-inclusive elements in the role that parents ultimately have regarding their child's education (Heckman, 2011; Potter & Morris, 2016). Once they are in school, strengthening the parent-teacher relationship occurs so that there is a continuum of learning for the student that goes from their home to the school and back (McFarland-Piazza et al., 2012). This strong relationship creates a seamless understanding and a sense of teamwork that enhances the student's learning experience (McFarland-Piazza et al., 2012). These roles and relationships evolve, and though some flourish, there is still a widening gap when it comes to hearing directly from the parents. If there is an expectation of being a part of their children's educational team, their voices need to be heard regarding how they can address the minority achievement gap.

Using social constructivism and social equity frameworks, this study looked deep into the influences behind educational disparities and the minority achievement gap, especially their parental involvement relationship. These theories provided a backbone for a study rooted in the desire for marginalized groups to have equality, equity, and access to the same quality of education as their White peers. This qualitative case study aimed to fill this noticeable research gap and clarify the realities that Black students' parents have when it comes to their direct and indirect roles in addressing the Black student achievement gap that affects their students.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodology and research design used for this qualitative, collective case study, which sought to understand the perspectives of Black children's parents regarding their roles in addressing the Black student achievement gap in their Virginia school district. Additionally, this study seeks to understand how parents define their involvement at home and school and its effect on their child's success. This study aims to fill the literature gap by taking an in-depth look at the parental perspective regarding their specific roles in addressing the achievement gap that affects their Black students. This chapter offers thorough descriptions of the study design, setting, participants, specific procedures, researcher's role, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness components, and ethical considerations to gain a complete understanding of the methods used.

Design

A qualitative collective case study was conducted by interviewing parents of Black students at a middle school and a high school within a Virginia school district and considering their varying perspectives on their role in addressing the Black student achievement gap. The qualitative research method was deemed most suitable for this study because it needs to relate to parents personally and examine their own experiences concerning this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research allows for individuals' empowerment by encouraging their voices to be heard (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By conducting this qualitative study, I desired to hear directly from parents and get to the heart of how and why they feel a specific way, as opposed to using a quantitative study, which focuses on the aspects of what is happening and how much or how often it is happening (McLeod, 2019). The participants' lived experiences were examined, and

non-statistical inquiry and analysis methods were used to obtain results based on social phenomena (Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2018). This is an important topic with a unique perspective lacking in qualitative, scholarly research and studies, making it suitable for a case study approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018).

The first objective of a case study is to understand the case studied (Patton, 2015). A case is the unit of analysis, whether it is an individual, a group, or even an event, that is central to the study and analyzed to find an answer to a real-life issue (Ary et al., 2006; Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). This study used the parents as the cases and identified their realities about the phenomenon of the minority achievement gap, making case study the best design methodology to use (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). There are two variations of case studies: single and collective. Single case studies often referred to as the realist perspective, "assumes the existence of a single reality independent of any observer" (Yin, 2018, p. 52). This perspective is helpful when defined parameters assume certain propositions are factual, or the researcher is seeking alternatives to those assumptions (Yin, 2018). On the other hand, collective case studies are considered relativist, and their focus is on multiple realities and multiple meanings, depending on the observer (Yin, 2018). The more robust of the two variations, collective case studies must be capable of replication, either with similar results or conflicting results (Yin, 2018).

The collective case study design was chosen because I wanted to include the parents of Black students' multiple realities and provide a more detailed look into the issue at hand to produce a more substantial effect towards filling the intended gap in research (Yin, 2018). As the researcher, I am most interested in obtaining first-hand perspectives of each parent participant. Answering how they feel about their role leads to the inquiry of why they think this way. Once

the question of why is answered, further information can be obtained about their thoughts on addressing the minority achievement gap. While using the collective case study design, I anticipated that there would be literal replication, which would yield similar results across all cases (Yin, 2018). While conducting the case study, there were no presuppositions of results; the goal was to let each person's truths uncover in a fluid and organic manner (Slawecki, 2017; Yin, 2018). The added value in using collective case studies is the allowance for analysis within and across situations and compares results for similarities and dissimilarities across the cases (Yin, 2018).

For this study, the achievement gap was the disparity of academic performance between Black and White students (Carpenter et al., 2006). This study is significant to the body of educational research. It can add exceptional support to the emphasis on the evolving role of parental involvement in schools. Furthermore, it provided insight into the roles that parents of Black children feel they correctly play in their child's academic success or failure.

Research Questions

Central Question: "How can Black parents be more involved in closing the achievement gap between Black and White students?"

Research Question 1: What do parents of Black children identify as their roles in their children's education?

Research Question 2: How do parents of Black children perceive the effect that their involvement has on their children's academic success or failure?

Research Question 3: What additional support do parents of Black children need to facilitate better learning for their children?

Setting

This case study took place at Harris Middle School (HMS; pseudonym) and Sims High School (SHS; pseudonym), two public schools located in a suburban area of Virginia. It is a medium school district with approximately 55,000 students in grades K-12 (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). Within the identified student population, the racial/ethnic demographic is 37% White, 35% Black, 11% Hispanic, 8% Asian, 5% two or more races, or undefined race/ethnicity gap (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). The gender demographic is 47% female and 53%, male. The largest employer for this district is the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the median annual household income is $54,500, with the average educational level being an associate degree (Virginia Department of Education, 2019).

This setting was appropriate due to this district's specific focus on developing effective strategies that would close the achievement gap in all of its schools, based on the revised accreditation standards by Virginia's Department of Education (Virginia Department of Education, 2017). These new accountability benchmarks place a long-term focus on the most vulnerable subgroups' accountability, including Black students, who have historically fallen below the expected academic growth target (Virginia Department of Education, 2017). I believe that my goal of speaking directly with parents of Black children regarding their role in their children's education fits in with the county's goal of "building collaborative relationships between families and schools as active partners for student success" (Virginia Department of Education, 2017, p. 1).

Participants

Purposeful sampling ensured that different perspectives on the studied phenomenon were illustrated (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). Purposeful sampling is a research strategy

that defines participants' selection based on their relevance to the research questions and the value that they bring to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2018). It requires studying information-rich and relevant cases that will produce beneficial findings to the study's field (Patton, 2015). The sample demographics were parents with the following characteristics: currently have Black children enrolled in the studied public school district in Virginia and have high or low participation and involvement at their child's school. This demographic aims to solicit input from both the socioeconomic and academic performance spectrums and different grade levels. Using this type of sampling, I endeavor to understand the unique insight into the achievement gap that these participants have based on their Black children's experiences in this school system.

Following IRB approval (see Appendix A), the site identification occurred from two schools within the school district's database. The county's central office helped identify a middle school and a high school with a wide range of performance metrics. This was determined based on current and historical data obtained from the database. Upon selecting the schools, working with the Principals, 6 parents were chosen from each school, with the sampling only including Black individuals who have Black children actively enrolled in the school system. A total of 12 participants identified as candidates to participate in the study, with the Principal at each school identifying parents who were heavily involved (3 parents) and those who had minimal/no active school involvement (3 parents). Of those participants identified as eligible, 9 initially agreed to participate; 1 additional parent had to participate later in the process due to her schedule availability. Parameters for a heavily involved parent included proactive responsiveness to school personnel, active engagement in their child's academic progress, and volunteering to assist with school efforts (in-person or remotely). Parameters for minimal/no school involvement

included actions such as non-responsiveness to school personnel, unaware of academic issues their student is having, and minimal outreach to the school as a partner. This span aimed to get the unique perspectives of the parents on both ends of the involvement spectrum. Following the identification of parent participants, the Principal provided the researcher with contact information. Each parent then received the study information and interview consent forms and signed and returned them electronically.

Procedures

Before beginning collecting data for this study, I obtained written site approval from the proposed location. This site approval came from the Director of Assessments for the county, and their central office retained a copy for recording purposes (see Appendix B). The Director of Assessments also identified the two specific schools that were to be used for the research, Harris Middle School (HMS; pseudonym) and Sims High School (SHS; pseudonym). The selected schools came from a pool of 26 middle and high schools in the district. Following site approval, I contacted Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and provided the site approval and application for study approval. Following IRB approval, I then reached out to HMS and SHS's principal to further explain the study's purpose. Working with these principals, I was given a list of 12 parents in total, 6 per school, to participate in the study; 10 agreed. The criteria for the choices were that they must be parents with a Black student enrolled in one of the chosen schools, and the parent's involvement in their child's education can be involved or non-involved. Following this, I sent the informed consent forms to each participant for review and signature (see Appendix C).

Once informed consent was received from study participants, individual interviews were scheduled; the focus group took place after all individual interviews. The researcher scheduled

the interviews using the parent participant's contact information; the same contact information was used to set up the focus group. Each parent was called and given a proposed list of dates and times for their interview, which took place over the Zoom web conferencing platform. The researcher remained flexible in scheduling to be more accommodating to the participants. The individual interviews were between the individual parent and the researcher. The focus group session was scheduled through the use of a Google Form. Multiple dates and times were added, and participants were asked to rank their choices. The slot receiving the majority of the votes was held for the focus group. The goal was to have a minimum of 7-10 parents participate in the focus group session; 7 individuals agreed to participate.

All interviews and the focus group session were video recorded and stored in a secure cloud location for the researcher's retrieval. The results from each session were transcribed using automated transcription software. Data analysis using pattern matching logic was the next step, where all result organization and synthesis began. The pattern matching logic process included taking the theoretical assumptions of patterns and attempting to match them with the observed things during the research phase (Sincovics, 2018).

The Researcher's Role

I am currently an assistant principal at a 7-12 school in Virginia. I do not work in the district where this study took place and thereby have no direct relationship with the participants or school settings used for research. As the researcher for this study, I am a human instrument seeking information that would improve the chances of lessening the minority achievement gap in this district's schools. I conducted all data gathering from the study participants with no outside assistance. I am allowed to witness first-hand the achievement gap in Black and White students and parent involvement with the respective groups in my current role. After seeing the

achievement gap get larger despite many efforts to lessen it, I am determined to begin identifying the root causes of the issue and move towards a remedy applied in all districts.

I am a Black, single-parent household product, and I am a single parent of two Black children. My mother was always very involved in our education, and therefore we knew the expectation was for us to succeed. Fortunately, this trait was passed on to me as I have always been my children's most prominent advocate in school. Even with a son who struggled while in school, I found that the more involved I was, the more motivated he was to do better. Having experienced these things instead of hearing about them second-hand gives me the ability to address them with integrity. Having such a similar background to some of the parents that I spoke with and recognizing my strong desire to see the minority achievement gap eliminated, I used bracketing to acknowledge my biases and preconceived notions (Merriam, 2009). The preconceived notions that I had were surrounding previous experiences with Black parents casting blame on the school instead of accepting personal responsibility for their child's academic success and also the lack of Black parents visibly being in the building as volunteers. To bracket these notions and my biases, I listed my characteristics and thoughts about the subject. I then wrote out strategies I could use to counteract these biases. The strategy that I found most compelling was writing my mental notes in brackets as I interviewed so that I could capture my thoughts but not be influenced by them at that time.

Data Collection

Qualitative research has a substantial fieldwork component, which involves going to the environments of the people you are studying and having direct contact with them (Patton, 2015). In addition to direct communications, such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, qualitative research can include document analysis (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). Data collection

using various sources and following a specific protocol is essential and lessens the reliance on single sources of information (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). After approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), data collection commenced, using individual interviews and a focus group as the primary means of data collection (Yin, 2018).

Individual Interviews

An interview is an intentional interaction between multiple people to gain information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For researchers, interviews provide an understanding of the world from each participant's unique perspective, often based on their own experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study's primary data collection method was an individual interview with each parent using a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interviews allowed for a guided conversation while also leaving room for freedom of dialogue between the researcher and the participant (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). The participants' questions were open-ended to facilitate the conversation but still allow authenticity in the answers provided (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research questions framed the interview questions in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, all interviews took place using the virtual meeting platform, Zoom. Interviews were audio and video recorded for data collection purposes, with participants notified of this before the interview began. Recording the interviews enhanced reliability when transcribing the data for analysis and interpretation later in the process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2016). The interview questions asked of the participants were as follows (see Appendix D):

1. Please introduce yourself and provide some background about your family.

2. Tell me about your children.

3. How have their academic grades changed over the past few years?

4.   How often do you hear from your child's teacher?

5.   In what way do you receive most of the communication from your child's teacher?

6.   What are some ways that the school or the teacher has tried to involve you in your child's education?

7.   How involved are you at your child's school?

8.   What effect do you believe your involvement in your child's educational journey has on their success or failure?

9.   What have been effective methods used by the school to improve parental involvement?

10.   What more could be done by the school to improve parental involvement?

11.   One of the focuses of this study is the achievement gap between Black and White students. Can you please describe for me, in your own words, what you believe this means?

12.   How do you believe this gap affects your student, directly or indirectly?

13.   Who do you believe is most responsible for closing this gap in achievement? Why?

14.   That concludes the questions that I had for you. Is there anything else that you would like to mention?

Questions one and two were background questions designed to receive information from the participant (Patton, 2015). These questions required no critical thinking skills and were non-threatening, seeking to open the dialogue between the researcher and the participant (Patton, 2015). The respondent was allowed to add additional self-identification information, which could be used as a connecting point (Patton, 2015).

Questions three through six began the process of knowledge questioning where the parent provided information about their child's educational experience (Patton, 2015). Asking the parent to provide information on their child's current academic grades allowed them to give two-fold details, such as intervention or advancement services received. Parents were asked about a teacher connection because researchers state that those parents who work closely with teachers tend to have students who are empowered to have higher academic performance (Buckalew, 2018). In addition to this two-way communication providing information on student progress, it also gave parents an understanding of school programs that could benefit their child (Epstein, 2010). These background knowledge questions created a segue into the remainder of the interview.

Starting with question seven, the questions became more reflective and focused on the parents' actions, values, and opinions (Patton, 2015). Value questions allowed the researcher to obtain information on the participants' intentions and expectations (Patton, 2015). There are various thoughts about what parental involvement looks like, varying from participation in school activities, support at home, and communication between the home and school (Yoder & Lopez, 2013). Some parents feel that what they do at home matters the most, while others are more visible in the school environment. Asking the parents to be honest and transparent with their involvement can be sensitive, but it helps them give their narrative (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Silverman, 2000). Additionally, research has shown that how parents involve themselves in their students' school experience strongly affects their academic experiences (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Silverman, 2000; Williams & Sanchez, 2012).

The answers to questions seven through ten were designed to provide insight into what the respondents thought regarding their involvement at school and home and improvements they

believed could support their child's education. Question seven was personal but not in a

threatening way; instead, it sought to get the parent to look introspectively as the interview got

more targeted. A parent's critical awareness of their involvement and role in their child's

development is essential to moving towards efforts to make improvements (Epstein, 2010;

Jeynes, 2012). This goes beyond the traditional model of parents just volunteering at the school

and looks at teacher communication, helping with homework, and attending school events that

the child is a part of (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Epstein, 2010; Jeynes, 2012). Question nine

specifically solicited information that correlated to the research showing that schools with

programs targeting the cycle of positive home and school involvement have a lasting impact on

student performance, leading into question ten, which asked for their opinion on the current

programs (Jeynes, 2012). By this point in the interview, there was a solid rapport making the

respondents more at ease when answering the thoughtful questions that follow (Patton, 2015;

Rubin & Rubin, 2016).

   Questions eleven and twelve asked the parent specifically about the minority

achievement gap, which was at the heart of this study. This is a term used in the school setting;

however, some parents may not be aware of its definition or how it applies to their students.

Asking these background knowledge questions at this point in the interview provided variety and

kept the conversation fluid as the focus temporarily moved away from personal tasks to more

generalized ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 2016; Seidman, 2012). It also brought the unique parental

perspective into the equation by asking for their opinion on the cause of the achievement gap and

the existing barriers that prohibit it from being closed.

   Question thirteen's focus was on whom the parent believes is most responsible for closing

the achievement gap. This was a feeling question that was subjective to each respondent's

experiences, background knowledge, and thought processes (Patton, 2015; Seidman, 2012).

Parents of Black children affected by this gap sometimes state that they are met with resistance

when they try to be more involved and face micro and macro aggressions on the school's part

(Jeynes, 2012; King, 2005; Terrion, 2006). This question gave them a chance, with those

conditions to the side, to look inwardly and express where they believe the direct responsibility

lies in closing the achievement gap (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Jeynes, 2012; Terrion, 2006). The

interview closed with a single question, which allowed the participant to provide additional

information they would like to share (Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2016). This type of question

often elicits valuable information not gathered elsewhere (Rubin & Rubin, 2016).

Focus Group

"Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees likely yield the

best information" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 164). There was one focus group session held

following the individual interviews. The focus group included both schools, with each school

having similar characteristics, such as demographics and location within the area (Krueger &

Casey, 2015). For the focus group to be effective, at least three parents from each school needed

to participate. All were welcome and invited; 7 total participants agreed to be involved with the

focus group. The focus group session was video recorded for later viewing analysis and

transcription. Participants of the focus group received a participant agreement as well as a

statement of confidentiality.

During the focus group, each participant was given adequate time to express their

opinions without feeling rushed. There was additional time allocated at the end of the session for

open-talk, questions, and closing thoughts. Questions asked during the focus groups were more

generalized than those used in the individual interviews. They were also more open-ended to

solicit more thoughtful input from each participant. The questions asked in the focus group were as follows (see Appendix E):

1. What grade is your child in, and how long have they been in their school?

2. What do you like about your child's school?

3. What do you dislike about your child's school?

4. How do you feel when you are at your child's school?

5. What do you do at home to prepare your child to do well in school?

6. What would motivate you to become more involved in your child's education?

7. What challenges do you face in your efforts to become more involved in your child's education?

8. What are some ways that schools could support parents when it comes to strengthening the academic performance of Black students?

9. I have asked many questions up until this point. I would now like to open the floor for additional comments. Is there anything else that anyone would like to mention before we conclude?

Document Analysis

In qualitative research, namely case studies, it is appropriate to draw information from multiple sources, enhancing the corroboration and reliability of evidence gathered (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Using document analysis in this study also coincided with the research that shows parents who are more visible at the school tend to be more involved in their students' education (Jeynes, 2003; Larocque et al., 2011; Lathram, 2015; Matteucci, 2016). Artifacts such as attendance logs, school-to-family correspondence, and minutes of meetings and conferences are good indicators of parental involvement. These documents were obtained from the Principal

at each school. I believe that these documents' reflective examination added breadth to the information obtained from the interviews and focus groups (Patton, 2015).

Each school used in this study maintains documentation when parents are volunteering at the schools and a part of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). An examination was done of the PTA membership rosters and the volunteer rosters at schools to get a better idea of parental participation and visibility (see Appendix F). All sensitive information was omitted before being obtained, and the information shared with me is kept in a secure location. Data drawn from these documents were also cross-referenced with the interviews and focus groups' results to give a broader perspective for the data analysis phase (Yin, 2018). Most documents of this nature contain quantitative material, such as dates and times. It relies upon the parent following through with signing in at the school or proper matching with the student and parent in membership rosters. All these conditions that cause a potential for inaccuracy were taken into consideration, and the data was interpreted accordingly (Yin, 2018).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is not an independent step in the qualitative process, but rather it is interrelated and tends to happen simultaneously to other actions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When conducting data analysis, the researcher is taking the information collected and looking for meaningful codes, themes, and patterns of concepts (Saldaña, 2016). In coding material, symbolic meanings are assigned to create a "summative, salient, essence-capturing, and evocative attribute" (Saldaña, p. 71, 2016). This deep level of analysis brought intense meaning to the data collected and helped develop keywords, which proved useful during the next phase of analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2016).

Throughout data collection and analysis, suppressing preconceived ideas and notions allowed the researcher to appreciate the participants' experiences (Patton, 2015). To help keep my biases in check and not voice them to the participants, I kept a reflexive journal during the interviews and focus session. This journal captured my thoughts during and after each interview and focus group session. The journal entries were analyzed afterward to identify noticeable patterns, themes, and codes amongst the study participants' responses (Adu, 2019; Saldaña, 2016). Clearly written entries made the future analysis more comfortable and meaningful (Adu, 2019; Saldaña, 2016). Using reflective journal entries, I was also able to increase the study's credibility using authentic documentation of the research process (Adu, 2019; Saldaña, 2016).

Data analysis of the individual interviews and focus group included transcription via automated transcription software and critically reading the resulting notes (Seidman, 2012). Member checking, which allows the participants to review the data to judge the accuracy, was used to increase credibility and validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was essential to have a reliable technique for this analysis; therefore, pattern matching, one of the most favorable data analysis techniques for a case study, was used. This technique allowed a retracing of the researcher's thought processes and the participants to give better insight into the resulting conclusions (Yin, 2018). All transcripts from the interviews and focus group were cataloged electronically and named so that they were easy to find yet protective of the participants' sensitive information. As I reviewed these notes, I kept track of essential concepts, looking for overlapping thoughts from both the participants and me. Concepts were connected by examining word repetition and the use of metaphors and analogies, which involved carefully going through the text to identify similar key phrases (Patton, 2015). The memoing process was used to pair up these concepts with previous notes taken during the interviews to form a logical flow of ideas.

Following this analysis, I went back over the material to narrow it down into thematic categories, using the theoretical frameworks that guided the study (Seidman, 2012). Transcribed audio recordings allowed for common themes exploration to avoid oversaturation of ideas (Seidman, 2012). Memos that I took during all interviews were considered to help provide a more comprehensive picture of the data and allow for consensus building and acknowledging differing points of view.

All data retrieved from the document analysis, interviews, and focus groups went through triangulation to enhance construct validity (Yin, 2018). The use of pattern matching logic, processes, outcomes, and rival explanations were considered (Yin, 2018). This type of data analysis has an underlying assumption that humans make sense of the world and their experiences by making comparisons between their external observations and their internal thoughts (Sincovics, 2018). The process and outcomes piece focuses on the "how" and "why" of the case study, comparing a predicted or assumed outcome with the observed patterns (Yin, 2018). On the other hand, pattern matching using rival explanations acknowledges that there may be threats to the initial assumptions of the study, and it leaves room for counterarguments to the "how" and "why" (Yin, 2018). The themes and patterns that emerged were categorized and recorded using a spreadsheet. These themes were essential to understanding the resulting answers to the research questions, which involved parental perception. The analysis result was a structured and rigorous synthesis of information that provided lessons learned and application to future case studies and substantiated answers to the research questions (Patton, 2015; Sincovics, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Trustworthiness

Participants play a vital role in the validation and trustworthiness of qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As recommended by Yin (2018), standard case study methods will add to the study's integrity. To enhance this study's trustworthiness, procedures were put into place and followed to ensure credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

A robust conceptual framework added credibility to this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The first thing that I did as a researcher was to develop a rapport with my participants. This encouraged them to be more honest and open in their answers to questions. One way to ensure credibility is with methods triangulation, which uses various techniques to collect data (Tracy, 2013; Yin, 2018). In this study, triangulation was used by analyzing documents and having multiple conversations with the participants through individual interviews and a focus group (Rubin & Rubin, 2016; Tracy, 2013). Validity was increased by comparing information obtained from these various methods to see if similar results emerge (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2018).

Another way of adding credibility to the study was by using direct quotes collected during the data collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were able to see their direct words and check for accuracy during the final credibility assurance method, member checks. Members checks involve participants receiving a summary of information collected during the interview and focus group, in this case, transcripts (Patton, 2015). The privacy protection was ensured by not using the group members' real names in any shared documents. The participants reviewed this data and had a two-week window to offer written or oral feedback to the researcher. Internal validity happened by making any revisions necessary for completeness or accuracy (Patton, 2015). This iterative process increased the results' reliability and allowed

participants to validate the credibility of the information gathered (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is essential in qualitative research, requiring descriptive data and methodical data collection procedures (Patton, 2015). The utilization of participants possessing personal experience with the chosen phenomenon, their input, though subjective, is deemed trustworthy. By memoing throughout the study to track themes and codes, dependability and confirmability were enhanced (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tracy, 2013). Memoing was done in an organized fashion so that the information obtained would be useful in uncovering and verifying nuances in data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tracy, 2013). The memoing for this study was done via voice recording as the data was being analyzed and reviewed to aid in its dependability. The recording and transcription of conversations also increased dependability and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Confirmability is a way of ensuring that there is no bias on my part. When interpreting the raw data, I wanted to exclude my own opinions, thereby decreasing the bias (Miles et al., 2014). Using automated transcription software to do a verbatim transcription of the interviews, I was able to get a deep understanding of participants' intent based on their actual words (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2016). This transparency was also necessary for anyone reviewing my research later (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2016). Additionally, throughout the study, a chain of evidence was maintained to help with any questions about the information gathered (Yin, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability, also known as generalizability or reliability, relates to the study results' ability to be applied and used by another researcher (Merriam, 2009; Miles et al., 2014). The

objective is to conduct a replicable study, garnering the same results (Yin, 2018). The goal is to reduce bias and errors from the study to accomplish the said objective (Yin, 2018). Careful and explicit documentation is essential to increasing the likelihood of transferability (Yin, 2018). Though this transferability is not always guaranteed, by using thick descriptions of the entire process and the results, I increased the likelihood that it will be useful to someone else (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

All ethical issues were considered carefully and addressed through a series of checks. For this study, pseudonyms exist for all schools, principals, parents, teachers, and children's names that emerge during the study. There were minimal risks to the human subjects involved with the study, as all conversations took place in a safe virtual space, accessible only with a strong password. All participants were over the age of 18 and were considered mentally capable of participating in the study. If there would have been a removal of the participant from the study for their safety and integrity at any time, concern over mental stability were to arise.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, which may seem to call into question a participant's parenting skills, it was anticipated that some parents might get defensive. Ensuring that an optimal level of respect and care exists during every interview and focus group session managed and minimized this sensitivity. As a final step to lessen anxiety and heighten truthfulness, they were aware that their specific results would go no further than the researcher (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). Furthermore, all recordings will be discarded after three years, minimizing future risks or concerns of confidentiality. To secure the data, I have placed all electronic files in a password-protected folder. All paper documents are stored in a locked file cabinet with no outside access available.

Summary

This chapter aimed to outline the research methodology used to answer the research questions in this qualitative, collective case study. The research questions chosen were framed after an exhaustive literature review and acted as guidance for building the study elements. The setting for the study was a middle school and a high school in a Virginia school district. Twelve participants were chosen from the schools, 6 from each one, with the Principal's assistance. Of those requested to participate, 10 agreed to the individual interviews. Once all approvals were acquired, one-to-one interviews were held with each participant, followed by a collective focus group of 7 participants. The questions for both the individual interview and the focus group were constructed in an open-ended manner to allow more natural communication.

Once all data was collected, data analysis took place using pattern matching logic. Even though participants received the same questions, many responses existed due to the subject matter's nature. By using pattern matching, patterns and themes were identified, linking relationships among responses. This type of analysis was also valuable for enhancing the validity and trustworthiness of the collected data. Throughout the entire research process, there was confidentiality and a high degree of ethics. Participants received assurance that no identifying information linked their responses personally and that their data and participation would be kept private.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this collective case study was to understand the perspectives of Black children's parents regarding their roles in addressing the Black student achievement gap in their Virginia school district. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the data and present the findings from the study. The data was collected from individual interviews, a focus group, and the schools' historical documents. The chapter begins with demographic information and descriptions of the participants. The common themes are then presented to help relay this information. Next are the participant descriptions followed by a detailed account of the data related to the research questions. The chapter closes with a summary of the information that was presented.

Participants

This was a collective case study that took place over the internet using Zoom. The initial individual interviews included 4 parents from Harris Middle School (HMS) and 5 parents from Sims High School (SHS). One parent from HMS who was unavailable during the original interview slots was able to participate later, raising the total to 5 parent participants from that school. All parents were invited to participate in the focus group; however, only 7 accepted the invitation. Of the 7 participants in the focus group, 4 were parents of students at HMS, and 3 had students at SHS. During the focus group, participants were given the option to turn on their camera or leave it off for their privacy; most chose to leave it turned off. Participants in both the individual interviews and focus group were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

John

John is a married father of one child, a son, who is a seventh-grader at HMS. He has an older child who is currently away at basic training for the Army, but he also attended HMS when he was younger. He and his wife were born and raised in the neighborhoods surrounding this school, except when they both went away to colleges out of state. John runs his own company and is typically available during the day for his son's activities, but his wife is an emergency room nurse, so her schedule is less flexible. John characterizes both he and his wife as being highly involved parents, specifically stating that to him, this means "I help the school when I can, and so does my wife. When we can't do something, we give the money to help out. The school always has something going on, so I don't feel bad when I can't do it all."

This is the second year of middle school for John's son, and though virtual learning has presented its challenges, his son is achieving well in all of his classes. Upon analysis of the transcripts, my subjective opinion is that John's true involvement level is high.

Suzanne

Suzanne is a 34-year-old single mother of two children at HMS; her daughter is in sixth grade, and her son is in eighth grade. The family has lived in this area for almost two years, moving here as a part of a job transfer. They have adjusted well, though her children are not very outgoing and therefore have not made many friends. She has worked to get them involved with after-school clubs and sports, but most things are on pause due to the pandemic. She notes that the school has reintroduced some clubs in a virtual format, so she encourages her children to try them out to become more engaged. Suzanne is also an active member of the PTA in that she attends the monthly meetings and goes to the spirit nights to show her support. During the day, anything that is done presents a conflict for Suzanne because of her demanding work schedule as

a front-line manager at a large company. Upon analysis of the transcripts, my subjective opinion is that Suzanne's true involvement level is low.

Gloria

Gloria is a divorced mother of a daughter that attends HMS. After serving 22 years in the Army and retiring at her last duty station nearby, she moved to this area. She is currently working on starting an at-home consultancy offering transition support for veterans. Gloria's daughter is 12 years old and is in the 8th grade this year. She is a straight-A student who is also very active in extracurricular activities. Gloria notes that she has lived in the area for close to eight years and chose her particular neighborhood because of the nearby schools. This is her only child, and she said that the way her daughter has been able to flourish since she has been at HMS leaves her assured that she made the right choice in purchasing here. Upon analysis of the transcripts, my subjective opinion is that Gloria's true involvement level is high.

Denise

Denise is a single mother of four children, with two of them attending HMS – a sixth-grader and a seventh-grader. These are her oldest children, and she has had mixed experiences with their educational journey. Her daughter, the sixth-grader, has had a tough transition from elementary school to middle school. There is not as much "hand-holding," The quicker pace is causing some difficulty for her as she continues to adjust. On the other hand, her son, who is in the seventh grade, has gotten past those initial feelings and has begun to thrive this year. They both have average grades and "could do better if they were willing to put in the work." Denise works two jobs at local retail stores, so she is unavailable for helping at the school and does not feel that she has the time or energy to do much for them by the time she gets home. Upon analysis of the transcripts, my subjective opinion is that Denise's true involvement level is low.

Eden

Eden is a 39-year-old widowed mother of a seventh-grade son who attends HMS. She has been a widow for eight years, with her husband being killed in the line of duty as a police officer when her son was only three years old. She has lived in this area most of her life, leaving only to attend college in Colorado and then returning after graduation to get married. Eden is a biology teacher at Sims High School and has been there for nine years. Eden's son is a high-performing student who is also an athlete. He takes all honors classes and is currently looking towards a military career upon graduation from high school. Upon analysis of the transcripts, my subjective opinion is that Eden's true involvement level is low.

Jackie

Jackie is a 43-year-old single mother of three children, two of whom attend SHS; a daughter who is a sophomore and a son who is a senior. She also has an older son who graduated from SHS in 2016 and is now in the Navy. Jackie is from this area, though she moved away for about twenty years and returned 7 years ago after her divorce. She currently works as an Instructional Assistant at one of the elementary schools in a neighboring school district. Upon analyzing the transcripts, my subjective opinion is that Jackie has a moderate level of true involvement.

Lindsey

Lindsey is a married mother of one student at SHS. They are a military family, and her daughter, a junior, has been at the school since her sophomore year. Lindsey and her husband are both heavily involved in various things at the school, such as parent coffees and volunteering to help in the library and after-school clubs. She was active in her school in Georgia, so she feels it is only fitting to keep doing it. She likes being visible so that she can also "see what is really

happening in the building." Lindsey considers herself to have an advantage in that she does not

work, so she can dedicate more time to helping at the school. Upon analysis of the transcripts,

my subjective opinion is that Lindsey's true involvement level is high.

Teri

Teri is 39 years old and is a divorced mother of a son who is a freshman. She feels that

she and her ex-husband are actively involved with their son's education at SHS and were the

same when he attended HMS for seventh and eighth grade. She clarified by stating, "It's on our

terms, though. We don't go up to the school because we work a lot, but we do our part at our

houses." Teri works at a local bank and has the same hours as her son's school. This sometimes

causes a struggle with being present for events and conferences that happen during the school

day. She tries to split those responsibilities with her husband, but he works a job with similar

hours, which is not always possible. Upon analyzing the transcripts, my subjective opinion is that

Teri has a moderate level of true involvement.

Matthew

Matthew is the father of a 9th-grade daughter. He has been a single father for most of his

child's life, with her mother only becoming active again in the past three years. He has lived in

this area his entire life and went to SHS himself, so he feels that he has a special connection;

many of the same teachers are there. Matthew's daughter is an average student who typically

carries B's and high C's in her classes. She was in advanced academic classes before coming to

SHS, but for a reason unknown to him, she has not been performing at her full potential this

school year. He is not sure if it is attributed to Covid-19 and having to be virtual or if she is just

lazy. However, he is constantly monitoring it. Matthew is a very involved father and member of

the school community, having served as an aviation club sponsor for the past few years. Upon

analysis of the transcripts, my subjective opinion is that Matthew's true involvement level is high.

Dorothy

Dorothy is 62 years old and is a widowed grandmother/mother of junior twins, one boy, and one girl at SHS. Her daughter died a couple of years ago, and the father, her daughter's husband, was not mentally able to cope and take care of their children. Because of this, she was given custody by the courts, and last year she formally adopted them. They are aware that she is their grandmother, and they refer to her as "grandmommy." She is not originally from this area, having moved her to help her daughter as she struggled medically. The father is no longer active in their lives, but she gets help from her other daughter, the children's aunts. She has some health challenges, so she cannot walk that well. However, her son plays basketball, and she makes sure she is at all of the games and volunteers to help sell refreshments. She said that everyone knows them because of their story and situation and lends a hand when needed. Upon analysis of the transcripts, my subjective opinion is that Dorothy's true involvement level is low.

<div align="center">

Results

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This qualitative collective case study includes the results from data collected using individual interviews, a focus group, and a historical document review. Theme development was the first step in the data analysis, followed by explaining connections to the research questions based on participant responses. Direct quotes from the participants throughout this section offer first-hand, authentic insight into the parents' perceptions.

Theme Development

Data collection began with individual interviews with 10 parents of students at either Harris Middle School or Sims High School. Following that, all participants were invited to a

focus group session; 7 of the 10 parents agreed to participate. The interview questions in both

forums were centered around the academic progress of their student(s), communication efforts of

the school, their understanding of the achievement gap, and their perception of who bears the

responsibility of closing the achievement gap. Each interview and the focus group were

conducted over the Zoom web conferencing platform and were video and audio recorded for

transcription and analysis. Following the sessions, the information obtained was transcribed

using the automated software, Trint. The transcripts from the individual interview transcripts

were then sent to participants for member checking to ensure accuracy and completeness in

recording their statements (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lastly, a historical document review took

place using records provided by the school. The records included PTA attendance logs and

volunteer hours records (See Table 1). The triangulation of the data collected from the individual

interviews, focus group, and historical document review was later analyzed to provide insight

into each research question.

Table 1

Historical Document Review

Participant Name	Attending School	PTA Attendance (HMS: 12 max; SHS: 10 max)	Volunteer Hours
John	Harris Middle School	8	23
Suzanne	Harris Middle School	10	11
Gloria	Harris Middle School	6	22
Denise	Harris Middle School	0	2
Eden	Harris Middle School	1	0

Participant Name	Attending School	PTA Attendance (HMS: 12 max; SHS: 10 max)	Volunteer Hours
Jackie	Sims High School	0	0
Lindsey	Sims High School	9	14
Teri	Sims High School	3	9
Matthew	Sims High School	7	24
Dorothy	Sims High School	1	4

Once all data was transcribed, and feedback from member checks had been received, pattern matching began (Yin, 2018). This step started with coding from the participant data. As the data materials were reviewed, notations were taken of words and phrases that were repetitive. The search function in Word helped find occurrences of repeated words throughout the conversations. The common concepts and words were manually coded to ensure accuracy (see Table 2).

Table 2

Codes

Key Word/Phrase	Number of Occurrences
"Average student"	56
"Less flexible"	40
"No time"	37
"School responsibility"	80
"Highly involved"	40

Key Word/Phrase	Number of Occurrences
"We do our part"	71
"Schools accountable"	62
"Poor communication"	59
"Teachers are reactive"	21
"Constant communication"	47
"Not my job"	32
"Do better"	30
"Parent responsibility"	78

The discovered codes were grouped into themes, relying heavily on the theoretical frameworks that guided the study (Seidman, 2012). The themes that emerged were: (1) teacher/parent communication, (2) mutual responsibility between home and school, and (3) parental support at home.

Teacher/Parent Communication

Throughout the interviews and focus group, there was a resounding clarity that teacher communication is a key factor for parents. "No news is good news" was the philosophy to which both Jackie and Denise subscribed. In their experiences, teachers found it most important to reach out when there was a problem, and if you did not hear from them, you could assume your child was doing well in that class. John agreed and had the following to add:

> Teacher communication could use some work, but I know that my child is not the only one the teacher has, so I don't expect to receive an email every day. My son is an average student, and the periodic messages help keep me focused and attentive to his grades.

Matthew and Lindsey were of the thought process that constant communication from the teachers is a luxury. They try to put more responsibility on their children as they have gotten older and feel that they can reach out to the teacher if needed as parents. Considering the current virtual learning experience, some parents have seen an increase in teacher communication. This has been appreciated, and there was an expressed desire by all for it to continue when the in-person learning starts again in March 2021.

A few of the parents have had a fair share of negative experiences with teachers communicating, stating that the messages are inconsistent and often offered in a reactive way to a student's negative grade or behavior. One sentiment expressed is the evoked feelings when there is a sudden, unexpected email stating that the student is not performing well or is at risk of failing. Suzanne sees this all too often with her middle school students:

> The teacher will go weeks without communicating with me, and then all of a sudden, they're failing. And it always seems to happen at the end of the quarter, when there isn't much that can be done. What's even more frustrating is the school said that at the interim point, teachers would contact the parents of all students who are failing. But that has never happened for me.

Teri and Dorothy both have high school students and do not expect the teachers to overcommunicate, but they feel a lot is lacking. They feel there is a misconception that the parents are keeping up to date by looking at the Powerschool grading system or being transparent with their parents regarding their grades. Due to the pandemic, the students have been 100% virtual, causing communication to be even more sporadic. Dorothy acknowledges that the teachers have a hard time right now, but she also believes that things could be made easier if they communicate more. Both mothers affirm that this is often seen in elementary and maybe middle

schools but that high school students are "sneaky" and "secretive" when it comes to their grades, especially if they are bad. Dorothy goes on to say:

> We are doing our part to try to keep up with all of the ways that teachers put out information, but it is overwhelming. The teachers don't communicate, sometimes not even when my kids are failing. I find out when they get their report cards and have failed some classes. Then when I send an email for more information, it can be a week or more before I hear back. Sometimes they don't answer me at all. This is not the way to communicate, and I think they need to do better.

After much dialogue about teacher communication's positives and negatives, most parents linked their communication perceptions to their comfort level with the school and the teachers. No one disliked their child's school but instead felt they were great places, especially when they compare them to other schools nearby. John, Gloria, and Matthew all stated that they feel their children's schools have done an adequate job of creating "warm and welcoming environments" where parents can be vocal. Suzanne added that "sometimes the teachers aren't as inviting as the other staff in the school, so we shrink back from them." Denise and Lindsey agreed that they have experienced "cold-shoulders" from teachers in the past and lends itself to hesitancy when communicating with them about a problem.

Parents in this study asserted that they believe that teacher communication should be more than a progress report or negative update. The lack of regular and specific communication from school to home was a reoccurring concern for parents. Some parents feel like teachers should work harder to understand that not every parent communicates the same way and aims to be creative in reaching all parents. More frequent, positive communication would go a long way

in helping parents understand what is needed to help their students attain and maintain high school achievement.

Mutual Responsibility Between Home and School

The question of who bears the brunt of narrowing the achievement gap seems to be divided by school level. Parents at both schools agree that the sole burden cannot be placed on one side's shoulders but a mutually shared responsibility. John stated, "we have to make sure that we hold schools accountable, but we have to do our part as parents as well." He went on to explain:

I can't honestly expect the school to raise my son. When he was in elementary school, I expected frequent progress reports and updates, but now that he is getting older, that is no sustainable with the number of kids in the classroom. To be honest, since he has been doing virtual learning, it has forced me to see how much weight we were adding to teachers and the school. I've stepped up my game big time in the last 10 months.

Suzanne added to this line of thought that she does not have complaints about the teachers, but she does not have any "glowing reviews for them either." Suzanne wanted to issue a clarifying statement that she expects more from the school because of her children's special needs:

My children both have IEP's and some of the teachers ignore their needs. They are both written in ways that the teachers are supposed to be proactive with concerns, but they are reactive instead. This doesn't give me much time to help, and now instead of helping close the gap, we seem to be helping to widen it.

Denise chimed in, and they both asserted that there are a parent and a school responsibility for success and that everyone needs to do better to meet the students' needs; this

was nonverbally agreed upon by the majority of those in the focus group. She also makes a valid comparison to the responsibility recognized in elementary school and what is seen as the students get to middle school:

> When kids are younger, the teachers reach out at the beginning of the year and ask for details about your child, like the things they like and how they can support. In middle school, that came to a screeching stop, and we parents feel the burn. It is not fair to the kids or the parents. We have to work together, and how can we do that without communication?

Parents of high school students felt as if they had gotten used to the school's minimized communication, but some of them were still trying to figure out how to forge a partnership. There was unanimous agreement amongst them, and some middle school parents, there is a disparity in how Black and White students are treated and available. Teri and Matthew both noted instances where their children were treated differently and labeled just because of their race. Matthew explained:

> My daughter enjoys going to school, but she doesn't enjoy it when she is asked by a counselor why she wants to take an honors class. They don't ask the White students this, so why ask my daughter? That is one of the main reasons that I keep my face in the place. I know that there is the mistreatment of the Black students, and that doesn't help them want to learn. Then they make it seem like it's all about the grades. You can't learn when you don't want to be there or don't feel like you belong.

Dorothy often feels confused about the responsibility portion of the learning process. She feels that her advanced age does not work in her favor and often causes her to lack the capacity to help her children. She stated that "Teachers expect me to teach at home, but I can't do that

when I don't understand the material. I need as much help as the kids do." She was emotional when she listened to others explain the achievement gap and realized that her children might be a part of it; she aims to learn more about it and how she can help close it so that her children do not get "swallowed up as statistics."

The majority of the parents expressed a sincere desire to be more involved and help more with ensuring their child learns, but without knowing what is expected of them by the school, it is challenging. The deficit of knowledge from not knowing how to help causes some parents to relinquish control to the school, and with that is the frustration they feel when their child is failing. Race is a factor that was not discounted, with some parents seeing it as a significant driver in the academic success of Black children and others seeing it as having minor relevance to the overall picture.

Increased Parental Support at Home

There are differing ideas of what constitutes parental support, with confusion around whether it is most productive at home or school. Most of the participants said they feel it has to be a combination of both, though they do not always do it themselves. It was a resounding consensus that parents are responsible for their child's success and that more has to be done at home, especially as kids get older. Some parents in the study believe that adequate parental support is merely ensuring that their child goes to school and is prepared to learn. In contrast, others believe that parents have to be more intricately involved, such as checking homework and even re-teaching when there is a need.

With the current pandemic, there are minimal at-school events, and the majority of students are still participating in virtual learning from their homes. This new connectedness between school and home on a daily basis has given many of the parents a better look at the

amount of support they previously received from the schools. Jackie has seen this time together as an "eye-opening moment in time." She further went on to say:

> I had always felt that I did the heavy lifting when it came to my children and their education. I encourage them to do their best, and they perform. Having them at home and needing more support from me on homework, I realize that the teachers were pulling a lot of the weight. I am examining myself, and I am going to do better.

Many of the parents agreed with Jackie's thought process and also added that it has also shown some deficiencies in teachers that were not as supportive as they purported to be in the past. Once students are at the end of their middle school years and transitioning into the high school years, the parents noticed that the teachers did not provide the additional resources for parents to use at home with their students. However, they felt that the greatest need is in the high grades as the learning becomes more specialized and most parents do not have enough content knowledge to be helpful. A suggestion was made that teachers should be more transparent in their curriculum and precisely how it is being taught. That information would help parents to be able to become more engaged and informed with the topics and provide another layer of support at home, in turn releasing some of the pressure from the teachers.

As the conversation was coming to a close, Lindsey made an important connection with how she sees race and the role of the parent as being connected by saying:

> We can't be so quick to pull the race card. Not everyone does it, but some of us do. We have to look at our children and ourselves. The school might not always get it right, but we don't either. We have to be honest and tell the school when we need more support as parents. Or use our other resources to get our kids the help that they need. Now that they are at home with us all of the time, I am using it as a chance to be a better parent.

Parental support at home is multifaceted and includes helping with homework, arranging additional support, and collaborating with the school on success strategies. Overall, it is a commitment to ensuring that children are successful and receive the best education possible. In the study, parents invested in their child's learning found that their child's attainment and retention increased. This hands-on engagement overtakes any socio-economic or parental education barriers that may exist, leveling the playing field to learn.

Research Question Responses

Research Question #1

This study's first research question was: *What do parents of Black children identify as their roles in their children's education?* Parents from both Harris Middle School and Sims High School agreed that their role is to assist the school and reinforce the at-home learning process. However, there were varying opinions on what this looks like in practice. The change in family structure has also impacted parents' role in their child's education over the past couple of decades. With more instances of both parents having to work, there is less of a balance between work and home life, with the home being the thing that tends to suffer the most. This is not a result of the parents' lack of desire to be involved, but the competing priorities with providing for the family and being physically present more often than time will allow. "Many Black parents in this area have multiple jobs and would love to volunteer to go on a field trip, but they can't get the time off or go without that pay," says Teri. These non-negotiable, pressing family needs place inornate demands on their energy and attention, leaving little time for school activities. Therefore, it becomes even more vital that there is a mutual and shared responsibility between home and school, especially in middle and high school.

Lindsey, who is married, gave her viewpoint on the balancing act that she finds herself performing for work and home:

I am blessed in that I only have to work part-time while my husband works full time. I can go to the school as needed, and I am often home when my child arrives home. But the sacrifice is that my husband's role is minimal because he is always working. Even though my daughter likes school now, she hasn't always had the motivation to do her work. I shudder to think what would have happened if I wouldn't have been there to keep her on track. I feel for those that don't have another parent there to help them keep home life first.

The majority of the single parents in the study, such as Suzanne, Gloria, and Jackie, see themselves as disadvantaged because they do not have the fathers' support in pushing their children's education forth. Teri is a single mother, but she does not feel that she has to do it alone, as she states: "my ex and I tag-team our efforts. We know that it takes a village to raise a child, and we are the heads of this village. We cannot expect more from the school than we are willing to give." Although she acknowledges that she must be active in her son's education, she adds that teacher communication plays a role in how this plays out:

Some of the teachers show that they care a lot and try to accommodate my needs. But there are some that make me feel like I am never doing enough, even when I just ask questions for clarity. I just don't want my son's poor performance to become habitual, and I know I get on his nerves asking him about the work every day.

Matthew, a single father with minimal parenting input from his child's mother, feels the same strain on his time as many single mothers. However, he takes it as a part of his duty as a father and firmly feels that:

Learning starts at home, so parents have to do their part and advocate for their child, even

if no one else is. The job can wait, but my daughter can't. There is always room for us to

do more as parents. We have to check to see what is completed, what is missing, and

what is coming up. The school does a good job of giving us progress reports, but I have

to do my part and be proactive.

Some of the participants offered examples of what they considered to be active

involvement. They included keeping a watchful eye on grades, communicating regularly with the

teacher, and assisting with homework. John says, "part of my role as a parent is to make sure my

son is being challenged. I encourage him to take honors classes and even give him extra

enrichment at home." Having children with learning disabilities makes active involvement even

more important for Suzanne, who states:

I can't just turn my children loose to do their homework; it won't get done. I also have to

be their advocate and make sure that their accommodations are being met. This is all very

time-consuming for someone like me who works a full-time job. Being fully involved

with their education takes a lot of time, but their success has been worth it.

Dorothy admits that she sometimes feels that she is "out of touch" with current parenting trends

due to her age. Even yet, she has strong feelings about how she should be involved with the

education of her children:

It's been decades since I have been out of school, so I don't know much of the content,

but I can still be supportive. I can encourage my kids and remind them that they can be

anything they want to be and that I have their backs. If I had to say my role, I would think

it is to be their cheerleader.

Building and fostering strong connections with their children was a common thread amongst the parents. There was a recognition that parents' impact on their children is not often acknowledged in middle and high school, though those are when the grades matter the most. Some parents mentioned having frequent conversations with their children, specifically about their assignments and grades, while others chose to let their children initiate the conversations unless they noticed an issue. Regardless of the initiator of the dialogue, it was evident through the comments of individuals like John, Suzanne, Lindsey, and Eden that the more support the child knows they have from the parent, the more apt they are to be successful.

Some study participants mentioned that though they agreed that it is their responsibility to monitor their child's attendance and let the school know when they need assistance, they also feel the push to do more. This means going beyond the home and includes them volunteering their time at the school whenever possible. This sentiment was confirmed when reviewing the historical documents and comparing them with the study participants' statements, such as John, Gloria, Matthew, and Lindsay. There is a direct correlation between the parents who spent more time participating in school-based activities and higher achievement amongst their children. There is also a connection between the level of communication that teachers have with more visible parents, as was noted by multiple parents.

Those parents who did not participate much outside of the home do not always attribute it to a lack of time. Suzanne says:

> A few times when I have volunteered at the school, they made me feel like I wasn't as welcome as the White parents that were there. I didn't get much attention, and some of the administrators were just nasty to me. I felt invisible, and it made me not want to waste the little free time that I have to go up there anymore.

Others in the group expressed they had not thought about the subtle things that made them feel unwelcome until Suzanne mentioned her experience. The central theme identified in the feelings of unwelcomeness was that when they were called to the school for something negative, people automatically felt they needed to handle them with "kid gloves." A few mothers stated that when they were at gatherings and controversial conversations, they stayed quiet not to have their passion misconstrued as talk of an "angry black woman." Dorothy mentioned that since she was older than all the other parents, she was often asked if she was the grandmother and where the parents were. Her response to this was:

> I don't like having to keep explaining that these are my grandkids but also my kids. It's not easy reliving my child's death and telling people that I am now their mother. Some of the teachers act like they should feel sorry for me. But I don't have a sob story and don't want pity. I just want my babies to be treated like the other kids and me to be treated like the other mothers.

Research Question #2

The second research question for this study was: *How do parents of Black children perceive the effect that their involvement has on their children's academic success or failure?* There was a consensus that the more involved a parent is in their child's education, the more successful they are. This academic success is directly linked to the Black achievement gap, and failure to succeed causes it to widen (Bowman et al., 2018). The parents desire their involvement to be authentic and on terms that fit their family. John saw his involvement at the school as directly affecting his son's success, saying: "My son is an average student who flies under the radar. I have to make sure that I stay on top of his grades. When I don't, his grades start to slip." Eden is adamant that her child's success is because she does not give another option, as she says,

"I model success for my son and expect him to do the same. I see the achievement gap daily, and I know that if I am not involved, then my son might not get all that he needs to achieve."

Suzanne and Jackie both relayed feelings that teachers often have lower expectations for the Black students and therefore do not push them to do better. Jackie's daughter does well in her academics; however, she has seen the inequitable distribution of time and resources and reconciles that the school is not averse to "Black students just being average." Participants whose children have attended various schools have seen that when Black students are offered fewer opportunities for advancement, such as diverse curriculums, advanced classes, and extra support outside of the classroom, they further perpetuate the achievement gap's widening. Since Blacks are the minority group at HMS and SHS, this can be seen as an area of ongoing improvement often referenced in school communication.

Adding to this factor is the minimized effort put forth by some teachers and parents alike at the middle and high school level. Denise describes this lack of shared and equal responsibility as being central to the success of children by saying:

> The school, me, everybody can always do better. I have to work so we can eat and have shelter. I try to help them with homework, but the older they get, the harder the work is for me to understand. I guess it is partially my fault, but the school has to take some blame too. I don't want it to seem like the schools are bad because they are not. I just want my kids to be successful; I want everybody to pass.

Teri felt very strongly about how her involvement impacted getting rid of some of the stereotypes about academic ability and intellect that often impede Black children's success, namely her own. She stated:

I am very well educated, and I don't want anyone to think that I don't value education. I have to give more effort into my son's education than the parents of his White friends. The system is already set up to fail him. He has to know that I am watching and that I care. That's why I communicate so much with the teachers. Even when they respond to me negatively, I am nice because I am only in it to see my son win.

Matthew echoed Teri's thoughts, and it turned the conversation towards a rich discussion centered on Black parents fully understanding the achievement gap and how they can narrow it. Matthew shared that:

The school does a good job of sending out communication and saying they want all parents involved. But there is still an invisible divider between them and us, and then we are made to feel like the squeaky wheel when we ask questions or complain about things. But I won't sit back and watch my daughter or any other Black baby fail, courtesy of a skewed system. I will continue to be an advocate for all Black children and help them to see that they are just as smart and successful as their White peers.

Even the parents in the group who considered themselves more hands-off felt that they and the schools needed to redefine involvement. No longer is it a physical presence in the schools, but it is also the parental support at home. Some examples of ways that their home involvement could lead to higher academic success rates included emphasizing the child's self-worth and ability, reinforcing materials that they do not understand, empowering them to be advocates with the teachers, and dispelling racial stereotypes hinder them from achieving success. Though Lindsey is involved a great bit, she offered the following insight that beautifully connects this research question to the theme of teacher/parent communication:

My child does her work, so there isn't much need for the teachers to reach out to me. There is a district-wide tool where I can look at her grades in real-time, and the school does a good job of posting information on its website and social media. These are our children, not theirs. I pulled back a little from doing stuff, and I noticed my daughter slipping, so I had to slide back in. I know first-hand what my active involvement means, and it is the difference between success and failure for my child.

Research Question #3

The third research question for this study was: *What additional support do parents of Black children need to facilitate better learning for their children?* During the focus group, there was a sense of frustration voiced when speaking on this question. A few parents expressed that they were tired of uninvolved Black parents getting all the attention and being the main drivers for studies such as this one. They felt like the parents trying to be involved were rarely ever shown appreciation or recognized for their efforts, making them not want to do as much anymore. Teri says, "we can't seem to get any attention until we are not doing something. Then it is all eyes on us." Denise added, "they make it seem like if we don't come running to the school every time the doors are open, that we don't care. That is not true. Stop and look at what we are doing at home, which is what should matter anyway."

One of the most appreciated support mechanisms for Black parents is close communication between the teacher and parent. Parents expressed that when they felt more informed, they also felt empowered. Dorothy recommended that teachers should use a "growth system like the one used by the English teacher. It gives ongoing progress on the reading goals to let you see where they need more help." Other parents agreed that constant communication of progress is good and that they would also like to see it accompanied by advice on the next steps

once a lapse is identified. "Narrow the communication gap, and we can narrow the achievement gap," says Eden.

Though there was no debating that the schools provide much support in general, there was a desire to see programs and initiatives narrowed to focus more on Black children and the unique needs of Black families. A couple of parents wanted to see the school do a better job explaining their school strategic plans and how they were linked to closing the achievement gap. Eden voiced that "once parents can see that the school is doing their part, it is easier to get on board." There was also a suggestion that the school conducts a parent survey to the parents of children identified as being in the achievement gap. "Asking parents whose children are affected the most will give you the best answers," emphasized Jackie. John says that once the school gives Black parents a voice and viable solutions, "it is up to us to use the programs and support than to help our children at home."

Socioeconomic status has long been thought of as a factor in parental involvement, with disadvantaged parents being less involved in their child's education. Denise sometimes feels that her lower-income negatively impacts her and her children's ability to be more involved in school activities, which can be stressful. She adds, "I don't have money for tutors, so I have to do more at home, which I don't always have time for." According to some parents, communication of the available support programs is also lacking. Eden is aware of extra assistance because she works in the school system; however, she notes, "most things are so hidden on websites that parents who do not know to search for it will never find it." Clearer lines of communication between the school and parents around needs and offerings would help remedy this disconnect.

Though efforts are continually being made to counter this narrative, it must also be recognized that not all Black parents who are minimally involved are socioeconomically

disadvantaged. Suzanne's perspective speaks to this when she says:

> I am not poor, and I live in the same gated community as the White people do. But I work a high-level job that requires my daytime and some nighttime hours. One thing that has been good with Covid-19 is that the school has had to move things to virtual. This means the tutoring is virtual, and the parent events are virtual. I just hope the school sees the value and keeps these things going in this format when everything is back to normal.

This thought process speaks to and debunks the notion that those active parents must also have a more significant financial advantage than parents who are not as active. Gloria and Suzanne both spoke that they do not need financial support from the school; they need a better understanding of how they help their children be more academically successful.

The majority of parents pointed out that the sheer nature of their being involved in this study showed that they cared about their child's education and that they wanted to be a part of the solution and not the problem. There were highlights of various supports that are already in both schools that the parents appreciated. These included free tutoring, after-school homework clubs, remediation, and extension website subscriptions provided by the PTA. The general communication from the schools was applauded, and no parent expressed feeling excluded from high-level knowledge. However, there was a desire for the individual teachers to provide support and become more aware of their treatment of Black students. This ties directly back into the need for increased proactive teacher communication.

Dorothy recalls that parents were not expected to do anything except send their children to school when she was raising her older children. As the years went on, she expected more ways to communicate that teachers would get better and offer more support to families. She goes on to say:

The teachers only call or email you if your child is in trouble. That's been happening for

decades, and it didn't work then, so why are they still doing it? When I get an email about

one of them, I answer it, but I only get them when somebody is failing. I ask what I can

do to help, and they never give me a solid answer. I am not the expert, and the expert

doesn't want to help, so what do I do with that?

Other participants had experienced similar trends, with teacher communication being mainly

reactive. Overall, there was a desire for a set of standards for teacher communication, including

response time, grading update intervals, and communication format. Teri suggested, "as soon as

a child begins to struggle, teachers should reach out to the parents. This could probably keep

them outside of the gap and get them back on track."

The implications that race has on the success of the Black student were brought up

throughout the various conversations and should not be overlooked or underestimated. There was

a spoken desire for the conversations to continue in ways that reach beyond this study. The

inclusion of a more diverse and culturally responsive curriculum is a starting point. "I chose to

go to an HBCU because I often felt misrepresented at my predominately white high school," says

Gloria. Denise recalled feeling conflicted as she weighed the idea of college, stating, "most of

the lessons and examples of success in school were White. It was hard for me to see myself." A

few of the parents who matriculated through college had similar experiences and stated that they

use themselves as examples of Black success for their children to emulate. However, this does

not negate the schools' responsibility to give all students more exposure to successful people of

color and their contributions to society. As pointed out by Dorothy, "we have to move past

Harriet Tubman and start talking about Kamala Harris. Show our children and other children that

being Black isn't a hindrance from greatness." A multi-cultural curriculum that helps Black

students see themselves as writers, scientists, and historians will help them feel more connected to the school and alleviate some of their parents' racial concerns.

Another suggestion of parents is for there to be teacher professional development around Black learners. Black parents feel that, for the most part, the teachers have good intentions, but it can also come off as being uncaring and unsympathetic to the plight of the Black student when nothing changes despite cries for change. Matthew explains:

It's like a self-fulfilling prophecy. The loudest voice telling the kids what they are going to be is what will happen. When the teachers don't feed them positive and uplifting things, everything we are doing at home gets drowned out. You have some teachers who just don't know how to talk to our Black kids or Black parents sometimes. You can't just come at us sideways.

Jackie expounded on this and suggested that any teacher can use it to enhance the classroom experience:

I have seen firsthand the implicit racism that exists in the classroom, things like giving the Black kids the smaller novels or not recommending them for the advanced classes. They make them feel like they are not entitled to be challenged, and that gets embedded in their minds forever. Black kids need to feel like they are safe to go above and beyond and that the teachers support it and will help them.

Lindsey expressed that "Black children have enough odds stacked against them," to which Teri added, "teachers have no excuse for not knowing how to deal with Black students. There are too many resources available nowadays." Dorothy conveyed that "we don't want special treatment for our children; we just want them to have a fighting chance to succeed." All parents desired the school district to work more closely with the state on finding a way to adequately fund the

professional development needed at the school level to help teachers learn more ways to reach the Black children to experience monumental gains in achievement.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings of a collective case study that included individual interviews with 10 parents, a focus group with 7 parents, and historical document analysis. An overview was given of the experiences and perceptions of each participant. Data analysis took place, from whence the following themes emerged: (1) teacher/parent communication, (2) mutual responsibility between home and school, and (3) parental support at home. Finally, I concluded the chapter by responding to the research questions. The study results were relayed using narratives and direct, verbatim quotes from participants—this technique allowed for the participants' unique voices to be heard.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this collective case study was to query Black parents of Black students at Harris Middle School and Sims High School about their perception of their roles in addressing the Black student achievement gap in their school district. In this chapter, I summarize the findings in this study that answer the research questions. I then discuss these findings' relevance and implications, considering the chosen theoretical frameworks and empirical literature. Finally, there is a review of study delimitations and limitations, followed by recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

This study used the qualitative methodology in the form of a collective case study to explore the participants' perceptions, who are Black parents of Black students. Examination of the guiding research questions was gathered from 10 parents in individual interviews and 7 parents in the focus group session; there was also a historical document review of all participants' volunteer activity at their child's school. Data analysis took place using pattern matching logic and matching the theoretical assumptions with concepts and ideas uncovered during the research phase (Sincovics, 2018). The following three themes emerged from the data analysis process: (1) teacher/parent communication, (2) mutual responsibility between home and school, and (3) parental support at home.

In answer to the first research question, *What do parents of Black children identify as their roles in their children's education?* the participants described the varying ways they offer support for their children during their educational journey. The level of at-school involvement tended to lessen with middle and high school parents, though they still felt it was necessary to be

active and visible, maintaining the connection between home and school. The majority of the participants saw themselves as another element of a collaborative effort with the school. The participants called for more accountability of themselves and other parents to ensure that they are reinforcing at home what is being taught in school and providing their students with the needed support to be successful. Matthew says that schools should "make parents hold their end of the deal. If they aren't doing it, then let them know, but also give them some tools to help them do better in the future."

In answer to the second research question, *How do parents of Black children perceive the effect that their involvement has on their children's academic success or failure?* participants noted that many Black children deal with racial divides within the school that undermine their academic success, putting them at serious disadvantages that can be lifelong. The participants unanimously agreed that their involvement directly affects their child's success or eventual failure in school. Parents attributed much of the misidentification of the word *involvement* to a lack of cultural understanding of how Blacks and Whites differ in their children's support. Eden says that "parents have to be vocal and remain an advocate for their child," with others agreeing and John pointing out that "increased support at home can change any child's story and lead to success."

In answer to the third and final research question, *What additional support do parents of Black children need to facilitate better learning for their children?* many of the participants felt a *squeaky wheel gets the oil* mentality in their schools. They did not like that the parents who are not setting a good example for involvement or the students who are deemed troublemakers are the ones around whom the school builds their supports. There is a desire for more support in cultural cognizance, which could include enhanced teacher education around the area of learning

styles of Black children. A sentiment amongst most parents was also that schools reach out in a proactive and action-oriented way to find out how Black parents of Black students want to be supported. Dorothy says, "parent conversation seems to be taken for granted," and Lindsey added, "everyone might be surprised at how much better things could get for our kids if we would put our feelings to the side and realize that we are all on the same team." This may eliminate the stereotyping that has historically taken place and allow them to get on a path towards academic success for the Black children.

Discussion

This section begins with applying the results to the theoretical and empirical literature defined in Chapter Two. There is also an analysis of how this study can extend previous research and add to the body of knowledge surrounding the minority achievement gap. Intertwined in each part of the discussion are the three themes that emerged from this study: (1) teacher/parent communication, (2) mutual responsibility between home and school, and (3) parental support at home.

Theoretical Discussion

The frameworks guiding this study were Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism and Frederickson's (2010) social equity theories. For this study, social constructivism was used to examine the participants' lived experiences and their associated, subjective realities (Bottiani et al., 2017; Vygotsky, 1978). Adding to this was the idea presented by social equity theory that a positive parent-child relationship at home increases the likelihood of higher student academic success (Carpenter et al., 2006; Reeves & Howard, 2016). The resulting data in this study confirmed the connection between higher parental involvement and academic success.

Social constructivism theory (Vygotsky, 1978) is heavily focused on multiple, subjective realities that take place over time and shape an individual's perception. This study revealed that much of how parents view their roles in narrowing the achievement gap and subsequently their Black child's success is a combination of their own academic experiences and how they feel when communicating with their child's school. Based on data derived from the individual interviews and the focus group conducted with this study, it can be concluded that the social constructivism theory components are directly linked to the identified themes. For example, participants who felt that they were not receiving adequate communication and support from the school had a more negative view of the school's role in narrowing the achievement gap and believe that more needs to be done. On the other hand, many of the participants that have more positive experiences with their child's school believe that the school is doing an adequate job and that they – the parent – have to step up and do more if needed. Neither of these perceptions is exclusive and could be altered if looking at the parent's self-motivation to reach out and be more proactively involved with the school.

Social constructivism also applies directly to the parent's perception of the achievement gap based on motivation. Vygotsky (1978) posits that motivation plays a crucial role in the success and stems from a sociocultural level. The participants in this study revealed through their conversations that they see extrinsic motivation as a responsibility of theirs and that it is a driving force in the academic achievement of Black children. Eden relays that her son has always enjoyed the "cash for A's," and Jackie mentioned the need to "give children something to look forward to when they get good grades. A prize is always in order." These external motivations can be bolstered through the use of extrinsic motivations, such as parents or teachers praising the completion of a task, thereby bolstering the child's ego and confidence (Vygotsky, 1978).

Social equity theory applies to this study in that every student should be receiving equal opportunities regardless of their situation or circumstances (Carpenter et al., 2006; Goss, 2017). The study revealed a close relationship between parental involvement and signal influences, which are the negative stereotypes of a particular group and how it affects their capabilities (McKown, 2013). For example, when teachers are implicit in their bias of Black students and their classroom abilities, it is passed on to the student and can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Dorothy recalled an event in which her son was told by the teacher that she "did not have high hopes" and that "nothing is wrong with being an average student." Dorothy is still working to "reprogram him to act on more positive thoughts and higher expectations." The study participants demonstrated through their conversations and experiences that when parents are more involved in positive talk and encouraging their child to succeed, the negativities can become less relevant. Another example of social equity theory application in this study was that Black students often experience an imbalance of rewards based on their performance. The participants expressed that when they noticed this happening with their children, it is a clear signal that they need to take a more active role, which includes enhanced and more frequent communication with the teacher. Eden believed that "the earlier clarification communication happens, the better. Listen to your child and believe them when they tell you something seems unfair." John added on by stating that "talking about what happens in class can help you see if there is equal treatment happening. When it is not, explore it further to see why." These actions are needed steps towards narrowing the achievement gap that plagues the Black students in this district.

Empirical Discussion

In addition to the theoretical connections, there are also empirical connections to the studied body of literature. This study adds to academic research about Black parents' role in narrowing the minority achievement gap. Numerous quantitative studies have examined the who, what, and why of responsibility around the achievement gap, but there are limited qualitative studies. Rowley and Wright (2011) conducted a quantitative study using timed writing and math tests to examine Black and White student scores' statistical differences. Their focus was on the school and teachers' impact and less on family accountability (Rowley & Wright, 2011). On the other hand, Crowe (2013) sought to show that parental involvement was a key driver in student success and narrowing the Black achievement gap through his quantitative study using Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME) Inventory with middle school parents. Looking at student responsibility and accountability for the gap was researchers Jiang and Zhang (2012) who found through their quantitative investigation of middle school students that student motivation and self-efficacy were essential for their school success.

Historically, the burden of responsibility has been placed on teachers and schools (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016; Fenton et al., 2017; Hipp, 2018); however, this study showed that many parents feel that they too have a vital role in this endeavor. The study participants describe their role as proactive and a continuation of what is done by the school's teachers and staff. However, many factors go into the way that the parent roles are defined. A discussion took place around their child's education involvement to define the roles the participants play in reducing the minority achievement gap. The majority of parents reported that they were involved, but this ranged from attending school activities and volunteering extra time at the school to checking homework and focusing energy on the at-home aspect of their child's education. A major driving

force in the parents' involvement level was the school's welcoming attitude and whether they felt

a sense of belonging.

In contrast, for others, it was their availability of time to offer to the school. Regardless of

the reasoning for their involvement, or lack thereof, participants believed that the achievement

gap could affect their child. Therefore, they must work closely with the school to help find ways

to narrow the gap.

Implications

The purpose of this section is to address the theoretical, empirical, and practical

implications of the findings of this study. The recommendations presented are applicable for

classroom teachers, school-based administrators, and parents. These implications can help each

of the stakeholders mentioned above in this school district and generalized to fit other districts.

Theoretical Implications

This study's theoretical framework was based on social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978)

and social equity theory (Frederickson, 2010). This study used these theories to explore Black

parents' perceptions of their role in narrowing the achievement gap with Black students. It was

discovered that their role included them being involved at the school and in the home, which

tended to trend their student towards more academic success and a decrease in the achievement

gap at their school. After reviewing the literature and conducting the research, the connections to

this work and the chosen theories became much clearer.

Social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) sees knowledge as a collaborative effort, and for

this study, the collaboration includes teachers, students, and parents. The learning level that

occurs with a student is emphasized by the individuals who offer the most guidance throughout

the process. When there is an achievement gap between groups of students in the same school

and with the same teachers, there has to be a more concentrated effort to determine the knowledge gap source. The parents throughout this study were confident in their belief that to reduce learning disparities, teachers have a role in instilling the content and that parents have the role of reinforcing this content and providing the emotional support that their child needs to be as successful as their White peers. When these roles are performed well, the implications are that Black students will be more likely to take an active interest in their educational journey with this added support.

The implications of the social equity theory (Frederickson, 2010) in this study are far-reaching. The achievement gap exists, in part, because Black students do not always receive the same educational opportunities and resources as White students, therefore their overall academic success rates trend lower (Carpenter et al., 2006). This is not always something that can be easily undone in the school system, as teachers and school administrators are not always aware of how to tackle the social, cultural, and economic conditions that cause the disparities. However, this study has shown that when Black parents are intimately involved in their child's education, seeking out ways to provide the needed support, they will begin to see their student excel. The implication that the direct influence of Black parents and their involvement on their Black children cannot be undermined and has to be taken into consideration when looking at how to narrow the achievement gap.

Empirical Implications

The most significant factors in a child's academic success are socioeconomic status, familial background, and parental support level (Coleman et al., 1966; McKown, 2013; Oates, 2017). Research also shows that Black children who lack parental involvement in their schools often lack academic motivation and, in turn, have lower test scores (Deniz Can & Ginsburg-

Block, 2016; McKown, 2013). This study focused on the perception of Black parents of Black students, and my findings provide further evidence to support these statements and provide a link to this study's purpose.

The parents in my study all had high expectations of their children, though there were varying degrees of involvement and support to help them reach these expectations. I also discovered that parents who expressed they were more involved generally reported that their students had higher academic performance. This involvement included volunteering at the school, attending after-school events, and even having their children become more involved in extracurricular activities and clubs. By the end of the study, all parents agreed that the achievement gap affects their child, be it directly or indirectly and that they had an obligation to play a more active role in decreasing the gap before it was too late.

Practical Implications

Participants in this study were selected because they were Black parents of Black students who attended school at either Harris Middle School or Sims High School. The responses obtained from the participants shed light on the reasons for parent involvement and participation at their child's school, as well as the lack thereof. There was also useful insight into the parents' understanding of the achievement gap and how they play a role in its widening or narrowing. Parents have always been one of the most influential components of a child's educational success. With the current pandemic closing school buildings and children learning virtually, this has placed an even more significant burden on the parents in the home. Schools have had to rediscover ways to build connectedness and strengthen their parent communication. Parents have also been allowed to see and hear their children in school in real-time. This at-home time has

been revealing to some parents as they recognize their child's weaknesses and strengths and their school.

Data analysis of the individual interviews and focus group revealed that increased parental involvement in narrowing the achievement gap is a desire of the participants. However, as the interviews and focus group progressed, many realized that they were not as truly involved as they initially thought. They also seek to feel more welcomed and supported by teachers and school staff as they endeavor to be more involved. Being a part of a school community where their Black child feels represented and their needs are understood is paramount. Addressing these changes can be a driving catalyst in improving relations and promoting academic motivation and success among Black students affected by the achievement gap.

I believe some recommendations can help repair some of the broken relationships between school and home, setting the wheels of change into motion. One recommendation would be for schools to examine more nontraditional ways to involve Black parents. This would require reaching out to these parents to query their preference for communication and to see in what ways they feel most comfortable participating. An additional recommendation would be for the schools to put a concentrated effort into ensuring that their school has a warm, welcoming, and caring school climate. Many Black parents reported that when they feel like the school is genuinely concerned about their Black child's well-being, they are happier and more satisfied with the holistic education. Constant, positive communication is an ongoing suggestion for schools and parents. Setting the tone early in the school year is essential, followed by proactive communication throughout the year. The key is not to wait until too long to contact parents with bad news. At that point, communication tends to break down, and the parents become more defensive, which does not help solve the problem.

Delimitations and Limitations

This collective case study included purposeful delimitations and unintentional limitations. The delimitations were chosen by me, as the researcher, regarding the boundaries for things such as setting and participant demographics. The limitations were weaknesses that were uncontrollable and uncovered throughout the study.

Delimitations

Delimitations for this study were the setting and the participants that were chosen. The study's setting was Harris Middle School and Sims High School, two public schools located in a medium-sized suburban school district in Virginia. This setting was chosen because it has a strategic goal focused on developing effective strategies for closing the minority achievement gap in all of its schools (Virginia Department of Education, 2017). The participants were chosen using purposeful sampling, which relies on participants' ability to answer the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The sample demographics were parents with the following characteristics: currently have Black children enrolled in the studied public school district in Virginia and have high or low participation and involvement at their child's school. This demographic's purpose was to solicit input from across different grade levels and varying participation levels at school.

Limitations

This study's limitations were the format for the individual interviews and focus group and the number of contacted parents who were willing to participate in the study. Since there is currently a global pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not feasible; therefore, everything was done on the web conferencing platform, Zoom. This presented some technology challenges for some of the parents, and during the focus groups, some chose not to turn on their cameras. This

caused a bit of disconnect due to the lack of nonverbal cues that are useful when having conversations. Fewer parents than desired were willing to participate due to their uncertainty with the format used and their current feelings regarding learning since it has been virtual for 10 months.

An additional limitation was an initial sample size that was too small. Of the 12 parents who were asked to participate, only 9 agreed in the first round of requests; there was a need for a minimum of 10 for the study. One parent agreed to participate later, but her schedule did not clear until after the focus group had been held. The individual interview was held with her one month after the others, yet her input was still incorporated into the final study results and analysis.

Recommendations for Future Research

Previous studies have looked at the achievement gap and what role the school plays in addressing it, and the correlation with the student's socioeconomic status. Some studies point to the lack of parental support and involvement as a significant reason for the consistent achievement gap (Biag, 2016; Reynolds et al., 2014). However, few studies look directly at the Black parents' perceptions of their specific role in addressing the achievement gap that affects their student, whether it be direct or indirect. This study aimed to focus on the parents' perception regarding their role in narrowing this gap. This study offered them an outlet to vocalize their experiences and offer insight into the role they feel they should play and any hindrances they have experienced so far in being more involved with their child's education.

Considering the delimitations and limitations and subsequent data findings from this study, I recommend that this study be repeated, using the same methodology, with parents from other schools to gauge their perceptions. This could occur in districts with similar achievement

gaps to correlate findings or those with differing achievement gaps, such as those with lower achievement gaps, to discover if their parents' involvement and perception of roles differ. I would also recommend expanding the study to Black parents of Black elementary school students in the same district. Some research has shown that there are more parental involvement and narrower achievement gaps during the elementary years, but it begins to wane, and the gap again widens between middle and high school (Brace, 2011; Oates, 2017; Reynolds et al., 2014). This recommended expansion would allow an opportunity to see if there is a lapse within the same school cluster once students leave elementary school and matriculate through middle and high school.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study was to understand the perspectives of Black children's parents regarding their roles in addressing the Black student achievement gap in their Virginia school district. This study's theoretical frameworks were social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and social equity (Frederickson, 2010). The central question for the study was, "How can Black parents be more involved in closing the achievement gap between Black and White students?" The three guiding research questions were: (1) What do parents of Black children identify as their roles in their children's education? (2) How do parents of Black children perceive the effect that their involvement has on their children's academic success or failure? (3) What additional support do parents of Black children need to facilitate better learning for their children? Participant data came from 10 individual interviews, a focus group with seven parents, and a historical document review. Following the data collection process, thorough data analysis took place using pattern matching logic, coding, memoing, and an interpretation of verbatim transcripts.

The themes that emerged from this study were: (1) teacher/parent communication, (2) mutual responsibility between home and school, and (3) parental support at home. The major takeaway from this study was that the parents of Black students desire to see their students excel and want the school's assistance to make this happen. Another takeaway is that parent involvement plays a contributing role in the academic success of Black students. One recommendation for future research includes repeating the study in various school districts, both with similar achievement gaps and those with different gaps. Another recommendation is to conduct research with Black parents of Black elementary students to determine if there are similar sentiments in those grade levels. The impact of this study is that it has allowed participants to express their viewpoints on what parent involvement looks like, and it guides them towards finding solutions to working with the school to narrow the achievement gap.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 31, 2020

Jennifer McCluney
Rebecca Bowman

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY20-21-153 A case study of the perspectives of Black children's parents regarding their role in addressing the achievement gap

Dear Jennifer McCluney, Rebecca Bowman:

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: December 31, 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: SITE APPROVAL LETTER

[Insert Date]

[Recipient]

Principal

[Name of School]

[Address 1]

[Address 2]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am researching as part

of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The title of my research project is "A case

study of the perspectives of Black children's parents when it comes to their role in addressing the

achievement gap," and the purpose of my research is to conduct a collective case study that

obtains the parental perspective pursuant to addressing the Black student achievement gap in

their child's school.

I am writing to request your permission to work with a designated official at your school to

contact parents of Black students in your school, inviting them to participate in my research

study. Participants will be asked to speak with me in an individual interview and participate in a

focus group. Participants will be presented with informed consent information before

participating. Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary, and participants are welcome to

discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please email a signed statement on the official letterhead indicating your approval to jmccluney2@liberty.edu. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Harris

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant:

The following information is being provided for you to decide whether you are willing and able to participate in the outlined study. Please be aware that participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Any decision to withdraw will not affect your relationship with this department, the instructor, the researcher, or Liberty University (LU).

Study Purpose: The purpose of this collective case study is to understand the perspectives of Black children's parents regarding their roles in addressing the Black student achievement gap in their Virginia school district.

Participant Requirements: Data collection for this study will be in the form one on one interviews, and a focus group. To aid in the collection of data, all conversations will be audio and video recorded. Individuals involved in the data collection will be the researcher and participants in the study, which includes other parents. Final research results will be shared with you; however, no actual names will be used to protect the confidentiality of all participants.

Risks and benefits: There are no known risks associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are the ability to give your opinion and perception of the achievement gap, as well as the opportunity to participate in a qualitative case study.

Compensation: You will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality: Your responses will be kept confidential. The reporting of the results of the study will be presented in such a way as not to identify you. The electronic recording of the interview will be password protected by the researcher.

Right to Withdraw: You are free to refuse to participate in the research and to withdraw from this study at any time. Your decision to withdraw will result in no penalty to you.

Questions: If you have any questions, I can be contacted at jmccluney2@liberty.edu. Please sign this consent form with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures of this study as outlined above. This consent also explicitly allows the researcher to keep an audio record of all interviews.

You will be provided with a signed copy of this consent form before the commencement of the study.

Date: _____

Signature of participant: _____

Printed name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

<div style="text-align:center">Jennifer Harris, Candidate for Ed.D., Liberty University</div>

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

Date of interview:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Description: The purpose of this project is to obtain the perspectives of the parents of Black children regarding their role in addressing the achievement gap in their child's school. It is hoped that by speaking with the parents of these students, a better understanding will be gained from the personal perspective of the parent and obtain further insight into how to address this achievement gap. The following questions will be asked to aid in this study:

1. Please introduce yourself and provide some background about your family.

2. Tell me about your children.

3. How have their academic grades changed over the past few years?

4. How often do you hear from your child's teacher?

5. In what way do you receive most of the communication from your child's teacher?

6. What are some ways that the school or the teacher has tried to involve you in your child's education?

7. How involved are you at your child's school?

8. What effect do you believe your involvement in your child's educational journey has on their success or failure?

9. What have been effective methods used by the school to improve parental involvement?

10. What more could be done by the school to improve parental involvement?

11.   One of the focuses of this study is the achievement gap between Black and White

        students. Can you please describe for me in your own words what you believe that

        means?

12.   How do you believe this gap affects your student, directly or indirectly?

13.   Who do you believe is most responsible for closing this gap in achievement? Why?

14.   That concludes the questions that I had for you. Is there anything else that you would

        like to mention?

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What grade is your child in, and how long have they been in their school?

2. What do you like about your child's school?

3. What do you dislike about your child's school?

4. How do you feel when you are at your child's school?

5. What do you do at home to prepare your child to do well in school?

6. What would motivate you to become more involved in your child's education?

7. What challenges do you face in your efforts to become more involved in your child's education?

8. What are some ways that schools could support parents when it comes to strengthening the academic performance of Black students?

9. I have asked many questions up until this point. I would now like to open the floor for additional comments. Is there anything else that anyone would like to mention before we conclude?

APPENDIX F: OTHER DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The researcher will obtain rosters and participation/attendance records from the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), volunteer events and meetings held within the schools. Notes will be taken from any meeting minutes to define the parental involvement of any parents participating in the case study. The researcher will also be making audio recordings of the individual interviews and focus group sessions. The purpose is to be able to transcribe the notes and observations later. An agenda of topics will be developed and adhered to during the focus group to stay on subject and within a specific time limit (no more than a 90-minute session). Each participant will be limited to a 2 minute speak time per turn to allow the opportunity for all in the group to express their opinions. Ten minutes will be allocated at the end of the session for open-talk and questions.