

CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP IN AFFLUENT SUBURBAN
SCHOOLS:
WHAT SEEMS TO BE MISSING IN THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY?

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ABSTRACT

There is a gap in achievement between African American/Black and Latinx students and their White counterparts. An abundance of researchers has concluded that it is a result of a gap in opportunities of access. Some researchers have shifted the conversation from achievement gap to opportunity gap. In the discussion and creation around school policies used to address the opportunity gap that exist in affluent suburban school districts, the exchange between school and student cultures seldomly receive attention because they are hard to measure, and interventions that may stem from their results are not necessarily generalizable (Carter, 2013). This study attempts to unveil the perceptions that Black and Latinx students who attend predominately White affluent suburban schools have regarding access to tangible and intangible resources and opportunities. Through the lens of students, insight into the feelings, beliefs, and identity, of Black and Latinx students toward education and the disparities of academic achievement in predominately White affluent suburban schools will be highlighted.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Growing up, I was number three among seven children, being raised in a three-bedroom apartment by a mother and father who both only completed high school. As a young African American/Black boy, those in the neighborhood, or those who went to school with me, looked like me or similar to me being of Latino descent. Although we all grew up in a similar environment, I still had an advantage in comparison to many. Having a father in my life has set me apart from many of my colleagues at the time. That alone has provided me with an extra resource that I could utilize to navigate the world that we were living in; one that was filled with hardship, oppression, and inequalities. Receiving advice such as “drink milk, it will make you big and strong”, “you can do anything you put your mind to with hard work and determination”, or even “if do well in school life will be a lot easier”, I thought I had the blueprint of being able to compete with anyone in this world as long as I was strong and worked hard. As my journey through life continued and I proceeded through middle school, high school, into college, and further into my career, I quickly realized that that advice given to me as a child was simply not true.

With six siblings in all, it would be my younger brother Guylan who I was closest to, being just about three years apart in age. My brother always looked up to me striving to do whatever I did, whether it be physically, socially, or academically. Being that my siblings and I were all raised by the same mother and father he received the same advice that I did growing up, “you can do anything that you put your mind to with hard work and determination...etc.”. He, as did I, and the rest of my siblings worked hard in school

with dreams of one day being better off than our current situation. Even among all of the hard work and determination that we all put in, it just so happened that I was given scholarships and opportunities to various educational summer programs each year for inner city students that “showed academic promise”. These various opportunities were made available to me from Kindergarten all the way well into middle school. My brother on the other hand, who had a higher IQ than I, and worked just as hard, missed those opportunities and resources due to various circumstances such as a lack of grant funding, the discontinuation of programs, the educational philosophy changing, etc. These missed opportunities held my brother complacent among our neighborhood environment and the resources that it had available to assist him in achieving. Due to my abilities in these summer programs I was granted an opportunity to attend a suburban middle school that was predominately White and contained better resources and opportunities than that of my neighborhood middle school. Once again, unfortunately my brother and all my siblings were forced to attend the neighborhood school which consisted of a majority underprivileged Black and Latinx student population, and inequitable resources.

Throughout middle school, although culture shocked, I was able to learn how to navigate a “privileged world”. Simply by attending this suburban school, social and academic services and opportunities were available such as overnight camping trips through the school environment club, studying abroad in Japan, receiving extra credit on assignments for typing them up on a computer (which was a luxury at the time), having a teacher tutor, even having the ability to buy Pizza Hut pizza and other delicacies for lunch, etc. These were resources and opportunities that many students and families would

be elated and privileged to have. Although I was able to navigate this “privileged world”, and even was able to gain access to some resources, for many resources and opportunities I was restricted. The internal battle of who I was (e.g. do I belong here?) and what was appropriate or acceptable (e.g. do they accept me?) was on going. Many times I did not have the money to go on trips or study abroad, many times I did not feel comfortable joining clubs or having a teacher tutor, especially when they did not look like me or could identify to my life. Many times, I could not even receive extra credit on assignments, because I had no computer to type on, or printer to print. I could not even stay after school to use the computer lab, because I would miss the bus and have no way home. But, even with all these resources and opportunities that I was exposed to, although many not being available to me or taken advantaged of I still fared better than my brother who could not even relate to my possibilities.

The two separate experiences that my brother and I had in access to resources and opportunities throughout our academic careers have set us on two opposite academic and life trajectories that will eventually play out. Fast-forwarding to college, my mother and father were always determined to make sure that all of my siblings and I would at least make it into college, because it was one step past what they knew how to do, which was graduate high school. I went on to complete my bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and attain several certifications while currently pursuing my doctorate, as my brother barely finished high school, and dropped out of college after three years stating, “it’s just not for me”.

Since graduating, I started working in the inner city as an elementary school teacher for six years. I was trying to reach kids at a young age and support other Black and Latinx students who may be experiencing some of the same hardships that I have experienced growing up. I have tried to provide resources and opportunities to even the playing field and instill some of the knowledge that I have acquired navigating a “privileged academic and social environment” in hopes that one day it may assist them. I felt it was my job to educate young Black and Latinx students to operate and navigate in a world that is unfamiliar to them. In my mind it was imperative to teach those students how to adapt to the world of those who were “privileged”, so that they would one day be accepted and valued by those who do not necessarily share the same academic and social experiences but yet dictate what is considered “right and acceptable” in society.

After growing as an educator and as a person in general, and learning a little more of how the world works, I felt a better chance of supporting Black and Latinx students was not to educate them as a minority in how to operate in a privileged world of the majority, but rather to educate the privileged world of the majority on the hardships and inequities of the minority. To do this, I took a new job as an elementary school teacher in a predominately White affluent suburban school district where I have been teaching for the past eight years. I knew that while working in the inner city, particularly where most students were Black and Latinx, and lived in poverty, it was the students who were persecuted with inequitable resources and opportunities. If I moved to work in the predominately White affluent suburbs than it would be I as the only African American male teacher among a privileged staff and student body that would be persecuted through

racial implicit and explicit biases that many of the dominate culture possessed. I believed that at least in this new environment, Black and Latinx students would already be a step ahead in accessing valuable resources and opportunities.

To my surprise, even while attempting to educate the privileged majority on the inequities of many Black and Latinx students, I have come to realize that even Black and Latinx students in these environments whether they have come from “privileged upbringings” or not seemed to either continue to have limited access to resources and opportunities or choose not to take advantage of them. To support access to some of these resources and opportunities, I along with a colleague of mine decided to volunteer and create a free educational program for Black and Latinx students geared toward raising achievement levels and closing the gap between Black and Latinx students and their White counterparts.

In creating this program, we were supported by the school district at first and even provided a limited amount of funds for snacks and a few supplies for the students, along with bus transportation back home as this was an afterschool program. The program maintained 100% participation from all students who were targeted which encompassed Black and Latinx students from grades 3 through 5 consisting of regular education, as well as special education students (gifted and learning support). Across the board, all student participants’ test scores have risen in at least one core subject area while in the program, showing the academic promise that these students had when accessing resources and taking advantage of opportunities.

The program was highlighted for its excellence and student growth among the school district's school board and was supported for two years by the school district. Among the second year, the district began receiving complaints from the parents of White students due to their lack of access to the program. Halfway through the year a new district led program was created and open to all students, but predominately occupied by White students. This new program focused on the same curriculum as our current program, and was fully funded, except for transportation, and included a stipend for teacher facilitators. At the same time the district launched this new program it rescinded all limited funding for our program, along with transportation that was provided. This led to the lack of access for most participants, and to my partner and I discontinuing the program.

Five years later, the district led program continues to exist district wide with the vast majority of participants continuing to be that of White students. In trying to encourage Black and Latinx students to join the program, many express the lack of transportation, the lack of comfortability in joining the program, or a simple lack of interest, as leading reasons in not participating. Among the Black and Latinx students who originally participated in my partner and I's program many ask about how the program is currently doing or ask to volunteer with the new students in the program not knowing it ceases to exist. Other previous members now take advance courses in high school around the programs subject of study and have joined outside academic organizations (e.g. National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE)). In speaking with these

students, they contribute a large part of their academic interests, success, and current trajectory to that initial access in opportunity, in joining our program.

It is my belief that like these young Black and Latinx students, the ability to access valuable resources and opportunities may be what motivates and causes a student to “succeed” academically. This motivation may lead to a successful academic and even life trajectory as in what I have experienced. The lack of access to resources and missed opportunities may adversely lead to the opposite, causing many Black and Latinx students to face continued academic hardships and inequities, and eventually an unfavorable trajectory, like that of my brother.

Black and Latinx Educational Hardships

Generally, African American (Black) and Latinx students face many challenges that are brought about through a myriad of social, cultural, socioeconomic, and historical factors. These factors have affected different groups in the United States in different ways and continue to play major roles in all parts of society today, including education. History has shown that for Blacks and Latinos, being treated equally and equitably in comparison to their White counterparts has at many times and in many ways been deemed challenging. School is a place where these challenges play out and are reinforced. Various people and organizations have attempted to address these challenges or have studied these phenomena. In doing so, various approaches have been taken such as looking through the lens of culture (Banks, 1998; Ogbu, 1998, 2003, 2008; MoCombe, 2011; Matthews, Banerjee, & Laueramann, 2014), socioeconomics (Anyon, 2005; Rothstein, 2004, 2013), student achievement (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Ladson-

Billings, 2006; Howard, 2010; Irvine, 2003) as well as the gaps in opportunity (Carter & Prudence, 2013; Diamond, 2006; Klopfenstein, 2004; Milner, 2012). The purpose of this study is to understand Black and Latinx students' perception of their achievement in comparison to their White counterparts.

The Challenge to Succeed for Black and Latinx Students

Black and Latinx students face many unique obstacles during their academic careers. These students, on average, attain lower levels of academic achievement compared to their White counterparts. Trends in the data have shown that White students have consistently outperformed Black and Latinx students on standardized assessments (NCES, 2016-2017). According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (2016), there is a gap in achievement that exists between Black and Latinx students and their White counterparts in K-12, with White students on average achieving 20 to 30 percent higher on assessments in math and reading. While the gap in achievement has fluctuated, Black and Latinx students have never achieved at the same level as White students. Although some may argue that the ways in which academic achievement is measured are subjective and oftentimes not a reliable indication of academic ability, these measures play an important role in the distribution of opportunities in US society (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012). For example, measures such as GPAs, and SATs, are used as major criteria for admissions into colleges and universities. The lower scores of Black and Latinx students adversely affect their opportunities to gaining access to competitive programs.

To raise the academic achievement of Black and Latinx students and in the long-term support their societal advancement, these students must have access to competitive programs and other opportunities at all educational levels (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012). Carter and Welner (2013) found that disparities in education and intergenerational economic inequality are highly correlated with skin color, ethnicity, linguistic, and social class status. The longer that lower social class groups are denied equal access to opportunities, the more inequality has compounded the adverse effects on these groups. Unequal access to opportunities in education may lead to the underachievement of Black and Latinx students. Further, this gap in opportunities provides a misperception of students' true abilities and denies the students opportunities to a better future. The gap in achievement between Black and Latinx students and their White counterparts, although usually discussed in the context of low socioeconomic urban settings, is likewise evident in affluent suburban settings (Diamond, 2006; Milner, 2012).

The Underachievement of Black and Latinx Students

Extensive research exists on the underachievement of Black and Latinx students in comparison to White students in low socioeconomic, urban settings where large populations of Black and Latinx students reside. The gaps in student achievement between Black and Latinx students and their White counterparts are glaring and evident in low socioeconomic urban settings (Noguera, 2008). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) long-term trend in 2008, the average nine-year-old reading score of White students was 228 in comparison to Black students at 204 and Latinx students at 207 (Boykin and Noguera, 2011). This shows an average deficit of

-24 for Blacks and -21 for Latinx students in comparison to their White counterparts. This trend is captured in the main NAEP (2007) among 8th grade math achievement as well, showing White students averaging a score of 290 compared to Black students averaging 259 and Latinx students scoring 264, highlighting an achievement gap of -31 between Black and White students and -26 between Latinx and White students. In affluent, suburban schools, where Black and Latinx students outperform their urban peers (Diamond, 2006; Noguera & Wing, 2011; Ogbu, 2003; Rothstein, 2013), there is still a gap in student achievement and outcomes in comparison to their White counterparts (Carter & Welner, 2013; Diamond, 2006). While researchers have identified providing more resources for Black and Latinx students to close the gap in achievement, the continued presence of an achievement gap in affluent districts highlights that simply attending a school with more resources although may close the achievement gap some; will not totally close the Black/ Latinx and White achievement gap (Diamond, 2006, Ferguson, 2002; Milner, 2012). There must be other factors at play in these environments that assist in maintaining the gap in achievement between Black and Latinx students and their White counterparts.

In this study, I examine Black and Latinx students' experiences attending a predominately White affluent suburban school and their perceptions regarding achievement and access to equal and equitable opportunities in comparison to their White counterparts. Specifically, I highlight Black and Latinx student's perceptions toward access to resources and opportunities and display which resources and opportunities they perceive as valuable to their academic success.

In the following sections I provide a foundation for the purpose of this study. I begin by presenting insight into a national attempt to close the achievement gap between Black and Latinx students, and their White counterparts. I then review the arguments supported by some scholars alluding to the shift of focus from student outcomes in the “achievement gap” to observing the root causes of the gap in opportunities or the “opportunity gap”. Next, I describe the perceived opportunities existing in affluent suburban schools and follow with a look into some disparities which exist in predominately White affluent suburban schools for Black and Latinx students, that may perpetuate the opportunity gap. The disparities toward Black and Latinx students presented may reside in some predominately White affluent suburban schools, but many times do not stem from predominately White affluent suburban schools. Subsequently, I then provide a look into the opportunity gaps that are present in predominately White affluent suburban schools that are either created by or supported by some of these disparities. Following an overview of opportunity gaps in predominately White affluent suburban schools, I then discuss how Black and Latinx students navigate success amongst these schools.

Purpose of This Study

In some predominately White affluent suburban school districts, which are perceived to be “rich” in resources and opportunities for students, the racial gap in achievement continues to exist. One possibility in addressing the disparities, is in the access to resources and opportunities that exist. The shift in the nation’s educational agenda to focus on the effort to close the racial gap in achievement suggests that

prevailing beliefs about race in the United States may be shifting. Research has also disproven the assumption that Black and Latinx students are intellectually inferior to White students, suggesting that differences in achievement might be the product of social experiences (Noguera, 2008). The continuance of the racial gap in achievement between Black and Latinx students, and their White counterparts suggests that regardless of how the existence of the gap is explained, the relationship between race and students' achievement remains largely coupled (Noguera, 2008). This highlights the need for greater focus on Black and Latinx students' disparities.

Regardless of the reasons Black and Latinx students in some predominately White affluent suburban schools do not have access to resources and opportunities, the fact of the matter is that there are opportunity gaps that continue to exist in these environments. Through this study, I examined two things: 1) What are Black and Latinx students' perceptions toward achieving at the same levels as their White counterparts? 2) Do Black and Latinx students perceive themselves as having access to the same resources as their White peers? a) If Black and Latinx students do perceive to have access to the same resources as their White peers, do they use them effectively? b) What resources do Black and Latinx students identify as important to their academic and personal success?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study I look at the perceptions that Black and Latinx students attending a predominately White affluent suburban school have regarding achievement and access to resources and opportunities. In this chapter, I will provide a conceptual framework that will assist as a guide in which to view the study results. I will then walk through previous theories and studies around the complexities of the achievement gap, the opportunity gap, and further, the attempt to provide insight into the perceptions of Black and Latinx students who attend a predominately White affluent suburban school in order to better understand the gap in achievement and opportunity as they see it.

Conceptual Framework

This study is informed by an opportunity gap explanatory framework created by Milner (2012). The framework consists of five (5) precepts that are interconnected and can be utilized as an analytic tool to explain the gaps in opportunity (Milner, 2012). The precepts consist of color blindness, cultural conflicts, myth meritocracy, low expectations and deficit mindsets, as well as context-neutral mindsets and practices. Created as a framework for educational practice, I will use this framework to help me understand Black and Latinx students' perception of the structural and social inequitable systems at play in a predominately White affluent suburban school.

Milner explains "Questioning what it means to experience and live in a world that does not necessarily find the views, preferences, and experiences among people of color to be "normal", "acceptable," or "valid" is a recurrent charge for some researchers" (p.

298). He goes on to argue that “this framework can be used in explaining, problematizing, and perhaps more deeply understanding educational practices beyond an overreliance on the achievement gap.” (p. 299).

This opportunity gap explanatory framework assists my research to broaden conceptions, paradigms, worldviews, and methodological practices to focus on educational processes, structures and systems and not completely focus on academic outcomes. Milner explains

[W]hen researchers build knowledge about the links between cultural conflicts and opportunity, teachers, principals, and counselors in P-12 schools may place more attention on addressing cultural conflicts and deepen their understanding about how such conflicts can have lasting influence on not only opportunity but also achievement. (p. 710).

Rather than focusing completely on the achievement differences that exist between Black and Latinx students and their White counterparts in an affluent suburban school, and looking at what resources and opportunities are available to mitigate those differences, the opportunity gap explanatory framework allows me to see how Black and Latinx students “navigate” their school environment in terms of relationships, context, and activity, and it allows me to see how all of this is framed through the perceptions of Black and Latinx students.

In utilizing the opportunity gap framework to highlight social and structural inequities in a predominately White affluent suburban school through the perceptions of Black and Latinx students, it should be noted that the three precepts of color blindness, cultural conflicts and myth meritocracy are interrelated and should be viewed as such. The adoption of color blindness beliefs, ideologies, worldviews, and practices assist in

the possibility of educators consciously and subconsciously avoiding, missing, and overlooking an important identity characteristic of students which is race (Milner, 2012). In not acknowledging a student's racial identity, background, and experiences it is virtually impossible to build relationships; and educational systems and practices are not implemented with the whole child in mind. This makes it just as impossible for educators to recognize broader, systemic disparities in educational policies.

Just as color blindness, cultural conflicts, and inconsistencies that educators and students face in the educational environment can limit student's learning opportunities (Irvine, 2003; Milner, 2012) and affect their access to resources. Students whose cultural experiences are different from the teachers may not be able to use them as a resource if the educators operate from their own cultural ways of knowing (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2012). These conflicts in culture can sometimes result in an oppositional environment, where educators are fighting to have students operate according to their personal cultural norm and students resist educators' proclivity to control them (Milner, 2012).

In fighting the battle of conformity with students, some educators have a difficult time confronting matters of race and adopt color blindness in their work. According to Milner (2012) these educators identify disparities in students' socioeconomic status as causes of opportunity gaps and as explanations of the gap in achievement. These factors are considered in the precept, myth of meritocracy. Many educators may believe that their success and the success of students is earned, and that failure is a result of making bad decisions (Milner, 2010). They may believe that their own success and the success of

others is merited due to their hard work, their abilities, following the rules, and making the correct decision in life. The myth of meritocracy around student success that is adopted by some and argued by others, centers around resources and opportunity. Milner (2012) argues,

U.S. society is philosophically and ideologically structured such that all people are supposedly created equally with the same opportunities for success. In reality, however, educational practices and opportunities are not equal or equitable. There is enormous variation in students' social, economic, historic, political, and educational opportunities, which is in stark contrast to the "American dream" – one that adopts and supports meritocracy as its creed or philosophy. (p. 704)

Educators may fail to recognize the systemic barriers, institutional structures, and educational policies that limit access to resources and prevent opportunities for success, even when students are working hard.

The final two precepts of low expectations and deficit mindsets, along with context neutral mindsets and practices stand alone, but can be seen woven throughout the study independently. Through the lens of low expectations and deficit mindsets that some educators may have of students, being able to develop opportunities where students are challenged cognitively are difficult. These deficit mindsets and low expectations can be transferred into educational practices and again be used to limit access to resources and prevent opportunities for students which can prove to be detrimental to the academic and social success of students. In the same context, it is important to keep in mind that educators and students live in social contexts that have huge implications on their development, thinking, and behaviors (Milner, 2012). Through the lens of context-neutral mindsets that some educators may have, educators will not be able to recognize deep-

rooted and ingrained realities that are embedded within their school and community environments. It is important for educators to deeply understand and keep in mind both the broader and localized social context of students. The lack there of hinders the true nature of trying to support students through providing resources and opportunities. As Milner (2012) states “There is also an added problem when educators believe that issues of race and diversity are insignificant in mostly White social contexts.” (p. 709)

Introduction

A review of literature was conducted to provide background information relevant to this study including an attempt to close the achievement gap, shifting from the achievement gap to the opportunity gap, the perceptions of opportunities that exist in suburban schools, Black and Latinx student disparities in predominately White suburban schools, opportunity gaps in the suburbs, navigating success in a predominately White suburban school, leading to Black and Latinx Students’ continued struggle with implicit inequities. The first section presents a brief overview of the attempts to close the achievement gap and the struggles to do so in suburban schools. The next section offers slight insight to the shift in the literature from focusing on the achievement gap to focusing on the opportunity gap. This then leads into the perceptions of opportunities that exist in suburban schools. Followed by a short examination of the disparities that Black and Latinx students face attending predominately White suburban schools. The next section presents the gaps that currently exist in suburban schools. This is followed by a glimpse into how Black and Latinx students navigate success in predominately White

suburban schools. Finally, the continued struggle of Black and Latinx students' navigating implicit inequities is showcased.

As briefly mentioned, my plan is to demonstrate that while there is an abundance of literature on the achievement gap and ways in which it should be addressed; a major shift in the literature has taken the focus away from outcomes that the achievement gap presents and refocused attention on the root causes, the opportunity gap (Carter & Welner, 2013; Diamond and Huguley, 2014). Further discussion will be applied explaining how the gap in opportunity or "the opportunity gap" has been recognized as one of the leading theories used to explain the causalities behind the achievement gap. Most of the literature around the achievement and opportunity gaps focus on low socioeconomic urban settings. I will unearth the uncharted territories that examine these gaps within a suburban context, discuss how Black and Latinx students navigate them and show why further research is needed. However, the first step in this literature review process is to present a larger picture of both the achievement gap and opportunity gap, to provide a background of these issues within a suburban setting.

National Attempts to Close the Achievement Gap

National data consistently indicates disparities in student achievement and specifically that Black and Latinx students score significantly below the national average on standardized assessments (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008; Mertens, 2015;). Further, use of standardized tests has caused educators and researchers to question and become concerned about the bias against members of the Black and Latinx community (Mertens, 2015). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) revealed concerns about student

graduation rates, patterns in advanced placement and gifted programs (Milner, 2012), and the over-representation of Black and Latinx students in special education (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Milner, 2012). The impact of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation on the reading and math achievement of Black students K-12 was analyzed by Lewis, Hancock, James, and Larke (2008). The researchers found that the policies enacted under NCLB had no impact on achievement because in Grade 4, 88% (reading) and 87% (math) of Black students scored at “basic” or “below basic” levels in comparison to their White counterparts who scored 60% (reading) and 53% (math) at “proficient” or “advanced” levels (Mertens, 2015). NCLB was enacted to “ensure the success of all students.” NCLB placed a hyper-focus on students’ standardized tests scores and required states to publicly report results by subgroups. The continuation of disparities among student achievement further indicates that the legislation that mandates high standards and academic achievement for all students appears to undermine and shortchange that of Black students (Lewis et al., 2008). Even having access to affluent schools, which are believed to be rich in resources and opportunities, does not provide adequate resources to support Black and Latinx students in achieving at the same levels as their White peers. Nor does it secure the ability to distribute these resources and opportunities to remedy the legacy of social structural inequality in American Education (Mertens, 2015).

The Struggles of Closing the Achievement Gap in Suburban Districts

Several affluent suburban school districts have struggled to find ways to close or at least narrow the gap in student achievement. Recognizing these challenges, several suburban school districts collaborated through consortiums such as the Network of

Equity and Student Achievement (NESA) and the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) (Alson, 2003). MSAN is a national consortium consisting of 15 affluent suburban school districts across ten states ranging from California to Massachusetts (Diamond, 2006; Ferguson, 2002). MSAN surveyed 41,000 middle and high school students across all districts within its network (Alson, 2003; Ferguson, 2002; Hubler, 2005). Results from this survey and additional research such as; Milner's (2012) study *Beyond a Test Score*; Howard's (2010) study: *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools*; Noguera and Wing's (2006) study: *Unfinished Business: Closing the Racial Achievement Gap in Our Schools* as well as Boykin and Noguera's (2011) study: *Creating the Opportunity to Learn* indicated significant disparities between Black or Latinx students' and White students' skill levels, resources available outside of school, rates of enrollment in higher-level courses, and importance that students place on teacher encouragement.

Boykin and Noguera (2011) report a trend of improvements in both reading and math achievement for Black and Latinx students that are statistically significant between 1975 and 2008, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) administered by the National Center for Educational Statistics. They report that NAEP's long-term trend assessment scores in reading for Black and Latinx students have risen.

In 1975, just under half of 9-year-old Black and Latino students scored at the lowest performance level, whereas only 2 percent of 9-year-old Black students and 3 percent of 9-year old Latino students scored at the highest performance level. In 2008, by contrast, less than one-third of 9-year old Black and Latino students were at the lowest performance level, and approximately 10 percent of Black and Latino students scored at the highest performance level. (p. 9).

A similar trend of improvements in reading achievement was found among 13-year-old Black and Latinx students. Compared to reading achievement, it was reported that Black and Latinx students made even larger gains in mathematics.

In 1978, approximately 46 percent of 9-year-old Black students and 39 percent of 9-year-old Latino students scored at the lowest performance level, whereas only 4 percent of 9-year-old Black students and 9 percent of 9-year-old Latino students scored at the highest performance level. In 2008, by contrast, approximately 21 percent of 9-year-old Black students and 14 percent of 9-year-old Latino students scored at the lowest performance level, and 25 percent of 9-year-old Black students and 34 percent of 9-year-old Latino students scored at the highest performance level. (p. 10).

Again, a similar trend of improvements in mathematics achievement was found among 13-year-old Black and Latinx students.

As significant as these gains in achievement are, Boykin and Noguera report that they do not necessarily translate into a reduction in the gap of achievement. The reason behind their claim is that over the course of this period, White students have also improved in these areas of achievement leading to a continuation in the gap.

Challenges in closing the gap in achievement are highlighted by the disparities between Black and Latinx students and their White peers in the rates of enrollment into higher level courses as well as the resources available outside of school. Noguera and Wing's (2006) study brought to light the fact that many White students in suburban districts have resources to resort to, such as tutors and private coaches if needed that Black and Latinx students do not. It also shows the struggle that Black and Latinx students have in accessing, through teachers and counselors, pertinent information about what types of classes to take to gain entrance to and succeed in advanced placement courses. The participants in Noguera and Wing's (2006) study concluded that the

freshman year of attending high school, was a promising turning point for many White students, while a high percentage of Black students learned to see themselves as non-achievers and could use encouragement from their teachers.

The results from the MSAN survey notably indicated that although all students felt that teacher encouragement was important, Black and Latinx students felt that it was more important than their White counterparts. Mathews, Banerjee, and Lauermann's (2014) study on academic identity formation and motivation among ethnic minority adolescents supports this premise. They argue that minority students are more academically motivated and feel like valued members of the school community when teachers and staff make them feel cared for, and when the students are given open access to articulate their social and academic difficulties. These results highlight how important teacher-student relationships are in the view of students for their achievement.

Shifting from the Achievement Gap to Opportunity Gap

Efforts to eliminate disparities in access to high quality teachers and high-quality curriculum have been a commitment in changes to policy by The U.S. Department of Education's Equity and Excellence Commission (2013). The Commission's report recommended the attraction of top teaching talent to the profession, the support and retention of effective teachers, and access to high quality curriculum and learning opportunities. These are areas that the Equity and Excellence Commission state "must be equitably distributed across districts and schools" (p. 21). In discussing the equitable distribution, the issues of poverty and its potential impact on student achievement is not disregarded, but its effects are said to be mitigated with access to high quality instruction,

early childhood education, and various other support services and opportunities to promote student success, yet there is an achievement gap that exists.

Teachers who are underqualified are disproportionately assigned to teach low income Black and Latinx students (Barton, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2010). In addition to underqualified teachers, Black and Latinx students have less access to academic and college preparatory courses; instead, the schools that they attend offer more remedial or vocational courses (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In Darling-Hammond's book *The Flat World and Education* (2010) she presents Oakes's research on the likelihood of placement in a college preparatory course of high school students when controlling for standardized test scores. In the study she presents an example of Latinx students who score near the 60th percentile on standardized test scores being less than half as likely as White students to be placed in college preparatory classes when their White peers were virtually assumed such a placement. Similar patterns were also found for Black students. In Noguera and Wing's (2006) *Unfinished Business: Closing the Racial Achievement Gap in Our Schools*, they conduct a research project at California's Berkeley High School to examine the racially based achievement gap within the school. In their four-year longitudinal study, they found similar reasons just as that of Barton (2004) and Darling-Hammond (2010) that accounted for the low enrollment rate of Black and Latinx students in advanced courses that include the honors and gifted classes. Noguera and Wing also identified an overrepresentation of Black and Latinx students in remedial and special education courses. Noguera and Wing continue and come full circle in discovering teachers with negative beliefs and attitudes being coupled with providing a

lack of effort toward raising the achievement level for Black and Latinx students. The studies and approaches of Noguera and Wing, Darling-Hammond, and Barton speak to studying the lack of access to resources and opportunities for Black and Latinx students. For some researchers these particularly missed opportunities along with other inequities that exist for Black and Latinx students in supporting their achievement is what they refer to as the opportunity gap and study shrinking the opportunity gap to potentially address the gap in achievement.

Thinking about the issue as a gap in achievement tends to force educational researchers and scholars to compare racially, culturally and ethnically diverse students with their White counterparts without an undeniable explanation of the underpinning behind the causes of disparities and differences that exist (Milner, 2010). White students may be framed as the standard by which all other racial, cultural, and ethnic student groups are compared to when the achievement gap itself is measured through comparing racially and culturally diverse student groups to a single White student group (Foster, 1999; Howard, 2010; Milner, 2010). The continued research on disparities of student outcomes among racial and ethnic student groups in comparison to their White counterparts may also unintentionally frame researchers, scholars, and educators of studying and conceptualizing students of color from a deficit perspective (Howard, 2010). As a result, Milner (2010) argues that these studies encourage researchers, scholars, and educators to focus on individuals and groups of students instead of exploring the inequitable, racist, and sexist structures, systems, policies, and practices that assist in perceived achievement.

Some researchers look at the achievement gap from a different perspective. Urban researcher and educator, Jacqueline Jordan Irvine (2010), describes the achievement gap as not a solitary entity but rather comprised of other multiple gaps that contribute to the achievement gap. If we address other gaps surrounding and affecting education that attribute to the gap in student achievement and outcomes such as teacher quality gap, teacher training gap, economic gap, health care gap, nutrition gap, school integration gap, school funding gap, and the challenging curriculum gap, then the gap in student achievement will improve as well. Addressing these other gaps, Irvine explains, will also help to change the minds of researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and administrators that perceive there to be an achievement gap. She argues that the gap in achievement between Black students and their White counterparts might not even exist if other educational disparities/gaps were properly addressed. If we need to address all of these other gaps in the system in order to close the achievement gap, then these other gaps must mainly be applicable to Black and Latinx students; so what is wrong with the system that continues to perpetuate all of these gaps and why are they mainly targeting and affecting Black and Latinx students?

According to some researchers the gap in achievement today can only be utterly understood by recognizing the inequitable differences in resources such as the financial or academic opportunities between groups (Hung et al. 2020). In recognizing these inequitable differences educators may be able to provide supports such as resources and opportunities. This approach some may consider as being the first step in addressing the gap in opportunity between groups which exists at all levels and in all environments.

Examples of these opportunity gaps which will be further discussed later in the paper have been identified in high school mathematics (Flores, 2007), higher education (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012), and among advanced placement courses (Taliaferro & Decuir-Gunby, 2008). In making efforts to take this approach it is critical to take an approach that focuses on assets and does not lend itself to stereotyping groups and populations (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). As the efficacy behind the efforts to close the gap in achievement using traditional methods and programs are questioned, a comprehensive investigation of the gap in opportunities which are said to lead to the achievement gap are warranted.

The Opportunity Gap

With attention being placed on students' scores on standardized tests, concerns around graduation rates, patterns in gifted and advanced placement along with numbers among special education placement, and other measures that allow groups to be compared among each other (Milner, 2012) does not allow the focus attention on the root causes that highlights these issues in the first place. Many students of color and other marginalized groups face standardized reform efforts used to level the playing field when many times the field for these students is anything but level (Ladson-Billings, 2006) with equitable access to valuable resources and opportunities being more accessible for some more than others. For those that have less access to valuable resources and opportunities or are simply denied access at all may also be the same ones that are in the lower half of the gap in achievement that currently exists.

In examining the disparities in mathematics education among high school students Alfinio Flores (2007) found that Black, Latinx and low-income students scored significantly lower than their White counterparts on standardized assessments. Flores argues that the measures of student outcomes are due to a gap in opportunity and should be viewed differently than through an achievement gap frame. Flores states “Shifting the frame from looking at measures of educational outcomes to examining what students actually experience in schools’ results in a very different way of describing disparities among students in school” (p. 32). Flores’s examination calls attention to the fact that Black and Latinx students are less likely than White students to have access to experienced and qualified teachers, more likely to face low expectations, and are less likely to receive equitable per student funding. Highlighting these inequities of opportunity faced by low income, Black and Latinx students shows that the achievement gap is better understood as a manifestation of an underlying deep-rooted cause- the opportunity gap. The opportunity gap for Black and Latinx students is not only found among the K-12 sector and effected by tangible factors (e.g. computers, funding, etc.); but rather the disparities in opportunity can be found as early as Kindergarten leading all the way into higher education and are effected by intangible factors (e.g. racism, relationships, stereotypes, etc.) as well.

At the higher education level, the academic opportunity gap was studied focusing on how racism and stereotypes disrupt the education of Black undergraduates (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012). Johnson-Ahorlu highlights how racism and stereotypes obstruct the academic success of Black students as well as impacts their behavior and emotional well-

being. She states “The difference in GPA (Grade Point Average) between Black and White undergraduates must be framed as an “opportunity gap,” as opposed to as an “achievement gap,” in order to highlight and challenge the institutional inequalities that contribute to student achievement”(p. 635). Johnson-Ahorlu found that racial stereotypes caused many faculty members to have low expectations of Black students and discouraged them from pursuing certain careers and majors. It was also found that stereotypes caused Black students to experience stereotype threat (anxiety or stress triggered by the fear that one might fulfill or be associated with a relevant stereotype (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012) which motivated faculty to not build supportive relationships with them. It is important to consider the structural and environmental factors such as racism and stereotypes in schools that hinder students’ achievement instead of concentrating completely on factors such as standardized test scores, and socio-economic status while maintaining a context-neutral mindset. Although there are structural and environmental factors that affect student achievement within all environments and among all students, researchers should focus heavily on areas where there is a disproportionate distribution of students by race. These environments may be more prevalent to racism and stereotypes particularly targeting the minority.

Some schools that contain a disproportionate distribution of students by race can be found in the suburbs. Among a large project studying suburban districts’ conceptualization of and response to racial and economic change, a subset study was conducted examining the ideologies and beliefs of teachers, staff, and administrators (Tyler, 2016). Tyler collected data from racially diverse suburban school districts from

metropolitan areas consisting of Atlanta, Boston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, San Antonio, and others. Tyler found that teachers, staff, and administrators alike claim to be committed to diversity but are impacted through having a deficit perspective on students from diverse racial/ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Educators held deficit perspectives toward students from these backgrounds in regards to students' "real-world experiences" (e.g., going to the zoo, attending a concert), Family and Home life (e.g., "chaotic" or "unstable" home environment, broken homes, single parent households), Community (e.g., lack of support, the effects of concentrated poverty), as well as in Discipline, Motivation, and Values (e.g. students having a lack of interests in academics, no home structure, or students containing a "gang mentality"). Tyler addresses this deficit perspective of suburban educators by stating "Such deficit thinking is problematic because it threatens to reproduce inequalities in a new, suburban arena. First, the deficit perspective holds white, middle-class norms as the ideal and measures all students against this standard... Second, cultural deficit discourse eclipses institutional and structural perspectives on inequity" (p. 304). These perspectives alone may create barriers for racially ethnic students such as Black and Latinx student's ability to access resources and opportunities such as building supportive relationships with the school staff. They also play an important role on how suburban educators not only interact with Black and Latinx students but also in what guidance and supports are provided for Black and Latinx students as many times school staff may be the "key holders" to many resources and opportunities (e.g. admittance into A.P. and honors courses, access to extra support, admittance into school clubs and organizations). With research showing a deficit

perspective toward Black and Latinx students from school staff among suburban schools, it is important to unveil the perspectives of Black and Latinx students attending suburban schools and discover if these perspectives affect their access to resources and opportunities.

Perception of Opportunities in Suburban Schools

It may be perceived by some members of society that most students who attend affluent suburban schools come from upper-middle class families. The cultural and societal norms that many associate with the upper-middle class include families who value education and send their children to schools that provide what appears to be the top resources, experiences, and opportunities (Rothstein, 2013). These households tend to include two parents who both have jobs that involve collaboration with colleagues, are expected to solve problems, and strive to contribute to the success of the corporations or jobs in which they work (Rothstein, 2013; Rothstein and Wozny, 2013). These same parents likely directly or indirectly instruct their children to value and understand the reasoning behind instruction. Family vacations, traveling, and lived experiences through activities such as dance lessons, trips to the museum, summer camps, participation in organized sports, and social clubs provided to their children may enrich the context for their reading and writing and assist with cultural experiences (Rothstein, 2013; Rothstein and Wozny, 2013). In general, children raised by upper middle class parents have more inquisitive attitudes toward the curriculum that is provided by teachers (Rothstein, 2013) and may seek to advance their learning through extracurricular activities, taking advanced

placement courses and independent studies; all opportunities that are usually perceived as common practices in affluent suburban schools.

In Diamond's (2006) study where he examines race, opportunity, and school achievement in integrated suburbs he expresses

One often thinks of African Americans in affluent suburbs as highly privileged. However, there are reasons to be cautious about this assumption. While Blacks who live in the suburbs are often better off economically than their African American counterparts in urban cities, they are often not as well off as suburban Whites. (p. 499).

He goes on to show that even middle-class Blacks often "teeter on the fence" between privilege and peril when compared to middle-class Whites. In looking across predominantly White affluent suburban school districts he has found that overall Black families were in far more precarious economic situations than were Whites.

Although Black and assumedly Latinx students in the suburbs may live in more precarious economic situations than their White peers, they still attend the same affluent suburban schools. With all these resources and opportunities that are perceived to be available for students attending affluent suburban schools, why are Black and Latinx students who attend these types of schools still underachieving in comparison to their White counterparts? Are they simply not taking advantage of the resources and opportunities? And if Black and Latinx students are taking advantage of those resources and opportunities, are there intangible components such as teacher support and encouragement that exist in these environments that Black and Latinx students cannot access?

In attaining access to resources and opportunities (e.g. advance placement courses, tutoring, studying abroad, etc.) there is usually a common understanding of what those resources and opportunities are when they are in a tangible state — because they are easy to see and/or use. When one thinks of resources and opportunities that are intangible, however, it may be more difficult to define. Although it may seem that all students have equal access to the resources and opportunities that the school provides, and many others assume that these resources and opportunities are readily available particularly in an affluent suburban school environment; most of these assumptions are conjured with tangible resources and opportunities in mind and may be false. In investigating the opportunity gap in affluent suburban schools, it is imperative to view not only tangible resources and opportunities but also view resources and opportunities in a state of intangibility in order to uncover if these types of resources and opportunities support student achievement, as well as if students view, value and/or access these types of resources and opportunities. For this study, intangible will be defined according to Webster’s Dictionary (2019) as something that cannot be easily defined; or vague, and will be used to describe resources and opportunities that are associated with the various in school relationships, cultural proficiencies, personal ideologies, etc.

The Disparities of Black and Latinx Students in Predominately White Suburban Schools

Overall, Black and Latinx students face stark differences in course offerings, curriculum programs, and the human environment in schools they attend, in comparison to many of their White counterparts (Darling-Hammond, 2013). In some schools, minority students are effectively tracked by race and denied the most qualified teachers

and curriculum (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Rothstein, 2013; Tyson, 2013). In racially diverse schools, capable Black and Latinx students are crowded out of the advanced and honors courses by their White counterparts (Tyson, 2013). This could be because of reasons such as systemic racism, racial discrimination by school leaders, or, through racial minority students not taking advantage of more rigorous courses due to intangible factors such as students' social and academic feelings towards their teachers, peers, education, and personal identities.

When looking at all the resources and opportunities that are afforded to students in many affluent suburban schools one may believe that equal educational opportunities are available for all students, but this may not be the case particularly for Black and Latinx students. This assumption that equal educational opportunities exist reinforces beliefs that the causes of Black and Latinx students' low levels of achievement are intrinsic to them, their families, or their communities (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

When looking at students from low-income families who live in a city, those who move to affluent suburbs fare better than those who stay in the city, with much lower dropout rates, and a greater likelihood of attending college. Black and Latinx students who grow up in the suburbs have more access to resources and opportunities than those who remain in the city as well; yet the isolation of Black and Latinx students has been increasing in affluent suburban schools across the nation (Rothstein, 2013).

This isolation of Black and Latinx students can be seen at the school and classroom levels through voluntary and involuntary social and academic segregation that possibly affects students' attitudes as well as their sense of belonging and acceptance. In

John Ogbu's Shaker Heights study, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb*, one student commented on the small number of Black students in the honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes (2003). He went on to say that a Black student felt uncomfortable when they found that they were the only Black, or one of only a few Blacks, in such a class. This may explain, in part, why Black and Latinx students enroll in AP courses at less than half the rate of White students (Boykin and Noguera, 2011; Noguera, 2017; Klopfenstein, 2004). In a study by Klopfenstein on equal opportunities for minority students in Advanced Placement courses across the state of Texas, it was reported that in one year among 383,043 White students 15% enrolled in AP courses compared to the enrollment of 8.2% of Latinx students among 255,139 and 7.2% of Black students among 100,109 students (2004). This difference may lead Black and Latinx students who are eligible to take Advanced Placement courses to feel isolated in these courses. Social and cultural factors may also impede students from taking advantage of the resources and opportunities that are made available. Most teachers of Black and Latinx students in affluent suburban schools do not share the students' ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Noguera, 2017). This may require minority students to use some different cultural norms to effectively interact with their teachers and schools. For example the way in which Black and or Latinx students may verbally respond to a given directive or their response to academic or social feedback provided by the teacher may cause a disconnect between student and teacher which is an example of Black and Latinx students lacking access to intangible opportunities that may affect student achievement. The achievement of these students is as much a function of their unequal access to essential educational in school

and out of school resources, both tangible and intangible as they are a function of class, or culture (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Diamond, 2006; Milner, 2012; Ogbu, 2003). It is for these reasons that further investigation is needed around the experiences of Black and Latinx students attending predominately White affluent suburban schools.

Battling Cultural Conflict

Historical events have influenced members in society consciously and subconsciously at times, implying that Black and Latinx people are inferior to White people (Boykin & Tom, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 2000). It is possible that this belief may be found in many past and present forms such as through the media, through the representation of Black and Latinx people in books and entertainment, the disparities of recognition in awards and accomplishments, and the imbalanced incarceration rates. These beliefs that may be represented in various forms may also carry over into the school system hindering Black and Latinx students from advancing both socially and academically. When looking at the disparities in opportunity between racial minority students and White students in the American education system, many issues come to light that highlight lingering racism and biases. One example of this is school discipline. Researchers have examined school discipline differences between White and Black students and have found that Black students are disciplined at significantly higher rates than White students (Battiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2017). As a clear example, between the 1972-73 and 2011-12 school years, the national rate of out-of-school suspensions for Black students has increased nearly 200% (from 12% to 23%) while the out-of-school suspensions rate for White students only grew by 12% (from 6% to 7%)

(Battiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2017). The racist beliefs and biases that portray Black and Latinx students in a negative light impact racial minority students' engagement in school. This can affect Black and Latinx students' ability to access resources or take advantage of opportunities that may be presented for their academic achievement.

Anthropologist John Ogbu (2003) refers to Black students' state of mind, in which people unconsciously replay in modern society the role or mentality of slaves, as the "Sambo Mentality." Today, people who have this mentality may believe that Black and Latinx students are inferior to White students or are incapable of competing at the same level academically. As an example, a study in Oakland, California included surveys of 1,300 students and 82% of the respondents reported that individuals in their families or communities believed that White people considered Blacks less intelligent than Whites (Ogbu, 2003) In the same study, 21% of respondents reported that school personnel do not believe that Black students are as smart as White students (Ogbu, 1998). Educational practices today that reinforce this "Sambo Mentality" and help to internalize the concept of Black and Latinx people being inferior to Whites can be found in teacher expectations (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Delpit, 2012), the leveling of students (Tyson, 2013), and the disproportionate representation of Black and Latinx students in special education (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). For Black and Latinx students, this idea of being inferior to White students can be internalized and result in consequences that can be observed in classroom attitudes and behaviors (Ogbu, 2003), and assist in many social and academic decisions that students make in navigating the school environment.

The racial segregation that may arise from these actions between students creates one form of what researchers consider cultural conflict (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2012). Some groups of students, who have cultural characteristics that are more aligned with the school's culture, norms, and expectations than that of other groups of students, have greater opportunities for academic success (Banks, 1998). These cultural characteristics, norms, and expectations are viewed in the form of embracing the school's curriculum, speaking standard English, and spending time studying to get good grades, and are what some Black and Latinx students considered "acting white" (Carter, 2013; Lewis and Diamond, 2015; Ogbu, 2003). Black and Latinx students who were incorporated into the United States through conquest, slavery, or force (e.g. African Americans, Mexican Americans) frequently do not do well academically (Carter, 2013; Noguera, 2007; Ogbu, 2003). Some scholars believe that these students adopt an oppositional culture or "resistance to acting white" (Farkas, 2002; Horvat and Lewis, 2003; Ogbu, 2003). Although some scholars support the hypothesis of "resisting to acting white" (Farkas, 2002; Horvat and Lewis, 2003) the empirical evidence supporting this thesis as the causality of Black students in particular underachieving and adding to the achievement gap is mixed (Lewis and Diamond, 2015; Mocombe, 2011). In Paul Mocombe's 2011 study: A social structural reinterpretation of "the burden of acting white" Mocombe argues that

contrary to Ogbu's "burden of acting White" hypothesis, the argument put forth here is that it is due to their indigent (pathological-pathogenic) structural position within the American capitalist social structure of inequality, as opposed to a differing or oppositional cultural ethos from that of the latter, as to the reason why Black American school children underachieve vis-a-vis their White counterparts." (p. 92).

Regardless of the mixed and conflicting results in the literature provided by scholars, the premise that students experience of being taunted because of their high achievement or “proper vernacular” being the main cause of Black student underachievement and assisting in the achievement gap is a strong theme in American schools (Lewis and Diamond, 2015; Mocombe, 2011) whether or not it completely explains the gap in achievement or opportunity. Whether a result of students’ indigent structural position in America or the “resistance to acting white”, the consequences may have a significant role in the disparities between Black and Latinx students and their White counterparts at a high achievement level. These consequences occur mainly in diverse school settings as opposed to a predominantly Black or Latinx school settings (Carter, 2013; Diamond and Huguley, 2014), and may even affect Black and Latinx students’ ambitions to join and succeed in advanced placement and honors courses. The combination of internalization of historical beliefs of Black and Latinx students accompanied with cultural conflict may explain Black and Latinx student’s self-doubt not only in school but in life.

The Creation of Self -Doubt Through Myth Meritocracy

While White students can look to family and friends for examples of achieving the American dream that anyone, regardless of where they were born or what class they were born into, can attain their own version of success in a society where upward mobility is possible for everyone and could be attained through education, it has been harder for Black and Latinx students. Instead, when some Black and Latinx students look, they see countless examples of disadvantages and inequities preventing families from achieving that American dream. As a result, some Black and Latinx students may

internalize their self-doubt of achievement and success through hard work, determination, and education (Mathews, Banerjee, and Lauermann, 2014).

Black students' self-doubt about their ability to achieve the American dream through hard work and education leads some to try and reach their goals through other means. The lack of opportunity to acquire the American dream through education may discourage some of these students from pursuing education beyond what is required by law or even drop out prior to that (Fryer and Torelli 2010; Ogbu, 2003, 2008). Many students may consider alternative opportunities to become successful that do not require academic credentials.

In fact, opting for these alternative opportunities may be considered a way of Black and Latinx students feeling as though they are controlling their own destinies instead of relying on the educational system to "guide" their success. Some Black students believe a viable alternative strategy is playing sports, or may believe that being entertainers (e.g. rapper, singer, comedian) (Mocombe, 2011; Noguera, 2008), or using social media (e.g. Instagram, YouTube, TikTok,) will also be alternative strategies for success. It is possible that even students of middle-class successful parents may not make the connection between hard work and education. As a result, some Black and Latinx students in affluent schools may develop identities that include unsuccessful academic and social behavior. These unsuccessful academic and social behaviors may be looked upon as being oppositional and can be classified as a collective identity due to cultural conflict.

The oppositional collective identity of Black students in terms of education is associated with intentional underachievement, maintaining an affective difference in cultural practices and attitudes (e.g. language, dress, relationship with teachers and the school system, etc.) (Fryer and Torelli, 2010). These practices, preferences, and attitudes are class-based notions that connect Black “underclass” cultural norms against the cultural practices of upper-middle-class Whites (Mocombe, 2011). John Diamond and James Huguley (2014) speak of where you might find examples of this oppositional collective identity in saying

...emerging research has begun to substantially narrow the context in which these phenomena may actually occur. The most likely context seems to be integrated schools, particularly those that have disparate opportunity structures within their walls, and with some suggestion of particularly strong effects in predominantly white schools.” (p 752).

Black and Latinx students along with other minorities perceive and experience the school culture as an imposition by the dominant culture and usually experience it negatively, because the dominant group uses both the curriculum and language to communicate to the racial minorities the message that they are inferior (Ogbu, 2003). This message of inferiority may contribute to Black and Latinx students’ feelings of self-doubt and may contribute in further isolating themselves from their White counterparts in terms of attending the same classes, school organizations, as well as social interactions creating self-fulfilling segregation within schools and denying themselves educational opportunities needed to be successful and advance academically.

The academic identity and perceptions of Black and Latinx students formed during high school have long lasting educational and career-related outcomes. According

to Matthews, Banerjee, and Lauer mann, (2014), these identities are usually formed through two major frameworks, which are: (1) internally debated (e.g., “doing well in school is important to me”); and (2) externally supported (e.g., “my relationships at school make me feel like I belong here”) These internal and external frameworks are what minority students in this study use for the rationale and confidence in education to lead them to be successful. The internal debate over the importance of doing well in school coupled with the external support justifying the students belonging in that setting assist in the formation of the students’ academic perception and identity. Attending a predominately White affluent suburban school as members of a marginalized population may have serious effects on the formation of identity due to the lack of intangible resources, opportunities, and experiences that are provided. Collectively, Black students are at a deficit when viewing the internally negotiated components of their academic identity, (e.g., their value of education, concept of self). (Morgan & Mehta, 2004; Matthews, Banerjee & Lauer mann, 2014). They also rely on sociological supports in schools to assist in their academic identity formation that are affected by external characteristics (e.g., school belonging, social interconnectedness) (Matthews, Banerjee, & Lauer mann, 2014). The presence or absence of these components may play major roles in how the collective identity of Black and Latinx students are perceived or better yet manifested among the group. Supporting the academic identity of Black and Latinx students in predominately White suburban schools may assist suburban school districts in addressing the context-neutral mindsets of educators and closing or at least narrowing the gap in student achievement.

Racial Injustice Formed Through Context-Neutral Mindsets

When discussing the opportunity gap and the differences between students' and schools' cultures it is important that the discussion start with race. If starting the discussion around the differences between students' and schools' culture and race then Griffith and Conrad (2008) argue that the centrality of the discussion must be about teacher-teacher, teacher-student and student-student relationships, as well as the student's understanding of self. Diamond (2006) explains that it is impossible to isolate the attitudes, achievements, and the outcomes of students from the larger picture of racial inequities that exist within our communities, schools, and classrooms on a day to day basis. These experiences of racial injustice may be heightened for Black and Latinx students who attend predominately White suburban schools and who suffer from a sense of racial isolation and feelings of being inadequate (Grossman and Aneess, 2004). These feelings that students have may contribute to the opportunity gaps and ultimately the gap in achievement. Researchers have concluded that some Black and Latinx students in effect live out self-fulfilling prophecies (Grossman and Aneess, 2004; Tyson, 2013). The lack of diverse make up in the classroom and the feeling of inadequacy works as a wall for more equitable opportunities, because it reinforces ideas about a connection between race and intelligence and who is and who is not smart (Grossman and Aneess, 2004; Tyson, 2013). The opportunity gaps that exist in predominately White affluent suburban schools are different than those of other settings. These gaps are a result of more than distinct and observable factors and weigh heavily on Black and Latinx students' experiences. This may be caused in many times by the context-neutral mindsets of

educators when trying to support students. The struggle for some suburban school districts to close the gap in achievement while also struggling to develop a school culture that understands, supports, and takes into account student culture may create further gaps in opportunity for students resulting in a form of racial injustice. These opportunity gaps that exist in some predominately White suburban schools need further investigation on the in and out of school experiences of Black and Latinx students in the suburbs.

Opportunity Gaps in Suburban Schools Lead to Continued Gaps in Achievement

Some may have the perception around suburban schools as being rich in resources and opportunities which contribute to high achievement levels for their student population. The literature around the gaps in opportunity, and achievement and student outcomes between Black and Latinx students and their White counterparts among historically high performing suburban school districts has grown (Ferguson, 2001; Ferguson, 2002; Grossman and Ancess, 2004; Viadero, 2002). The gap in achievement is persistent for middle class Black and Latinx students as well as for low socioeconomic students (Orfield et al., 2000). As of February 2018, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) in its latest version of Digest of Education Statistics reported a trend since the early 2000's of a widening gap in student achievement scores between students attending city schools and students attending suburban schools at both the elementary and secondary levels. For example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress' (NAEP) National Report Card (2019) shows 4th grade students attending city schools scoring at or above proficiency on standardized math assessments in comparison to those 4th grade students attending suburban schools. In 2007, 34% of students scored at or

above proficiency in comparison to 46% of their suburban counterparts. In 2019, 36% of students attending city schools scored at or above proficiency in comparison to 46% of their suburban counterparts. At the secondary level among 8th graders these same trends continued with 27% of students attending city schools scoring at or above proficiency in comparison to 37% of their suburban counterparts in 2007, and in 2019, 30% of students attending city schools scoring at or above proficiency compared to 38% of their suburban counterparts.

To see gaps in opportunity and achievement between urban and suburban school districts is disheartening. To see gaps in suburban school districts accompanied with the previously existing achievement gap particularly around racial groups is concerning as some of these districts project a racially integrated environment rich in resources and opportunities coupled with high student achievement; although further observation will show these to be loosely coupled as underlying racial inequities continue to persist (Diamond, 2006). Even though Black students in affluent suburban schools many times have access to more resources and opportunities and outperform other Black students in urban schools, a gap in standardized test scores, grades, and even the types of courses that are taken continues to remain between Black and White students (Diamond, 2006; Noguera and Wing, 2006; Ogbu, 2003). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, (2018) standardized tests show that even when we compare Black and Latinx students with their White counterparts, from similar income bands, there is still an achievement gap. There is no single version of class-inequality that can explain the reason behind minority students from similar backgrounds, living in the same

neighborhoods and attending the same schools not achieving at the same level as their White counterparts (Ogbu, 2003). Even when Black and Latinx students are high achievers and or achieve at the same level as their White counterparts in White suburban schools, a gap exists between Black and Latinx students and their White counterparts that presents as a struggle for Black and Latinx students to navigate.

Navigating Success in Predominately White Suburban Schools

As White suburban schools become increasingly populated with more students of color and the gap in opportunity is becoming more prevalent, scholars are researching the experiences of Black and Latinx students attending these White suburban schools (Diamond, 2006; Diamond, Lewis, & Gordon, 2007; Huidor & Cooper, 2010; O'Connor et al, 2011). Among these studies O'Conner et al. looked to document the experiences of high achieving Black students who take advanced courses and attend a predominantly White school. Although the students performed well, researchers discovered that students struggled to navigate their environment to gain the resources and supports that they needed to be successful. Researchers discovered that the students felt that there was a lack of a support system available to Black students in the upper level Advanced Placement (AP) and advanced courses. It was reported that the students upheld strong connections with their Black peers who had less rigorous courses to protect them from acts of racism. O'Conner et al. state that the students' negotiation of the school contexts, and resistance to stereotypes, interacted with the contexts of the school as an unwelcoming space. The researchers go on to note that some Black students were able to cross racial boundaries in class by proving that they were creditable academic partners.

In another study around issues of racial isolation and negative peer pressure in higher level courses for Black students at a White suburban high school; 70 Black and White students were interviewed regarding how successful they believed their life would be according to race (Diamond et al., 2007). Researchers discovered that most Black students believed that their race would limit their life opportunities for success, while White students did not believe that race was a factor in their opportunity of success at all. The opportunities for success may be hard to navigate for Black and Latinx students due to stereotypes and racist structures that exist in White suburban schools; forcing some students of color not to take advantage of the opportunities set before them. Huidor and Cooper (2010) studied how students of color decided to participate or not participate in educational activities, clubs, and organizations based on how comfortable they felt and their ability to navigate the different circumstances. In their study of students of color (mainly Black and Latinx) who were bused to a predominantly White suburban school, researchers revealed that students recognized racial segregation in the school's academic and social contexts. The pressures of racial segregation in these contexts were mitigated by students building strong bonds with their same race peers. Although the high school was known for its prestige in academics with more than 25 Advance Placement (AP) and honors courses as well as strong sports program, no students of color were involved or planned to be involved in those programs. Huidor and Cooper state "it was evident that the academic matters of quality teaching and peer rapport were of significant importance to the students' perception of attaining a first-rate education" (p. 160). If the experiences of Black and Latinx students attending White suburban schools are affected by their

perception of stereotypes and racist structures that may exist hindering them from taking advantage of available resources and opportunities, then further investigation behind these issues are warranted.

Black and Latinx Students' Continued Struggle with Implicit Inequities

As much as suburban schools are viewed as being the model for racial integration and student achievement, inequitable systems, structures, and policies exist in these environments that contribute and reinforce opportunity gaps. However, these inequitable systems, structures, and policies are maintained much more subtly than in the past (Diamond, 2006). Today, it is hard to just focus on one area to address the inequities and disparities that play out in the educational system. Many times, the disparities themselves may stem from, or may be intertwined with, societal views and ideologies that result from historical phenomena or personal experiences. These societal views and ideologies, whether apparent or not, may ultimately be used in the decisions that are made regarding education and assist in the shaping of suburban educational institutions themselves (Diamond, 2006). Black and Latinx students are at a disadvantage in a multitude of ways and on various levels. Structurally there is limited access to valued resources found outside of school for them. Institutionally, Black and Latinx students are systematically placed in the lowest advantaged positions and locations for learning inside of the school, and ideologically their intellectual capacity is questioned, and their cultural customs devalued in school and among society (Boykin and Noguera, 2011; Diamond, 2006).

Students' learning experiences and achievements are strongly affected by an abundance of factors outside of the school's control, and it is for this reason that schools

must play a larger role in efforts to address inequitable opportunities within its institution. Many times, the assumed effects of Black and Latinx students attending suburban schools are simply inaccurate and overcome by other social factors such as racial, ethnic, class, and gender dynamics (Carter and Welner, 2013). These social factors have historical implications that, to this day, affect the access to valued resources found not only outside of schools but inside of schools as well (Ladson-Billings, 2006)

Throughout some predominately White suburban schools there are common areas of blame for Black and Latinx students' shortcomings. Educators commonly blame each other, uninvolved parents are another target, along with students' poor attitudes. Students are also accused of being unmotivated and not working hard enough (Noguera, 2017; Tyson, 2002). As a result of "the blame game," some students are misplaced in classes beneath their academic capabilities, placed in special education, or encouraged to follow a vocational track of education (Boykin and Noguera, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010). There are social beliefs that are commonly held about Black and Latinx people in general that help to contribute to these misconceptions. Beyond intelligence, there are other negative cultural characteristics that are often attributed to Black and Latinx students including laziness, low achievers, dysfunctionality, being mischievous, and the lack of work ethic (Carter, 2013; Diamond, 2006; Tyler, 2016). In some cases, teachers have lower expectations of the potential of Black and Latinx students than they do White students (Boykin and Noguera, 2011; Diamond, 2006; Ferguson, 1998; Tyler, 2016). An alternative body of research shows that Black and Latinx students are just as engaged and study just as hard as White students (Ferguson, 2002). With educators better recognizing

and understanding the inequity on structural, institutional, and ideological levels will allow for them to better comprehend the racial disparities in achievement. The inability of educators to understand the social realities, cultural resources, and discernment of Black and Latinx students in both urban and suburban settings and continue to contain a cultural-neutral mindset only continues to perpetuate the opportunity gap in education, and it is for this reason that the experiences of Black and Latinx students attending suburban schools needs to be further investigated.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study uses a qualitative design to unveil the perceptions of Black and Latinx students who attend a predominately White affluent suburban school. A qualitative design allows for students to “speak their truth” and unveil their shared experiences that they may have through their stories. This approach focuses on the implicit values expressed through a qualitative lens and will attempt to account for and highlight the social dynamics and relationships between individuals and groups.

Taking a qualitative approach allowed me to provide the participants with a voice while attempting to make sense from their perspectives (Mertens, D. M. 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It is a way to advocate for the emancipation of those groups who are marginalized (Creswell and Poth, 2018) in predominately White affluent suburban schools. In order to truly capture the spirit and voice of the participants, I collected data through in-depth focus groups, interviews, observations, and casual conversations in order to capture the students’ understanding of the situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These forms of data collection, along with member checks, assists with the validity of the study (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The explanation behind why the opportunity gap exists between Black and Latinx students and their white counterparts are so often reported by those who are not marginalized or oppressed. We far too often hear the “experts” interpretation of the phenomena behind various issues instead of hearing from the true experts; those participants who are experiencing the challenges day in and day out, which in this case

are the students. This study was an attempt to give voice to the group’s way of life in the world (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and “make the world visible” (Mertens, 2015). I explore this phenomenon through the following questions.

1. What are Black and Latinx students’ perceptions toward achieving at the same levels as their White counterparts?
2. Do Black and Latinx students perceive themselves as having access to the same resources as their White peers?
 - a. If Black and Latinx students do perceive to have access to the same resources as their White peers, do they use them effectively?
 - b. What resources do Black and Latinx students identify as important to their academic and personal success?

Site Selection

Top Not(ch) Education

Located in an east coast suburb outside of a large metropolitan area lies Shawmont Area School District (SASD)¹. According to www.niche.com Shawmont Area School District serves approximately 8,500 students in grades K-12. SASD maintains low class sizes and provides students attention with a student-teacher ratio of 11:1, while the national average is 17:1. SASD prepares their students for post-secondary opportunity and show this through having a graduation rate of over 96%. Students are a top priority in Shawmont Area School District and the district holds back no expense in providing for

¹ Shawmont Area School District (SASD) is a pseudonym.

the needs of its students through spending approximately \$26,057 per student while the national average of student expenditure is \$12,239. The Shawmont Area School District strives for diversity in all areas of its organization from curriculum, to staff, to students. The student demographic make-up of SASD consists of 73.5% White, 9.7% Asian/Asian American, 7.5% Black/African American, 4.7% Multiracial, 4.4% Latino/Hispanic, and 0.1% Pacific Islander.

This study took place at Shawmont High School (SHS)² in Shawmont Area School District (SASD). Shawmont High School (SHS) is a historical academic powerhouse. Established in 1894, the high school has sent students to college every year since its first commencement in 1897. SHS opened with an impressive granite and stone building with grand archways that sat on 23 acres and was considered one of the finest new educational facilities at the time. Throughout the years, the attendees and building itself continued to expand until 2004 when its citizens advisory committee felt that the building “no longer met the standards of the Shawmont Area Community.” It was rebuilt in 2010 with state-of-the-art facilities that support world class curricular and co-curricular programs (Shawmont Alumni Association, 2018)³.

Shawmont High School’s 2018-2019 profile indicates that it has been nationally recognized for excellence in education for well over 20+ years. With a graduating class of 355 students, 96% of whom attend college after high school and 4% of whom join the military, partake in a gap year, or are employed full time. Providing over 70 honors

² Shawmont High School (SHS) is a pseudonym.

³ Shawmont Alumni Association, (2018) is a pseudonym and not an actual citation.

courses in the areas of art, English, mathematics, music, science, social studies, and world language, SHS also provides 22 Advanced Placement courses, leaving students with a range of rigorous and diverse courses to take.

Shawmont High School has state-of-the-art classrooms and science labs, a lecture hall with tiered seating, an 850-seat auditorium/theater, a greenhouse for environmental and horticultural studies, high-quality athletic facilities, a swimming pool, television studio, multi-media production facilities, a musical instrument digital interface (MIDI) lab, an open-air courtyard and a two-story library. Honors, and Advanced Placement courses are offered in addition to the existing college preparatory courses, cooperative work experiences, educational field experiences, community service, and scholar's programs that are made available for students. More than ten percent of the SHS graduating class is recognized by the National Merit Scholarship Program.

While Shawmont High School has a number of admirable qualities, there are student achievement gaps by race in the schools' standardized test scores. According to the state's index (2019), 90.5% of White students compared to 56.7% of Black students and 74.5% of Hispanic students passed the English Language Arts exam with a proficient or advanced rating; 80.6% of White students compared to 41.1% of Black students and 62.4% of Hispanic students scored proficient or advanced on mathematics; and 92.0% of White students compared to 58.5% of Black students and 71.6% of Hispanic students scored advanced on the science exam. The fact that a nationally recognized, affluent, suburban school, which has the funding and resources to address the racial gap in student

achievement, continues to struggle to close the gap, proves that there is a much deeper issue.

Participant Selection

I targeted Black and Latinx students who attend Shawmont High School (SHS). At the time of this study participants were identified through the demographic marker that is labeled on their student information sheet provided to the school for record keeping. The school district's office of research and program evaluation sent out a mass email to all students identified as African American/Black or Hispanic on their demographic marker. Flyers were hung up around the school inviting students to partake in an information session about the study. To further recruit I used the assistance of the Smith Scholars Program⁴, an academic excellence program designed to help cultivate the academic and leadership potential of students of African American/Black and Hispanic/Latinx students. The program is embedded in the school curriculum and its participants encompass over 70% of the school's racial minority population. By focusing on this population, I was able to focus completely on a well-defined single culture-sharing group (Creswell & Poth, 2018) where I was able to conduct, focus groups, interviews, and observations until the perspectives of the group were clear. In this study, I used a maximum variation sampling (Mertens, 2015) to document diverse variations of individuals based on specific characteristics. This approach also allowed me to identify themes across a broad range of students (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) from diverse abilities, characteristics (e.g. studious, social, charismatic, etc.), and grade levels.

⁴ Smith Scholars Program is a pseudonym used to mask the institution of origin.

All participants who chose to engage in the study did so on a voluntary basis with written consent from a parent or a legal guardian. All participants provided written assent as well. All participants also had the option to opt out of the study at any time during the study. All measures were taken to uphold confidentiality and the anonymity of all parties involved, including, but not limited to, the use of pseudonyms and fictionalizing details in the results section. Figure 1 describes the demographics of the participants as it relates to grade, gender, and race affiliation.

Figure 1: Participants

	Aliases of students mentioned	Total Number of Students in each Focus Group	Number of Male Students	Number of Female Students	Number of African American/ Black	Number of Latin(x)/ Latinx	Number of students with GPA = 4.0 – 4.5	Number of students with GPA = 3.5 – 4.0	Number of students with GPA = 3.0 – 3.5	Number of students with GPA = 0.0 – 3.0
9th Grade	Shane Jessica Khadijah	11	4	7	9	2	1	3	6	1
10th Grade	Angela Damaris Megan Lance	14	2	12	9	5	2	4	8	0
11th Grade	Damon Guylan Heather	10	4	6	9	1	1	3	4	2
12th Grade	Ty Bryce Jasmine Corey Byron	13	6	7	13	0	1	3	8	1

Data Collection

I used three qualitative research methods to collect data. These methods included focus groups, interviews, and observations with field notes. Each research method assisted in highlighting the participants' voices and perceptions of access to resources and opportunities. I decided to use these qualitative research methods following Ogbu's (2003) study, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb*, and Palmer & Louis' (2017) study, *Talking about Race: Overcoming Fear in the Process of Change*. Ogbu (2003) describes using his fieldwork methods to obtain two goals when he states, "our goal in this daily interaction and rapport was twofold: (a) to understand the peoples' own ideas about schooling, and (b) to observe how students actually went about getting their education" (p. xv). These goals mimic my own in understanding students' perceptions about access to opportunities. My research questions were used as a guide to orchestrate the focus groups and interviews to elicit participants' sentiments towards relationships, beliefs/values, motivations, and behaviors behind the issue. The data collected was used to find common themes among the perceptions of Black and Latinx students attending a White suburban school regarding achievement and access to resources and opportunities. These methods allowed me to triangulate data. Creswell and Poth describe triangulation as a way of ensuring validity among the data. The benefits include uncovering a culture sharing identity and perception through focus groups, gaining in depth insight and experiences through individual interviews, and gathering observable evidence through the observation process.

Focus Groups

I conducted four focus groups. One focus group was conducted at each grade level. Conducting the focus groups by grade level allowed me to capture the experiences of students at their developmental stages without the influence of others who may be at a different developmental stage and, therefore, may have different perspectives on their experiences. I used the same focus group questions for each grade level as to maintain the integrity and focus of the conversation. Conducting focus groups by grade level also helped alleviate any influence from members of various grades as well as provided a safe and comfortable space for participants to express their voice. The focus groups were conducted prior to the interviews and observations to gather a broad understanding of the participants' perceptions and experiences. After analyzing the data, the information was then used to dig deeper into concepts and gather specifics as I proceeded to conduct interviews and then further reassess the data through observations.

The focus group protocol included three areas of inquiry. First, students' feelings toward school. Second, students' perceptions of their ability to achieve in comparison to their counterparts. Third, students' perceptions of having access to resources and opportunities. I asked students questions about their social lives, including student-teacher and student-student relationships and interactions, beliefs and values towards the participation in school-based organizations both academic and non-academic, beliefs and values toward advance placement and honors courses, special education (enrichment and remediation), and overall sentiments towards education. An audio device was used to

record the focus groups and notes later transcribed. Each focus group lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

Interviews

One on one in-depth interviews were conducted in “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, and to uncover their lived world” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 164). These interviewees were a subset from the focus groups and is what Mertens (2015) calls “nested sampling.” Nested sampling occurs when a subset of the participants of the study are included in another part of the study. I interviewed a subset of students that had one of four profiles: 3 students who on a 4.5 GPA scale had an average GPA between a 4.0 and 4.5; 3 students with an average GPA between 3.5 and 4.0; 3 students with an average GPA between 3.0 and 3.5; and 2 students with an average GPA below 3.0. I used between 5 and 7 open ended questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018) while leaving ample wait time in between questions for any further comments from the interviewee. Interviews took place during the students’ lunch period, in the same classroom or conference room where the focus groups occurred. This allowed for a safe place for the participant. An audio recording device was used, and interviews were later transcribed.

Observation

I observed and took field notes of the participants in their natural setting. Observing the participants in the natural setting allowed me to unobtrusively capture natural interactions between students and students, students and teachers, as well as students and staff. Critics of this data collection strategy fear observer bias (Mertens,

2015). I contend that once appropriate relationships have been built, observations provide more valid data than observations from a distant observer (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertens, 2015). I built these relationships by spending time being present prior to the launching of the study. This was done by making myself present and socializing during lunch periods, among common places of leisure, and at social and school functions (i.e. sports games, school play), I made 11 observations in total. These observations occurred during structured times, such as within school led and non-school led organizations as well as during unstructured times such as during lunch and transitions between classes. I had to be strategic in completing my observations as the institution prohibited me from observing students in any classroom setting while formal instruction was taking place. I first observed students on 5 separate occasions during unstructured times. These times consisted of during lunch, during a period called lunch and learn where students may use the time to get extra assistance in classes or take advantage of student led academic resources (e.g. writing lab), during their down time where students congregate throughout various parts of the building to socialize (e.g., atrium, community lounge, library, counselors office), as well as during transitions to class. Among the structured times my observations were restricted to school organizations and clubs only. Again, I had to be strategic in completing observations due to the institution's contingencies. I conducted 6 observations but only found Black or Latinx students participating in 4 out of those 6 which consisted of a sports team, a drill team, a debate team, and a scholar program, which targets Black and Latinx students and is taken as a class. The two observations where students were not participating consisted of two social clubs. The students attended

the functions in showing interests but failed join or left the organization amid its functioning. The participants whom I observed were the same participants whom I interviewed. This brought context and validity to the data that was previously collected. I attempted to complete my observations as a complete observer (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertens, 2015) where I would be invisible and simply take notes. Unfortunately, due to the nature of relationship that I had with some staff and the culture that I share with the participating group I shifted in and out of observer positions such as observer-as-participant and participant-as-observer (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertens, 2015). While observing I focused on the human and social environment. According to Mertens (2015), it is important to note characteristics of people in the different groups (male and female, different background characteristics, racial and ethnicity differences, and different ages). I watched for patterns of interaction, frequency of interactions, directions of communication patterns, and changes in these patterns as well as any decision-making patterns. I did this by creating a diagram to show direction of initial conversation (e.g. teacher/staff to student, student to teacher/staff, student to student) and tallying the amount of interactions between the Black and Latinx students of the group and the teacher/staff member as well as other classmates.

Trustworthiness

To ensure validity, member checking was used during the process of data collection; specifically, during the focus groups and interviews. This was done throughout the focus groups and interviews as well as during the conclusion of the sessions. Students were provided the opportunity to review notes and was offered the

opportunity to have them emailed to them for clarification. The process of three P's and an A (Pause, Probe, Paraphrase, and Acknowledge protocol (Singleton and Linton, 2006) was used to increase validity by allowing participants to suggest additions and deletions in order to tell the story the way they thought it should be told. Throughout the focus groups and interviews I took the time to paraphrase the students remarks after major subjects of discussion and share back with the students to check and see if I was understanding them completely. At those times students were able to confirm my understanding of their statements or deny my understanding at which they would attempt to explain their remarks again at which I would again paraphrase and share back. This process would continue throughout the entire focus group and interview process and until all parties, myself included had a complete understanding of the message that was being provided by the students.

Multiple methods of data collection – focus groups, interviews, observations, and field notes – allowed for triangulation and strengthen the interpretation and conclusions in the study. My study incorporates triangulation not only to interpret the data but to highlight any legitimate differences in the interpretations. The diversity in the data was preserved in the report so that the voices of the least empowered were not lost (Mertens, 2015).

Data Analysis

I used a four-step process for data analysis: 1) preparing and organizing the data for analysis (i.e., transcripts), 2) writing memos and creating codes for the data and used that data in order to construct themes. Codes were first created from the focus groups of

each grade level, followed by the individual interviews and then my field notes. I then compared across the data sources to locate repeated data and trends which were then synthesized into my themes, and 3) represented the data in my thematic findings using thick description. The processes of data collection and data analysis are interrelated and went on simultaneously throughout the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and I constantly checked and rechecked for validity.

Preparing and Organizing

I had the data transcribed and closely reviewed the transcription as it related to the audio recording. Reviewing the transcription data as it related to the audio recording allowed me to interact with the data in an intensive and intimate way. Mertens, (2015), states that this type of interaction allows for intimate interaction, which allowed me to bring my own point of view to the process, including understanding the multiple meanings behind what may seem to be simple responses. This also allowed me to be aware right away of my own impact on the process and allowed me to connect with the data. In doing so, I was sure to be well organized through maintaining proper files and labels for my data to facilitate the data analysis process and ensure accurate reporting of the results.

Data Analysis – Coding and Themes

In this study, the data reflected the participants' voices and their lived experiences and perceptions. I read through the transcripts and my field notes several times in attempts to get a sense of the data from the focus groups, interviews, and my field notes in their entirety by immersing myself in the details. While doing this, I took the time to

write memos in the margins and within the field notes to assist with the initial process of exploring the database (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using memos during the initial read allowed me to capture ideas from reading phrases and was helpful in identifying initial codes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I provided a code for each response that was provided answering the questions. Some responses were given several codes if they applied. Some initial codes consisted of self-doubt, low expectations, students feel lonely, better opportunity in school, WS (White students) do not understand, not able to relate, etc. Using the methodological tools of focus groups, interviews, and observations, I built detailed descriptions, and applied codes to those descriptions. I then developed themes and provided an interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I collapsed the codes into themes by searching for common language associated with the initial codes and grouping the initial codes around topics associated with or addressing my research questions. I allowed the data to guide the analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Some codes were discarded as they did not address my research questions and I found 1 discrepant code (my teachers are supportive) provided by 4 students. A code book was created and used to develop the themes. (See Appendix D). The same process was used for each of my data sources and again in addressing my research questions. After each stage of creating codes from among my focus groups and interviews I used my field notes to cross-reference the findings with what I have observed.

Creating A Point of View

It was important that I created and provided a point of view for the reader (Madison, 2011) that will give an idea to the interpretive framework that I used. An

example of this can be found in the way I utilized student quotes to provide the reader with a lens to how the student perceives their lived experiences. Taking this approach allows the reader to create a lens as to how to read the study as well as create a window to who the data represents and how the data was presented. I did this by sharing the findings through a narrative utilizing my field notes and various quotes from the participants.

Data Representation and Interpretation

In the results section, I wrote about the perceptions that Black and Latinx students' have navigating their lived experiences using thick description. Description is the foundation, (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Mertens, 2015) from which I tell the narrative of this group. I tried to tell the perspectives of the participants and invite the reader to see through my eyes what I have witnessed. I did this first by describing the setting and events in a straightforward way using just the facts (Creswell & Poth, 2018), carefully providing just enough detail to set the scene. The other details from the study were provided through the experiences of the participants. I provided pattern regularities that I found in the data and tied that into the story centered around the research questions. I organized my writing using progressive focusing (Mertens, 2015) where I described the broad context of opportunity gaps that may exist and then progressively focus in on the details of the participants stories that may give context to why these opportunity gaps exist in this setting.

Ethical Considerations

Within my data analysis and representation process it is critical to carefully consider any ethical issues. During these processes, I was sure to mask the participants'

names and assign aliases to prevent the inclusion of identifiable information in the analysis files (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As previously mentioned, I used member checking and triangulation to enhance confidence in the data interpretations. To prevent simply siding with the participants and disclosing only positive results (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I presented multiple perspectives that reflect the nature the complex picture that developed from the data.

When reporting this complex picture, Creswell & Poth (2018) suggest creating reports that are honest and trustworthy, tailoring the reporting to a diverse audience while using appropriate language for the targeted audience. I did these things to ensure that my evidence, data, findings, and conclusions are not falsified, my reporting was appropriate for the intended audience, and that my language was clear and not convoluted.

Since I interviewed students, I was sure to make my protocol and questioning age appropriate and addressed in a manner that students were able to comprehend. A consent form was provided to parents/guardian of all participants, regardless of the participant's age. An assent form was also provided to all participants. Within the consent and assent forms, notice was given explaining the content to be discussed during the study involved elements of both race and culture which can be sensitive subjects. These subjects were addressed with sensitivity and care.

Positionality

The reason that I chose to complete this study is as an African American/Black male working in a predominantly White affluent suburban school many times I have had the opportunity to witness the silencing of Black and Latinx students' voices, and

promising opportunities being stripped from them for the lack of understanding their point of view. Many times, I have witnessed Black and Latinx students not take advantage of opportunities set before them and White educators assuming why that is so.

As a current employee of the Shawmont Area School District (SASD) and the only African American/Black male teacher in a predominately White affluent suburban school, I understand and am aware of the hardships of gaining access to opportunities. I also understand navigating an environment uncommon to the one that I was raised in or currently live in. Even with those experiences, I lack the understanding of what it is like to be a Black or Latinx student attending a White affluent suburban high school and how they experience these same phenomena. I want to understand more about what Black and Latinx students' experience, the perceptions that they carry towards their personal and academic achievement in comparison to their White counterparts, as well as their perceptions toward gaining access to the same valuable resources and opportunities as their White peers.

I personally have experienced racism, racial implicit biases, and stereotype threat from members of the school community ranging from administrators to parents and guardians, to students, as well as through school systems and policies at both the micro and macro levels. These "attacks" although have not caused harm to my physical person, has caused harm to property (e.g. having my car keyed), my professional reputation (e.g. letters written to the superintendent, community Facebook page created attacking my character, etc.), my state of mind, my ideologies, as well as my ability to access opportunities.

In facing these challenges and being challenged with teaching Black and Latinx students in this environment, the challenge of acquiring resources and opportunities that will assist in their personal and academic achievement has resonated with me. Observing systems, policies, administrators, colleagues and students intentionally and unintentionally deny Black and Latinx students access to resources in comparison to their White peers has motivated me to join school and district organizations that assist with addressing race in education through equity and cultural proficiency with hopes in creating a more equitable environment for all.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. Although I examined the responses of Black and Latinx students in a predominately White affluent suburban school, it should be noted that I was unable to acquire the economic standings of the Black and Latinx student participants. This means that I may have over sampled students who come from low-income backgrounds and as a result these students may share more similar experiences. Students who come from lower socioeconomic standing may experience a tougher time in accessing valuable resources and opportunities due to what may be their lack of social capital both at home and within the school environment.

It should be noted that there was an over sampling of female participants. Although data was collected from and similar amount of both female and male participants among the interview and observation phases there was an over sampling of females among the focus group phase that may have skewed the data. The focus group data may have been weighed on a large part of the Black and Latinx female perspective

within these contexts. With focus group data being skewed toward the female perspective some larger topics (e.g. school discipline) may not have been brought to light that some Black and Latinx male students may experience more than their female counterparts.

This study considered the students' academic past experiences and their current academic status as it relates to educational labeling such as Learning Disabled, Gifted, and English Language Learner but no data was collected or provided in reference to their educational labeling. All these variables may or may not affect one's feelings toward educational advancement and therefore may contribute to them not taking advantage of opportunities even if they are provided. The students' experience with these variables along with their social status within the academic institution could affect their personal beliefs and values toward academia. If students with an educational label have struggled in school than feelings that these students may have conjured throughout the course of their education may provide a negative perspective on schooling overall.

This study was also limited in the ability to observe students in their structured academic classes. Only one class was permitted to be observed and that class was designed to support the academic achievement of Black and Latinx students. Although I was permitted to observe students during unstructured classroom support times and among academic clubs and organizations, being able to observe students in their academic classroom settings would have better allowed me to support or deny claims that were made by students.

Building relationship is essential to establishing trust and feeling safe to answer questions openly and honestly. The relationships that I built with the students may or may

not have impeded the responses that were given by the students. If they felt safe, then they were likely able to answer questions openly and honestly; if trust was not built, then the students may have been more reserved in answering questions or may have simply delivered what they felt was “the right answer” or “what I wanted to hear.”

Additionally, as the students were not given an incentive, students who volunteered may have biases directed toward their academic settings. These biases may or may not have influenced others’ responses depending on the social makeup of the sample.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

While completing an interview, a 10th grade student confided in me with her story in which I summarize here. Angela, an African American student, sat in the back of her class as usual alongside the only other student of color, eager to learn. The teacher began by introducing a new concept to the class. For Angela, the excitement of learning something new quickly dissipated as she struggled to comprehend and relate to the lesson. Not fully understanding the concept being taught, Angela contemplated her options of acquiring the new information and reigniting the fire to learn before the teacher moved on and she would forever be left in the dark. Option 1 was to ask for assistance from the only other person that she feels comfortable with in class, another Black student and risk being kicked out and labeled a “distraction” by the teacher if caught. Option 2, to raise her hand and ask the teacher for help and risk being put on the spot and labeled as being “dumb” for not knowing. Angela, going from being eager to learn to now afraid to learn chose option 2 and raised her hand asking the teacher for help. The teacher responded, “I should have never taught this because you’re not going to understand” and the teacher moved on to another topic. Angela then retreated to her safe space not drawing attention to herself and thought “I don’t feel like I’m ever going to succeed because it seems like the teachers aren’t really helping me out. It’s like I have to fend for myself”.

This is just one of many stories that students have shared during focus groups and interviews that highlights the experiences and perceptions of Black and Latinx students attending a predominately White suburban school. In the case of Angela, her eagerness to learn and succeed was robbed from her by her teacher's perception toward her ability to learn. This simple interaction between teacher and student accompanied with the now diminished courage Angela has after stepping out of her comfort zone in an environment that is set apart from her normal may have planted a seed of self-doubt that may one day flourish into self-manifestation.

This qualitative study was designed to unveil the perceptions that Black and Latinx students who attend a predominately White affluent suburban school have regarding achievement and access to resources and opportunities using these focus questions:

1. What are Black and Latinx students' perceptions toward achieving at the same levels as their White counterparts?
2. Do Black and Latinx students perceive themselves as having access to the same resources as their White peers?
 - a. If Black and Latinx students do perceive to have access to the same resources as their White peers, do they use them effectively?
 - b. What resources do Black and Latinx students identify as important to their academic and personal success?

In the analysis of data from the focus groups, interviews, and observations, five essential themes emerged. Themes one and two address research question one, while

themes three, and four address research question two along with its subset (a) question. Finally, theme five addresses subset (b)'s question that is also attached to research question two. The five themes consist of 1) The pressure to perform hinders achievement; 2) Racist narratives interfere with student attitudes toward success; 3) Lack of acceptance leads to prohibited access; 4) Deficit mindsets impede students' ability to utilize resources and opportunities; and 5) Personal support and strong relationships are needed.

These themes are highlighted through Black and Latinx students' perceptions that are provided. Similar to Angela's experience, students expressed many times over that they have had similar experiences and feel that they are on their own when it comes to academic achievement with many times falling short of what they believe to be the standard (i.e. the average scores of White students). These students' perception of having to meet the standard, with the standard being the average score of White students coincides with research done by Foster, (1999); Howard, (2010); and Milner, (2010). Moreover, the experiences and perceptions of Black and Latinx students affect their academic performance. In the following sections, I will discuss the nature of Black and Latinx students' experiences and perceptions and how they led students to encounter 1) The pressure to perform hinders achievement; 2) Racist narratives interfere with student attitudes toward success; 3) Lack of acceptance leads to prohibited access; 4) Deficit mindsets impede students ability to utilize resources and opportunities; and 5) Personal support and strong relationships are needed, all of which affect their access to resources and opportunities which may in return affect their academic performance.

The Pressure to Perform Hinders Achievement

The first theme brings to light the internal battle of responsibility and pressure that Black and Latinx students carry day to day, which weighs heavily on their academic performance and hinders their achievement. It depicts the pressure that students feel in being a racial minority and trying to meet the standard of academic success while many times coming up short. Results from the students' perception of the pressure to perform at a high level academically speaks to why Black and Latinx students do not feel that they overall achieve at the same levels as their White counterparts. Whenever the question was asked "Do Black and Latinx students academically achieve at the same levels as their White counterparts?" students almost always responded with what I perceived to be a nervous laughter while answering with a clear and unapologetic "No". It was hinted that this notion of not academically performing at the same level as their White peers although may sound disturbing to others truly did not affect students' feelings toward their own academic achievement. To these students it was a simple statement of fact and just another ramification of being Black or Latinx in society. Even though students' overall believed that they do not achieve at the same levels as their White counterparts, some felt as though to do so was an impossible task, while others felt that in order to do so supportive systems for Black and Latinx students needed to be in place. One student shared:

Some people like feel as if it's impossible for them to achieve at the same level. I feel like it's definitely possible if things changed. But a lot of other black students feel as if there's no way that they could possibly achieve the same level as white students do.

Another student expressed her sentiment responding to her peer's comment of "White kids do better academically than black kids." She states "Yeah, I really do believe that."

She goes on to justify her belief by explaining

Because their mindset is different from our mindset. There're a few Black people that are going to do really good. With White people, they have a panic attack when they have a C or stuff. Black people are like, "Oh a C that's still good, it's still passing." But to them it's like failing.

This quote not only shows the student's nonchalant expression toward not achieving at the same level as her White peers but, it also shows that, in her view, Black and Latinx students may perceive the importance of academically achieving at a high level differently than that of their White peers as well.

Damon, a student who has been brought up through the Shawmont Area school system provides his account of why White students perform better academically than Black and Latinx students, and the pressure that comes along with trying to maintain a high level of achievement in such a competitive environment. In referring to White students achieving at a higher level than Black and Latinx students he shares

I feel like they do, but at the same time it comes with a really heavy cost. Like I know personally, a lot of White students who do exceedingly well, you know, 5.0 GPA, perfect grades, overall, tons of sports and everything. But of those students, maybe only one or two of them, are happy. Almost all the rest of them are depressed, they're sad, they're always stressed out. They're always busy. Where the Black students I know who are doing not quite as good. Maybe they're not A students. Maybe they're B plus students, maybe they're B students, maybe they're C plus students. But most of the students I know are happy, or at least relaxed. Like you can sit down with them and just have a conversation and you can bring up school without making them stress out or act like they're going to die.

This picture that was painted of Damon's perception of White students who do exceedingly well was not unique to Damon. In fact, a common remark from students was

“These White kids be stressed out over an A minus or a B.” It is remarks like these that students used almost as a shield from the question of why most Black and Latinx students do not achieve at the same high level as their White peers. The stress that students expressed that they observe in their White peers that are perceived to do well academically in this environment was a major topic whenever the comparison came up about the academic achievement between Black or Latinx and White students. The same response was not provided when students were directed to speak about the academic achievement of Black and Latinx students in general who attend the school. Students expressed “wanting to do well” academically. Achieving at a high level academically was said to be particularly important for Black and Latinx students. One student described the reason for “wanting to do well” as “We have to do well so that we can have a better future for us and our family.” This evidence that shows the perception that Black and Latinx students have toward the importance of doing well academically supports the works of Matthews, Banerjee, and Lauermann, (2014), and Morgan and Mehta, (2004). Although doing well academically was held in high regard, students expressed that their overall achievement was not always at a high level.

In response to their overall achievement, students described a myriad of reasons behind why many Black and Latinx students do not seem to perform as well overall as their white counterparts, did in this environment. It was expressed that students either choose not to do well academically, are unable to do well academically, or feel obstructed from doing well academically, all of which were accompanied with both in and out of school pressures that they feel in having to do well academically. A large underpinning to

what students shared was the fact that many Black and Latinx students in the school were not brought up in the school district or were products of the environment that the school resided in. Many of the students had transferred in from inner city schools and currently resided in a small lower income area that happens to fall within the district lines. It was expressed that the student culture among the White students assumed that if a student was Black or Latinx then they resided in this area and come from a lower socioeconomic background. This was said to add pressure to the Black and Latinx students through proving that even if these perceptions were correct, the Black and Latinx students felt they had to prove that they still could succeed at a high level like that of their White peers. Among Black and Latinx students the culture of sharing the same experiences both social and academic was not accounted for by being from the same area but from being a racial minority in the school. One student describes his academic struggles and possibly the academic struggles of others moving into the district who sometimes choose not to do well academically. He reports

The difference between Black people and White people or... Yeah. So, it's like, Black people that just moved here from like a different area, a different school system, a different environment, their use to slacking because that's what everybody's doing. That's the cool. Like, you slacking on your grades. You just chilling. And there's like a couple of smart ones, but then when you move here, everybody's up to par. Everybody knows what they're doing. Everybody's in honors classes, while you in CP (College Prep) and niggas think you dumb when you actually in the regular classes. And it's like since you used to it, it's going to take a while for you to get out of that mood and become somebody new in life.

Similar remarks around this premise of “having to become somebody new” was shared in various ways and on various occasions. This quote sheds light on the pressure and possible internal battle that some students may feel who move into the school district

from a different environment that hinders their achievement. The premise of “having to become somebody new” shows that in regard to performing well academically for Black and Latinx students in this environment, the perception is that you have to adopt the school’s cultural norm and essentially shed your own in order to succeed. If this is to be true, then those students who choose not to conform to the school’s cultural norm may be viewed as oppositional which may have further implications upon Black and Latinx Students’ academic success. Along with the pressure and internal battle to conform, Black and Latinx students who move into the school district battle with other internal pressures to academically perform well.

A junior by the name of Guylan transferred to the school district at the beginning of his sophomore year. He explained that his mother sacrificed and moved his family into the school district with hopes of a better future for him so that he may be the first to change the family trajectory and go to college. He explains his appreciation for his mother’s support but goes on to explain the pressure that he feels because of it. Guylan shares

My mom didn't go to college. None of my family went to college.... my dad didn't go to college, but like only my one aunt and my one uncle went to college out of our whole entire family. So, it's like, when my mom had me, it's like everybody like looks in and like, ‘you got to be the one to get out. You got to be the one to be successful. We need more college graduates in the family.’ And it's like all the pressure is put on me. I mean, like that's not a bad thing because I want to do that, but it's like if I don't, it's like I'm letting everybody down.

A similar story was provided by another student mirroring the unintentional pressure that some Black and Latinx students feel from their home environment when they move into the school district from another district that was not similar. This student explained how

he “does alright” academically but struggles a lot because of the pressure that he feels in not falling victim to some of societies shortcomings that many Black and Latinx people struggle to overcome. The results of these perceived failures may prevent Black and Latinx people from succeeding or getting out of poverty. He shares

My mom, she made it out, I guess, like ‘cause we live in (an area nearby). We got our house. But like I still have a whole other side of the family. I got two brothers and two sisters living in probably one of the worst cities in Jersey. And like if I don't make it out, who is in my family, because my brother, he already sort of messed up his life, so now it's all on me and all my other little siblings.

This response was followed by several other responses from the Black and Latinx students such as, “that's how it is” and “that's how it is for me too.” The various pressures to achieve may have pushed students to work harder, but many times students expressed it having the opposite effect. Through these testimonies, students express the pressures that they feel in their academic performance stemmed from either society or the pressure to conform to the school culture. The testimonies were weighted in low socioeconomic undertones and expressed how students’ academic performance of achieving at high levels can be affected by these pressures, particularly when students moved into the school district. That fact is that not all Black and Latinx students who attend Shawmont High School moved into the district or were among the lower socioeconomic class, yet the narrative from students remained the same; that Black and Latinx students do not perform at the same level as White students at Shawmont High School. This narrative was one that was shared by Black and Latinx students that underperform as well as perform at the same levels of their White peers.

Racist Narratives Interfere with Student Attitudes Toward Success

This theme presents the challenges of Black and Latinx students in overcoming racist narratives used to define them and their academic abilities. It highlights how the racist narratives directed toward the Black and Latinx students at Shawmont High School many times not only affected their ability to achieve at a high level, but also impeded on their attitudes toward school and academic outcomes. Students expressed attending Shawmont High School as a Black or Latinx student alone regardless of socioeconomic status carries its own set of challenges. Many times, these challenges resulted in a lack of effort from students towards academics or teachers grading harsher and paying less attention on students' efforts toward achieving at a high level. Brought up through the Shawmont Area School District, sophomore Damaris has not always done well academically, not because she didn't try, not because she comes from a single parent home or is struggling financially, not even because she struggled to understand the curriculum. According to Damaris her academic struggles were due to the racial "stereotypes" that people had of her. She lamented over her perception that others in the school had of Black and Latinx students

I feel like there's all types of stereotypes of us like of us Hispanics or African Americans being the horrible kids in the school. And because we feel one thing, we get an outlook of we are horrible in academics and we get graded like harsher than White people. Or we don't get much help, or we don't get much of a voice heard in the school than White kids do.

The students were clear that regardless of if you moved into the school district or were raised in it, whether you came from a wealthy family or a poor family, or whether you did exceedingly well academically or not, simply because you were Black or Latinx

attending the school made it tough for you to succeed academically. The students felt that many teachers and students alike were convinced that the Black and Latinx students will not be able to understand the curriculum and therefore will not achieve at high levels. Even for Black and Latinx students who did follow the school's cultural norms and did exceedingly well academically on a consistent basis the taste of success was said to be "bittersweet". Being able to achieve at a high level in this environment was stated to be "a feat into itself", so to do it as a Black or Latinx student in this environment students expressed "should be extra special". Unfortunately, for many it was not, as many times it would come with a cost. This cost, students perceived involves the disbelief from teachers and staff of the student's capabilities to achieve at a high level accompanied with the pressure that students expressed that they feel in having to represent the entire Black or Latinx community. One student provided her feelings towards achieving at high levels academically. She states

I try my hardest in school. I'm an honor student, which has its perks, but it's not always very easy. And I feel like even when I try my hardest, I'm always looked down on by teachers and sometimes peers, just solely because of my race. I have to push myself harder to do my best and perform more because I have like the weight of the whole Black community as a whole, on my shoulders during the school day.

This "weight" of the entire Black or Latinx community that students spoke about is used by some students as motivation to do well, but it was also mentioned that this same "weight" has discouraged others in various settings and as a result prevents them from doing well. The students expressed this being in contrast with their White counterparts by Black and Latinx students "having all eyes on them". In discussing what brings about this feeling of having the "weight of the entire Black or Latinx community on your

shoulders” students shared that it was a result of “having to represent your entire race” due to the fact that many times they are underrepresented. Heather, a vibrant and outspoken junior tells of her struggle with speaking up in class when she was the only Black girl.

I remember I was the only Black girl in an all-White class. There's probably two Asians that was there. And I would feel so uncomfortable and I would get this thing where like, oh if I fail, I'll be known as the dumb Black girl. And I couldn't accept that. Because as the only Black girl I got to set the example and I got to ask questions and all that.

An almost mirror story was provided by a sophomore when she shared

Most of my classes have mostly White kids, I didn't have any friends in most of my classes. But it's like when you got that pressure of everyone expecting you to be the dumb Black girl in the class... I'm not the type of person who does good under pressure.

These sentiments did not only pertain to female students but was carried by male students as well. A similar occurrence was provided by Ty, a senior who is known to do exceptionally well academically, is involved in various sports and organizations, and is known to be social with everyone.

I take mostly honors and I'm usually the only Black person in it. Like even physics, I'm the only Black boy in there. And it's like when you listen, they call on you for like a question or something like that, you scared to get it wrong, because you're the only Black person. Every time I get called on, every time I get called on, they'll look. They're like.... ‘do you know the answer?’

It is evident that the challenges that Black and Latinx students experience on a day to day basis, some of which are internally charged, all effect their academic achievement many times effecting their attitudes toward achievement first. For some students, the challenges of overcoming racist narratives was used as an internal motivator but for many others it created a barrier and interfered with being able to achieve at high levels.

Lack of Acceptance Leads to Prohibited Access

The third theme unveils how the feeling Black and Latinx students have regarding being accepted at Shawmont High School prohibits access to the same resources and opportunities as that of their White peers. It speaks to the Black and Latinx students' perception of not being welcomed into the school's dominant culture as well as feeling isolated and uncomfortable in their environment. This many times prohibited the students, or at the very least, limited the students' ability to access valuable resources and opportunities used to achieve at high levels. The students revealed their perceptions around their academic achievement in comparison to their White peers overall. They spoke to what prohibited some of them from achieving consistently at a high level in acquiring the majority of A's on the report card or scoring on an advanced level on standardized assessments. They painted a picture of how difficult it is to get proper support when they need it, along with the many obstacles and oppressions they must overcome to be afforded the same opportunities as their White peers. Although they recognize the abundance of resources and opportunities afforded to them by attending Shawmont High School, students expressed the complications of gaining access to them and the lack of comfortability in utilizing the ones that they did have access to. They went on to express the various reasons they are not afforded the same opportunities as their White peers. Students expressed if they were afforded the same resources and opportunities, then they feel that they would have a better opportunity of success. Overall, the Black and Latinx students did not feel fully accepted in their school environment and, as a result, they are consciously and unconsciously denied access to

both tangible resources (e.g. joining social clubs, placement in higher level courses, etc.) and intangible resources (e.g. teacher encouragement and support, etc.). Many students revealed multiple attempts to be accepted and gain equitable access that has come to no avail and as a result, many students have given up and accepted things as they are. Bryce, an academically high achieving senior who proclaims to take advantage of the opportunities made available more than most other Black and Latinx students, attempts to explain the collective perception around gaining access.

There's a lot of opportunities Black kids have that they can take advantage of. And the sad thing is this... They're just like, 'what's the point?' It gets to a certain point where they've been rejected and this and this and that, because it's hard. It's hard being a Black kid.

This same sentiment is echoed as Lance provides his account regarding Black and Latinx students' perception around being accepted and gaining access to opportunities.

At a certain point, some people's mindset is like, 'I've experienced this, and I've done this so many times the same type of way. What's the point of me trying it again? What's the point of me making the effort if the same result's going to happen?' Not knowing the next time, you do it might be the time it changes. A lot of kids get that mindset. It's like failure after failure after failure after failure after failure, and then they just start giving up because they can't see the other side. And it's sad because Black kids I feel like experience a lot more failure than White kids, because we don't have any cushion to fall back on.

The lack of acceptance, although many times projected in subtle ways, was reported on some occasions as full-out exclusion, which many times led to isolation. In my attempt to understand the magnitude or overtness of this exclusion one student provided an example of this happening in class among her White peers by stating "...for groups and stuff like that, getting into groups and stuff like that, they will exclude you." This comment was often repeated and mentioned by others as displayed when another student expressed his

regard of not feeling accepted. “They’ll exclude you. They’ll do that.” Many students voiced this type of exclusion and feeling of not being accepted from their peers as the main reason for keeping to themselves in class and limiting their access to a tangible opportunity (e.g. Membership in groups, extra assistance). In Milner’s (2012) opportunity gap explanatory framework this may be an example of cultural conflict that states “conflicts, incongruence, and inconsistencies that educators and students encounter in the classroom can limit students’ learning opportunities.” (p. 701). Shane paints a scenario that showcases a moment when he was in class and exhibited these feelings:

I’m the only Black person in there. Let’s say you’re forced into a group that you’re going to be doing work with, you ask someone what you could do, and they be like, ‘no, that’s all right. That’s cool.’ And when it’s time to turn it in, ‘no, he didn’t do no work.’

His scenario was supported when another student abruptly interrupted Shane to add, “they won’t accept your ideas either.” Students reported wanting to do group projects alone to avoid being placed in uncomfortable situations. The exclusion of Black and Latinx students in any part of the school environment prevents access to the resources and opportunities that the school may provide. In speaking about being excluded, students discussed being able to combat being excluded in social groups by hanging out with students from similar racial backgrounds. They went on to say that it was hardly possible to do so when there are school structured times such as in class because “you’re the only one.” One student explained her thoughts about it in saying

I feel like it’s just like a lot of people that are of color are isolated. Because even if they do find their community of like black friends or friends of color, they’re still always going to be put in a classroom where they’re the only person of color there.

Most students expressed that the exclusion and isolation caused them to second guess their abilities to properly gain access to certain resources and opportunities compared to their White peers. They mentioned resources and opportunities such as class cooperative learning opportunities, having a study buddy, assistance with homework, etc. In contemplating taking advanced placement courses moving into her junior year, sophomore Megan explained her hesitation to ask for in class help along with her hesitation to take AP courses due to the lack of peer relationships that she has in her classes being the only Black or Latinx student.

So, in terms of the AP classes, when it's only, I know I'm the only Black one in Pre-Calc. I feel weird to ask. I know that if I go to AP courses, I'm not about to call up Becky, Sally, or Sue to help me with this AP thing. I'm not doing that. I'm just not doing that. I'd rather have one of my peers who can relate to me. We can go through it together.

On another occasion Corey reveals why he feels that he does not have access to the same resources as his White peers, he explains

It's easier for them to succeed because they're in an environment they're comfortable around, whereas you've got the average Black kid where it's all these White... You might have one or two Black kids in the class. You can't really... It's hard to really ask for help from another student when you don't really identify with anything they do. You maybe have said one word to this person sitting next to you, and you've known him this whole year. It's hard for you to survive and function in that type of environment, when you feel like nobody around you knows or supports you.

Black and Latinx students being isolated and excluded may create a false perception that Black and Latinx students do not want to utilize the resources and opportunities that are available. The students' isolation by race, and the feeling of being inferior supports previous work by Grossman and Ancess (2004). This feeling of inferiority and not being accepted within the school environment has caused some Black and Latinx students not

to rely on education as a means of succeeding. Instead students reported exploring other opportunities for success absent of academics such as through sports, entertainment, or through social media as was discussed in previous studies by Mocombe, (2011) and Noguera, (2008). Students access to resources and opportunity for academic success seemed to be as strong as a student's social capital and observations show that social capital in Shawmont High School was clearly segregated by race. One student described the social atmosphere as:

You will rarely see like, oh, White people hanging with Black. It wouldn't just be like a big circle. I feel like Black people hang with the Black people, White people, majority hang with the White people. Asians hang with the Asians. I feel like everything is so racially segregated.

This phenomenon was further explained in another student's account for how groups self-segregate and her reason for doing so; providing a little more detail behind what happens

So, it's certain ways that you could fit in at the school, and the minorities you could tell that they separated themselves. And then they separated themselves from the White people and then separating themselves from each other. It's like because the White kids, they grew up together. They grew up here. Some of the kids (Black and Latinx) that even grew up with them, they don't even fit in with them. They had to fit in with their own crowd. I guess it's some sort of a culture thing. But it's just like certain things I do in front of them, I can't do with them because they don't get it, or they are not the same as me. They don't see the same thing.

When asked to explain why Black and Latinx students tend to keep to themselves, a student shared, "we do it ourselves. Like nobody makes us do it. We just do it ourselves. Yeah, it's like our natural thing." Although there are many ways in which students can relate in order to build social bonds that may increase students social capital and therefore their access to resources and opportunities; Black and Latinx students' skepticism behind their White peers' true intentions in building relationships with them was questioned.

To substitute for the resources and opportunities that students feel they are prohibited from using, or are not taken advantage of, students expressed building a support system among themselves. This support system is used for both academic and social issues. It was expressed that it provides a “sense of belonging” and creates a “community within a community that does not accept you.” In an interview, a student expressed his feelings toward belonging to a social group composed of only Black and Latinx students and turning to them for academic support instead of utilizing a school resource. He says with a smile on his face, “we're a giant family collectively. You feel confident” The need for Black and Latinx students to create their own support system within the school environment implied that there was a disconnect between school culture and the culture of Black and Latinx students. The disconnect between the school culture and the Black and Latinx student culture was indicated through Black and Latinx students expressing that they do not feel comfortable with their teachers, staff, or their White peers. This evidence supports the argument of Carter (2013) displaying that the disassociation between school culture and student culture enhances the gap in opportunity and further investigation is needed to explore the dynamics that play out between the two and how they affect student outcomes.

The dynamics between the school’s dominant culture and student culture of Black and Latinx students at Shawmont High School caused students to feel uncomfortable. It was explained that aspects such as the school’s systems, policies, and the ideologies associated with them, accompanied with student voice, which many times catered to the majority, assisted in manifesting the school culture. For the Black and Latinx students, it

was expressed that their culture was manifested through “sticking together”, “sharing similar experiences and history”, and even “supporting each other’s interests”. The students revealed “sticking together” (e.g. congregating in common areas, sitting together in class, etc.), “sharing similar experiences and history” (e.g. being kick out of class, being denied access to opportunities such as recommendations to AP courses or receiving extra support, how they were raised at home), and/or “supporting each other’s interests” (e.g. rallying behind a student’s music career or sports interests post high school) where in conflict with the school culture’s expectation for them, which again caused them to feel uncomfortable. These feelings restrict the access to resources and opportunities through the superficial relationships that were built between Black and Latinx students and their teachers, staff, and peers. The relationships that are built between Black students and their teachers are essential in supporting their academic success (Howard, 2010; Milner, 2012; Noguera, 2011). Students reported feeling uncomfortable within their classes when they are the racial minority. A student sheepishly stated, “it makes me uncomfortable when I’m in classes with like a whole bunch of White people.” They expressed constantly being watched. One student explained “you just feel like you're constantly being watched and surveyed by White people, teachers, staff. You can't move anywhere without feeling like you're being looked at.” Another student supported that statement when she gave an account of her first day of class, she said “They were just looking, giving me this weird face like, ‘get out of my school. You don't belong here.’” With students feeling as though they are constantly being watched, added to the perception that they are not accepted. It was evident that the Black and Latinx students

did not feel comfortable in their school environment among their White peers and teachers overall. Although, the discomfort and lack of acceptance between them and their teachers was highlighted as the main obstruction to access to resources such as “receiving attention in class”, “receiving extra support”, or things as simple as investing in students “personal interests.” It was also highlighted that the teachers are the main reason behind Black and Latinx students’ obstruction to opportunities such as “gaining access to honors and advance placement courses”, joining school based “clubs and organizations”, and “representation for school events.” One student struggled to find the words to express how some of her teachers makes her feel by saying

Some teachers are like... You get the vibe where it's like you don't belong, feeling like you don't belong. So, some teachers will kind of talk down to you a little bit. I won't say any names. Some teachers are just maybe... I don't know what their ideals are, but some teachers are just like... It's like you don't belong here.

Her comment was later mirrored by another when he stated “I'm chill with like my class, you know what I'm saying? It's the teachers! Like sometimes they make you feel like, like you don't fit in, I guess you could say.”

With Black and Latinx students’ inability to feel safe and comfortable with their White peers and teachers created barriers toward accessing the resources and or opportunities that are made available whether those barriers were intentional or not. Working to overcome those obstacles force Black and Latinx students to take on a new “persona” in adapting to the school’s cultural norm that they may be unfamiliar with. At times it also forced Black and Latinx students to submit to the oppressions that may come from their teachers and prohibit access, as many times teachers are the “gatekeepers” to many valuable resources and opportunities.

Deficit Mindsets Impede Students' Ability to Utilize Resources and Opportunities

The fourth theme describes Black and Latinx students' perceptions regarding the lack of value that others have towards them due to deficit mindsets. This theme brings to light reasoning behind why Black and Latinx students at Shawmont High School do not take advantage of the resources and opportunities that they do perceive are available. Black and Latinx students revealed having minimal access to the same resources as their White peers. They reported either not being able to use their resources as effectively as their White peers do or not using the resources at all. In digging deeper to unveil the reasons behind not being able to use the resources as effectively as their White peers or not using the resources at all students reverted to their actions being a result of feeling uncomfortable in doing so. They reported feeling uncomfortable in utilizing their resources either through the lack of experience with certain resources or through not feeling valued by peers, teachers, and staff which resorted in self-doubt and the questioning of their ability to succeed in using them. Jasmine explained the difficulty that she has in asking for help because of the way she feels when she does. She expressed that it is "one of the hardest things" that she must do and many times she does not even receive the assistance that she needs. She goes on to say

I feel like constantly berated, like you're looked down upon when you ask someone else for help. Especially when it's someone, like, especially a White person. I don't know why, I just get this feeling like, 'oh, we got to do this right.' 'No, you're doing this wrong.' Like, I feel like I'm being looked down upon and I don't appreciate that.

This perception is one that Black and Latinx students attending Shawmont High School share which supports their feeling of being inferior as was discussed earlier, not only restricting access to resources in some cases but leading to ineffective usage of resources

when they do feel that they have access. An example is provided by one student that portrays the perception that Black and Latinx students have when trying to effectively utilize a tutoring resource provided by the school. The student professes

Somehow the school made it like their problem that they have to help minorities succeed or whatever. I don't think it's intentional, but at the same time it comes across like it's an inconvenience for them, even though like they volunteered for it or whatever. And it's just like, asking White people for help is just the worst; period, because not only is it personally a thing, but it's also what people see.

The disconnection between the school's culture and the student culture of Black and Latinx students, along with the fear of being perceived as "less than" are a couple of reasons that were reported by Black and Latinx students that keeps them away from taking advantage of many of the school's clubs and organizations. The evidence of Black and Latinx students' lack of participation in school clubs and organizations supports findings by Huidor and Cooper, (2010) that showed racially minority students not taking advantage of the school's resources of clubs and organizations in a White suburban school. With Shawmont High School having such a competitive academic culture, students reported their hesitation of getting involved in clubs and organizations particularly around academics due to the deficit mindsets and low expectations that their teachers and peers have toward them and their academic ability. One student spoke for the group when she shared her perception towards how her teachers and peers view the Black and Latinx students, which is one reason that causes her not to participate in many of the clubs and organizations that are offered. She states

They already have it set up in their mind. Oh, their parents don't go to work. Oh, they probably do drugs. Their siblings probably do this and that and they think that we have a bad home. But in reality, our parents are home helping us out, getting on us about doing our work and stuff. Our

siblings are, and all of our family members, but they already have it out that we're just a bunch of other kids coming by that's ghetto and all.

Another student chimed in and provided context to her remark by sharing what his experience is like in the classroom among his peers. He goes on to say

Yeah, the kids do kind of talk down to you a little bit, too. Like, 'do you understand?' Or then when they figure out that you smart, you can actually get that work, they're like, 'oh wow!' I'm like, so it's a big thing now that I could do the same level of work or better work than you? That's wild? That's so surprising? That's why nobody wants to join their clubs.

The deficit mindsets and low expectations that was expressed that others have about Black and Latinx students were visible in their interactions with their teachers as well. The students felt like teachers were surprised when they answered questions correctly in class. One student shared, "I feel like, when a White person gets a good grade, it's like expected kind of but when a Black person gets a good grade it's like, 'oh good job Jamal!'" The students expressed not feeling valued socially or academically by their teachers and peers and therefore abstaining from joining many academic clubs and organizations so that they "would not be looked down upon or put down" by their teachers and/or White peers. Jessica supported these thoughts when she explained her feelings and interactions with teachers around her academic ability:

It's like you show them you know this work, and it's like, 'wow, really? I didn't...' they're amazed that you know how to do this or whatever. And I feel like it's harder for any kid to want to ask for help when you're feeling targeted and you're feeling against the group. It's a bad feeling to have, especially you being a student. You're looking for them for help, and for you to feel like you can't come to them because you're feeling like this is a bad feeling.

Suburban teachers, staff, and administrators are affected by a deficit perspective as founded by Tyler (2016) that impedes Black and Latinx students' ability to effectively

use the resources that they do have available. Stereotypes that teachers, staff, and administrators have toward the Black and Latinx students may have caused them to have a deficit mindset and low expectations of Black and Latinx students as founded by Johnson-Ahorlu (2012) which may also impede their access to, and effective use of valuable resources. With approaching new and unfamiliar resources, in order to use them effectively, some students have attempted to step out of their comfort zone and asked for assistance from those who currently effectively utilize them, or know how to utilize them which normally consisted of their White peers and teachers. They have done this with the hopes that they would not be looked down upon for doing so. Unfortunately, the lack of relationships that the Black and Latinx students at Shawmont High School have with their White peers and teachers discouraged more rather than less of them from stepping out of their comfort zones. This caused them to lean on one another for support in how to best navigate and effectively utilize the resources or resort to not utilizing the resources at all. Far too often Black and Latinx students expressed choosing the latter.

Resources that support student achievement are not only found in school but are also found in students' home environments and communities. Students discussed that although they shared the same resource in support from their home environments and communities as their White peers, the difference would lie in societies perception toward them and their ability to succeed. The Black and Latinx students mentioned that many times they would be discouraged by societies perception toward them from things such as volunteering in the community or extending their learning through internships knowing that taking advantage of these opportunities would support their chances at a post-

secondary education. They stated that they avoid these activities because of the low expectations that society has on them in being successful and attending college. One student expressed, “like where I grew up, like that was the thing. No one ever told me, ‘You could be this, you could be that,’ except for my mom and my dad. And I’m lucky enough to have that.” Black males spoke of their doubt in being able to succeed academically. They discussed being “targeted” no matter what they do whether they are “acting up” or “trying to do well”. One student in speaking about his struggle to overcome the many obstructions in his way of being successful stated “Whether I try my best, go to all the tutoring sessions, and do everything that these kids are doing the teacher will still say that I don’t try.” Another student shared her feelings about how Black boys perceive their opportunities to succeed academically. She shares

I feel like as Black people, they don't look at you like you're going to be something. I feel like a lot of Black boys, a decade thing, they think they can make it out or ‘I’m good at basketball’ or football. That’s it. Like they don’t ever tell you, ‘oh, why’... Like, ‘you could be a doctor or anything.’ I feel like, when they look at doctors that are Black, they be like, ‘oh, you accomplished that!’

Students expressed that the constant deficit mindset and low expectation that Black and Latinx students feel whether from their peers, teachers, or society caused students to have self-doubt in acquiring the outcomes that they set out to achieve when they use the resources that they have available. The result was Black and Latinx students not using those resources effectively. Again, students proclaimed over and over their attempts of utilizing resources to support their academic outcomes but to no avail and in return students lost hope in the effectiveness of many resources as well as in their ability to achieve and succeed academically. One student reported

I always use to go to lunch and learn to get help from this one teacher, but the teacher never helped me. He would say stuff like ‘you should know this. We went over this in class’ even though I was asking him for help, so eventually I just stopped going to him.

Another student agreed in attempting to utilize the resources to support their academic outcomes but to no avail. He stated

I use to go to this writing lab where like there are other students there that are supposed to help you with your writing but every time I would go they would just look at me like I was stupid because I didn’t know something. And then, instead of showing me what to do on the computer or whatever they would just fix it for me so that they didn’t have to work with me. Like my questions were too dumb for them.

Many students discussed feeling academically inadequate, and through academically underachieving in comparison to their White peers are living out a self-fulfilling prophecy as discussed by Grossman and Ancess, (2004) and Tyson, (2013).

Personal Support and Strong Relationships are Needed

The fifth and final theme captures students’ identification of the need for personal support and meaningful relationships as valued resources to their academic and personal success. The need for personal support and the presence of strong relationships are what were identified as resources that were deemed important for the academic and personal success of Black and Latinx students at Shawmont High School. Students specifically highlighted the need to feel welcomed, the need for peers that look like them in their classes, as well as the need for teachers to show that they care and have an interested in them beyond that of school. Students revealed that with these resources in place “even if we don’t do that well academically, at least people will want to help us succeed anyway and it wouldn’t be that bad to go to school.” For the Black and Latinx students who attend Shawmont High School, as racial minorities, it makes sense that

personal support and strong relationships were identified as important resources for their academic and personal success. Students discussed the ability to “simply go through school without anyone really caring about you or what you’re going to do after high school.” For Black and Latinx students to feel cared for by the Shawmont High School community, students mentioned that they first “want to feel welcomed” in the community.

Feeling welcomed was an issue that many students have relayed as a resource that would assist them both personally and academically. It was discussed that not being a part of a welcoming environment made it seem as though no one cared for their academic success or cared for them personally. Students mentioned the lack of feeling welcomed as being a major reason behind why Black and Latinx students self-segregate. They revealed that “being together with people that look like you make you feel comfortable to be yourself and also confident.” During a discussion around what can be improved in Shawmont High School in order to support Black and Latinx students, Khadijah, a student who attended a White suburban school since kindergarten took the time to explain her perception regarding Black and Latinx students’ from more diverse school environments first being introduced to a White suburban High School. She states

With not having a lot of the support systems and a lot of them who are from outside of schools already have a perception that school wasn't something that they can do well. A lot of times they come here and that's not their priority. So, I feel like if things were changed to where they'd have more support to like feel more welcome around here, I feel like they definitely feel a lot different.

Khadijah’s explanation resonated with many of the students as they each supported her comment with testimonies of times when they actually felt welcomed from friends or a

certain teacher in school and how those feelings brought about “a better day”, “a better attitude”, and even “a better relationship” with some of their teachers and peers. It was shared that the ability to feel welcomed whether by the school environment or by individuals supported Black and Latinx students’ in having positive attitudes toward school which warranted better relationships with members of the school community and assists with intrinsic motivation towards their academic success. Students expressed that the feeling of being welcomed provided a sense of belonging. This evidence supports the work around the effects of school belonging on the relationship of racial climate with intrinsic motivation by Byrd and Chavous (2011).

Students also provided testimonies of times when they did not feel welcomed in school. It was during these times that students banded together to stress the importance that feeling welcome was to them personally. Many testimonies that were shared were not unique stories to one individual but were testimonies that each student had their own version of. In trying to provide a suggestion on how to help with the issues that Black and Latinx students are experiencing one student suggested

They can just try to add more things about Black culture to kind of like talk about it more to kind of make us feel more welcome, or just even as simple as like teachers asking, trying to be more engaging with students. Like saying, "Do you need help?" Or, "Do you need help with any of this?" There are a few teachers who do do that, which I really appreciate. Some teachers who do go out of their way to really try and build a relationship with their student. Yeah, so I feel like if that was implemented more, we might feel a little bit more welcomed.

Many of the testimonies not only highlighted school environment issues that made students not feel welcomed (e.g. the lack of racial diversity among the school’s artwork or the lack of representation of Black and Latinx student culture throughout the school),

but rather focused on the disconnect between themselves and the White members of the school community. In addressing what resources Black and Latinx students felt were important and needed to be addressed to support their personal and academic growth, the students collectively expressed that “the people need to change”. One student voiced his thoughts in saying

I feel like that they should definitely change, basically make it a more welcome environment for Black and Latino students, because I feel like it's not the most welcoming environment to people, especially people who never been in a predominantly White school before. It's not the most welcoming environment, I'd say.

Black and Latinx students not feeling welcomed in their school environment has assisted with their ability to grow social bonds with one another as a support system to feel welcomed. These strong bonds that they have with one another as stated earlier were used as a resource that assist with students feeling valued and accepted when they are among their peers of similar racial backgrounds. Unfortunately, when attending a predominately White suburban school this is not always the case, particularly when students are in class and may need access to that resource the most.

The need for more students of color in school overall but particularly within the classroom was deemed highly valuable to students. They shared the importance of “seeing someone else that looks like you” in the class and how it provides not only a familiarity and comfortability but it was also stated that it provides a sense of confidence in their academic ability as well as pride. One student shared the excitement that she feels whenever she sees another student from a similar racial background in the same class as her. She reports

If I go in class and I see all the White kids I'm like, 'oh, I guess I'm by myself.' But if I see a Black kid, I'm like, 'Okay, this is better!' Because as a Black kid I'll get to talk to that person because I won't feel left out. I'll feel like there's somebody that's like me, so I'll go talk to them. I feel like we can do this together.

The difference in participation among school clubs and organizations was evident.

Black and Latinx students were intensely involved when there was an equal amount or more students of color than their White peers. Among clubs and organizations that contained one or two students of color, Black and Latinx students were less involved and acted more as observers than participants. This dynamic was stated to be due to students' lack of confidence or comfortability. Students asserted that the larger amount of Black and Latinx student in attendance made them more comfortable to "be themselves" and gather support from each other both socially as well as academically. One student spoke of attending drill team which is composed of the majority Black and Latinx students in saying "I always look forward to drill team. It helps me get through my day. It's the only time when I can be myself or get help from someone if I need it."

Getting help, particularly from teachers is an area that many would assume is an important resource for a student's personal and academic success, but for Black and Latinx students attending Shawmont High School it is much more than that. Black and Latinx students identified not only receiving help from teachers as important to their success but the need for teachers to care and value who they are as people is just as important. Byron has attended White suburban schools his entire upbringing and is now a senior and about to graduate with over a 4.0 GPA. In providing advice to any new Black or Latinx student attending a White suburban school for the first time he expressed.

So, my advice would be keep yourself surrounded by people that love you and support you with everything you do. It's important that that's teachers that do that. You have to find a teacher that actually cares. If a teacher's not working for you, say something. Say something like, "I'm not going to be able to function in this class if I continue being with this teacher." You have to be able to communicate that with your guidance counselor, and if you can't communicate that with your guidance counselor, you got to tell your principal, like, "I can't function here if I can't talk to the person that's supposed to help me the most here. I need a different guidance counselor." That's the main thing.

The Black and Latinx students' identification of the importance of teacher and student relationships (an intangible resource) to their personal and academic success further supports the work done by Mathews, Banerjee, and Lauer mann (2014) on the self-efficacies of African American and Latino adolescents. Students shared that the investment that teachers place in students when they take the time to view Black and Latinx students as more than a statistic provides them with a sense of value which in turn motivates them to succeed.

Students identified "sometimes needing encouragement" when they feel like they cannot do something or if they feel like giving up. The encouragement that students identified as being needed at times was mentioned comes from home at times, from their peers at times, but rarely came from their teachers. It was highlighted that the need for teacher encouragement was a particularly important motivating factor, not only in succeeding academically, but in succeeding in various life events. A student who is a self-proclaimed "knucklehead" shares his sentiments toward having a teacher that "actually cares" He shares

Some teachers will actually reach out to you and help you. Like a teacher I had in the past for instance, in ninth grade, Mr. Scallon. Our class was really rowdy and always misbehaving, but he'll sit down with certain students. I was rowdy but I still wanted to learn. I still wanted to get good grades. He'll sit down with us and

help us out. But certain teachers would just ignore the students who even are acting up or won't even talk to them after class and be like, "Hey, you need to calm down. I know you. You could do better than this." Some people don't get that type of talking to so they don't do the same thing that they could feel like they could be doing. They don't have a person telling them that they can do better than they actually be showing them that they can.

Teacher encouragement as mentioned in Milner, (2012); Howard, (2010); and Noguera, (2011), and supported by the survey from the Minority Student Association Network (Alson, 2003) has proven to be held in high regard toward the success of Black and Latinx students. The relationships that are built between teachers and their Black and Latinx students have an impact on their personal and academic success. These relationships, accompanied with more self-representation among class peers and a sense of feeling welcome, are what Black and Latinx students revere as important resources for their success.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

As the data demonstrate, in a predominately White suburban school, Black and Latinx students' perceptions of achieving at the same levels as their White counterparts and gaining access to valuable resources and opportunities are affected by the pressure to perform, racist narratives, the lack of acceptance, deficit mindsets, and the need for personal support and strong relationships. To raise the academic achievement of Black and Latinx students to compete with their White counterparts and in the long-term support their societal advancements, these students argue for having access to equitable resources and opportunities. In this study, the perceptions of Black and Latinx students who attend a predominately White affluent suburban school was explored to better understand their feelings, beliefs, and ideologies toward achievement and access to resources and opportunities in comparison to their White counterparts.

I study this context because research suggests that Black and Latinx students particularly in urban areas are overcome by social factors such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender dynamics that impedes access to resources and opportunities and their ability to succeed at the same levels as their White counterparts (Carter and Welner, 2013). This phenomenon was explored to see if this holds true in a predominately White affluent suburban environment. I found that among the setting that was studied, Black and Latinx students had no expressive reaction to the comparison of their achievement levels to that of their White peers. Despite students' nonchalant expressions toward their achievement comparisons, my study's participants expressed wanting to academically achieve at a

high level and attributed many of their academic short comings to the perceived racist narrative that they experience in their environment.

I found that within this environment the hinderance of achievement for my study's participants due to the "pressure" to perform was complicated. Student's expressed "pressure" in terms of both academic and social settings and described it being felt from both school and home environments. This "pressure" that students felt created a hinderance for some but was used as internal motivation for others. Home environmental pressure consisted of the pressure of "not being a statistic", "being the first to make it to college", "Being a role model for younger siblings", "not letting the family down", "proving society wrong", etc. In terms of the school environment pressure consisted of "representing the entire race", "scoring at an academically high level", "adapting to the cultural norm", "not being stereotyped", etc. The nature of this issue behind the "pressure" that Black and Latinx students felt was too dense to unpack within this study and further research may be warranted.

In my review of the literature around the inequities that exist for Black and Latinx students that may lead to opportunity gaps I have discovered school discipline to be a major factor. This research has shown up in studies by Howard (2010); Lewis and Diamond (2015); Noguera and Wing (2006), and others, showcasing the inequities that racial minority students experience in this area. To my surprise, in my research the topic of school discipline was not a major theme. Students have mentioned "feeling targeted" but there was not enough repeated data to warrant it as a major finding although enough remnants of the topic were brought up that it should be mentioned. As a current employee

of the institution where the study has taken place my belief is that less infractions against Black and Latinx students were being identified and or documented in order for there not to be any evidence of inequitable disciplinary treatment which may lead to future litigation in a heavily litigated district.

Overall Black and Latinx students in this environment found it particularly challenging to navigate structural and racist inequities that currently exist and spoke to the struggles of achieving at a high level in comparison to their White counterparts.

The Hinderance Behind Equitable Access to Resources

In this environment it was found that students perceive a combination of inequitable policies, structures, and systems that exist in a subtle manner (Diamond, 2006) which hinder their ability to either access or utilize available resources. These inequitable policies, structures, and systems are in part created and sustained through color-blind discourses, conceptions, and practices that allows the opportunity gap to exist and persist (Milner, 2012). The students alluded to cultural differences also referred to as cultural conflicts between their school environment, their White teachers and White peers, and themselves that may attribute to different racialized experiences in and out of the classroom, which may limit their learning opportunities and hinder their academic and social success (Irvine, 2003; Milner, 2012). In fact, some students felt as though achieving at a high level when compared to their White peers was an impossible task while others thought it possible with the proper supports in place to combat these inequities.

The Feeling of Self-Doubt

My focus groups, and interviews, along with my field notes from making observations, revealed the lack of value and acceptance that my studies participants felt in this environment. Many of the feelings that students felt were perceived to be projected upon them by their school's policies, structures, and systems, along with the interactions with administrators, teachers, staff, and peers. It was discovered that their experiences with these factors led to Black and Latinx students' intellectual capabilities being questioned, and their cultural customs devalued (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Diamond, 2006) which at times led to self-doubt and possibly self-fulfilling prophecies (Grossman & Aness, 2004; Tyson, 2013). Students unveiled the low expectations and deficit perspectives that others have of them (Howard, 2010; Milner, 2012; Tyler, 2016) as strong contributing factors in their self-doubt and avoidance of utilizing and taking advantage of the resources and opportunities that they did feel were available.

Barriers and Discomfort Deter Access to Resources

My study's participants overwhelmingly discussed the school's culture and their discomfort among it, leading to either their inability to access resources or their abstinence from accessing resources that were perceived available. Students discussed systemic barriers that existed as well in preventing access. Although a large part of the lack of access to valuable resources and opportunities were due to what my study's participants perceived to be barriers and their discomfort among the school environment, some students who transferred into the district found it more difficult to access resources.

In contrast to the perception of transfer students in having a more difficult time accessing resources than other Black and Latinx students, all students reported not having the same access as their White peers. Students felt forced to adopt the school's culture to possibly gain access and meet the school's standards which often was foreign to their own. Students felt as though it was important to meet the school's standards in order to take advantage of the resources that are available at a reputable high achieving school and the opportunities that they may be afforded for attending such a school.

School Culture Dictating Access

Students perceived adopting the school culture as meeting a standard that is set by their White peers (Foster, 1999; Howard, 2010, Milner, 2010) and regarded it as having their own student culture undermined. The mismatch of school culture and student culture is what students asserted as a major factor in their lack of access to resources and opportunities for academic success.

Given what we know from prior research about low expectations and deficit mindsets (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Howard, 2010; Milner, 2012; Tyler, 2016) that teachers and others sometimes have of students, it can make it very difficult for the knowledge and skills that Black and Latinx students have to be considered valuable when it may be "different" from the norm. According to deficit theories or perspectives, "different" is equated with deficient, inferior, and substandard (Milner, 2012) and may be how some administrators, teachers, staff, and students view Black and Latinx students who attend predominately White affluent schools. I argue that additional attention should

be paid to the burden of achievement for Black and Latinx students in predominately White affluent schools who transfer in from lower socioeconomic urban areas.

Further, while prior research has focused on the importance of teacher encouragement for Black students in urban school settings (Howard, 2010; Noguera, 2011), my work suggests that Black and Latinx students who attend predominately White affluent suburban schools also highly value teacher encouragement.

The Need for Support

My study's participants identified the need of personal support and strong relationships that involve care and personal interest as valuable resources in their personal and academic achievement. It was identified that in the predominately White suburban school of Shawmont High School, Black and Latinx students need to feel welcomed. This feeling of being welcomed reverts to the students wanting to be valued, accepted, and cared for in their environment. A welcoming environment may show Black and Latinx students that the school community supports them and accepts them for who they are and the different perspectives that they may provide.

Representation of Black and Latinx students' different perspectives is another area that students valued as important. Students expressed the need for seeing themselves represented within the school culture, within the school curriculum, and most of all among the school community, essentially being represented and valued in the school's social context. Context-neutral mindsets may exist among school's administrators, teachers, and peers, that do not allow for the recognition of deep-rooted and ingrained realities embedded in the school culture (Milner, 2012).

Conclusion

While I clearly do not seek to generalize based on one school context, my data contributes to comprehending the opportunity gap for Black and Latinx students as it exists in predominately White affluent suburban schools. Future work, perhaps drawing on survey data from similar school districts both affluent and not, systemically testing Black and Latinx students' access to resources and opportunities, would provide a better understanding of the opportunity gap in these environments.

Based on my findings, I suggest being aware of the social context of schools that may reinforce the status quo or disrupt it (Milner, 2012), in order to mitigate the opportunity gap that Black and Latinx students have in the unequitable access to resources and opportunities attending predominately White suburban schools. My work adds to the growing body of evidence suggesting that the opportunity gap exists at all levels of education, not only in low socioeconomic urban settings but in predominately White affluent suburban settings as well and may be socially constructed.

Recommendations

For Black and Latinx students who attend White suburban schools to academically achieve at the same high level as their White peers, educational institutions must provide supports that assists with evening out the playing field. To that end, I have six recommendations to school personnel.

Recommendations for Schools:

Infuse Representation of Student Culture Within the School

Within the five themes, students spoke to the importance of feeling welcomed in the school environment. Being welcomed in the school environment will assist with addressing the third theme which shows that Black and Latinx students need to feel accepted. In feeling understood and accepted from their teachers, peers, and staff, Black and Latinx students may gain access to similar resources as their White peers.

I believe that more attention could usefully be paid to the cultural dynamics associated with Black and Latinx students' experiences in predominately White schools. This will assist with Black and Latinx students feeling appreciated and accepted in their environment. As Banks (1998) shows,

some groups of students-because their cultural characteristics are more consistent with the culture, norms, and expectations of the school than are those of other groups of students-have greater opportunities for academic success than do students whose cultures are less consistent with the school culture. (p. 22-23).

Therefore, in considering how students gain access to valuable resources and opportunities and manage academic success, we need to attend to the dynamics they experience in their adoption of the school culture and interactions with administrators, teachers, and peers.

In efforts to make the school culture more welcoming for Black and Latinx students, White suburban schools should look to infuse the representation of Black and Latinx students' culture. This student cultural infusion could come in the form of representation within curriculum, displaying more cultural artwork and exhibits throughout the school's public areas, or through school clubs and organizations that cater

to the interests of Black and Latinx students. Through the displaying of these exhibits and addition of these clubs and organizations Black and Latinx students may begin to see a representation of themselves and their background which may build confidence and a sense of belonging. It also may relay the message to the Black and Latinx students from the school district that they are acknowledged, valued, supported, and accepted among the school community.

Recommendations for Administrators/School Leaders:

Create a Mentoring Program

Another resource that was held in high regard and deemed important to the personal and academic success of Black and Latinx students was strong relationships. Students expressed the need for teachers to get to know them and their aspirations, care for them, encourage them, and try to relate to them. With Black and Latinx students many times having teachers that do not racially resemble themselves, it is important for these students and teachers to build strong relationships so that they may have a better understanding of one another.

In building strong relationships, time must be invested in getting to know each other through conversing, gathering information, sharing stories, and understanding the commonalities and differences among each other. Creating a mentoring program between the teachers, staff, and Black and Latinx students will provide the time and connection that the teachers and students need to build that bond. It will also allow for the extra support from a teacher while in a safe environment. Mentorship should be encouraged, and training should be provided. Teachers and students who volunteer for the program

should complete cultural competency training together as mentor and mentee among the larger group. This will assist the teachers in being able to “relate to” and “understand” the students and vice versa. Initial incentives may be provided for teachers (e.g. professional development hours, stipend, etc.) as well as for students (e.g. curriculum credit, fulfilment of a project requirement, etc.) to entice participants.

Throughout this process teachers will then be able to build a relationship with students and have a deeper understanding of them beyond that of just academics. Commonalities may be uncovered which will assist in culture building between the teacher and student. Building relationships is critical in educational practices and is support by Darling-Hammond (2010) in *The Flat World and Education: How America’s Commitment to Equity Will Determine our Future*.

Diversify the Staff

Although the racial makeup of a school’s student body cannot be controlled, the racial diversity of the school’s staff is an area that can be influenced. My study’s participants discussed having more representation of themselves in the classroom. By diversifying the staff, Black and Latinx students may feel more comfortable in their learning environments which may assist them in taking advantage of the resources and opportunities that are available in the classroom. A diverse staff also provides various perspectives that are delivered through instruction but also provides a different image for Black and Latinx students’ White peers to learn from.

In order to recruit educators of color, predominately White suburban school districts can partner with local colleges and universities not only to recruit but to provide

incentives for educators of color to enter the profession of education (e.g. loan forgiveness by districts for (x) numbers of years of service, guaranteed employment upon graduation, etc.). Districts can also attend educators of color recruitment fairs or create an educator pipeline through partnering with historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's).

To retain the educators of color, a local networking consortium should be created for the employees of color so that there is a support system for individuals that may be navigating outside of their cultural norm. Upon employment into the district it would be beneficial for employees of color to be provided a mentor that would consist of another employee of color who has been employed by the district for several years. This will support new employees in understanding how to navigate the operations and politics of the district as an employee of color.

Provide Cultural Proficiency Training

The fourth theme discussed Black and Latinx students not feeling valued by their teachers, peers, and staff. Many times, this feeling was acquired through the low expectations and deficit mindsets that individuals had toward Black and Latinx students resulting in self-doubt and causing students to ineffectively utilize valuable resources. The low expectations that are projected onto Black and Latinx students may stem from current deficit mindsets consisting of the implicit biases and stereotypes that people may carry toward Black and Latinx students.

The adoption of color-blindness by Black and Latinx students' teachers can make it difficult for educators to recognize systemic disparities and dilemmas in education such

as an underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students in schoolwide clubs and organizations (Milner, 2012). It is for these reasons that cultural proficiency training is warranted.

Cultural proficiency training should be implemented among all school parties. These trainings will allow individuals to evaluate their own ideologies, perceptions, and beliefs. According to Matthews, Banerjee, and Lauermann (2014) Black and Latinx students are learning to navigate unique social and cultural tensions that can challenge feelings of efficacy. One way to support these challenged feelings is to change the narrative and educate oneself in the culture and abilities of individuals. Through the knowledge gained behind cultural proficiency training, doors may be opened in the future to have courageous conversations around race without individuals being afraid to ask the tough questions and others being offended. Black and Latinx students being able to have courageous conversations about race with other members of the school community may assist in building stronger relationships and therefore opening access to valuable resources.

Create a Student Union for Students of Color

Black and Latinx students who attend White suburban schools may self-segregate to build a support system and gain a resource where they may not have access to others. The gathering of Black and Latinx students as showed in the data provides a sense of belonging and confidence to students who do not necessarily feel welcomed. It also provides a “voice” and “soundboard” for Black and Latinx students to share their successes and struggles.

Creating a student union geared towards students of color but open to all students will provide a safe space for students to gather, express their concerns, and gain support, without the fear of “being constantly watched”. It will provide a sense of belonging where individuals can relate and find commonalities among one another. The creation of a student union could also serve as a support for Black and Latinx students who are just entering the school district. The collective voice from the student union can be used in having representation within the larger school community.

Recommendation for Policy:

Create a Strategic Plan on the Foundation of Equity

Throughout this study the data has shown that Black and Latinx students do not perceive to have equitable access to the same resources and opportunities as their White peers. It is for this reason that school districts should adopt a district policy that governs all other policies and forces the administration of these policies through a lens of equity. These policies should be used as guides while school districts create strategic plans that are based on the foundation of equity. With a strategic plan centered around equity, administrators, school leaders, teachers, and staff will be forced to provide Black and Latinx students with the necessary resources and opportunities to support their academic and personal success.

Future Research

This study highlights the need for future research in three areas. First, this study indicates that Black and Latinx students who attend White suburban schools are hindered or do not access valuable resources and opportunities due to their discomfort in attending

a predominately White suburban school. Future research should investigate the perceptions that Black and Latinx students have toward access to resources and opportunities when they attend predominately White suburban schools where racial minorities, particularly the Black and Latinx students make up close to 50% of student population. This should be done to determine if Black and Latinx students who attend White suburban schools are affected in accessing resources and opportunities by the variance in the school's racial demographic.

Second, this study took place in a predominately White affluent suburban school that carries a reputation of being academically competitive. Further research should be conducted in other predominately White suburban schools that may be less affluent and academically competitive. These schools may be ones that contain a percentage of students from economically disadvantage households and an "average" school rating. This research will shed light onto if the nature of the school's affluency, available resources, or competitive nature is what drives Black and Latinx students to carry the perceptions toward their personal and academic achievement.

Third, as this study only takes place in one location, future studies should take place across various suburban locations where the ratio between Black and Latinx students and their White peers vary. This will provide insight around the affects that having a larger population of Black and Latinx students may have on their perceptions toward their personal and academic achievement.

Closing Remarks

My mission to even out the playing field, through providing Black and Latinx students equitable resources and opportunities as their White counterparts to improve their personal and academic achievement and societal advancement has been ongoing. This stage in the fight has provided me the opportunity to be able to explore the uncharted territory of a predominately White affluent suburban school. The journey has not been easy, and it only gets harder from here. I have had the privilege and the honor of listening to the stories of some amazing young Black and Latinx men and women struggling to find their way to success in an uncomfortable environment. Their cries for support and guidance have many times fell upon deaf ears but this opportunity has allowed me to be a resource for them, acquiring knowledge and providing a voice to the voiceless.

My study identified five significant themes regarding the perception that Black and Latinx students have toward achievement in comparison to their White peers. These themes are supported by past research and consist of: (1) Black and Latinx students' pressure to perform hinders their achievement; (2) Racist Narratives interfere with student attitudes toward success; (3) Black and Latinx students lack of acceptance leads to prohibited access to resources and opportunities; (4) The deficit mindsets held by teachers, students, and staff toward Black and Latinx students assist in creating self-doubt and impede their ability to effectively utilize the resources that they do feel that they have access to; and (5) Black and Latinx students regard personal support and strong relationships as important to their personal and academic achievement. My hope is that

school personnel of predominately White suburban schools will consider and act on these themes, implications, and the areas of future research identified in this study to help support the personal and academic achievement of Black and Latinx students who attend White suburban schools. Because although this study focuses on the perceptions of Black and Latinx students who attend a predominately White suburban school; their perception is their reality.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: STUDENT INTEVIEW PROTOCOL

Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me for this interview and help me out. In case you did not remember my name is Brandon Latinx. I am currently a doctoral student at Temple University as well as a schoolteacher in a suburban elementary school. The purpose of this study is to determine what factors impede Black and Latinx students in affluent suburban schools from achieving at the same level of their White counterparts. My hope is to understand from the perspectives of Black and Latinx students their thoughts, feelings, and understanding of what factors and or experiences in affluent suburban schools prevent or discourage them from achieving at the same levels as White students.

The set of questions that I present are designed to elicit individual thoughts, feelings, or experiences that you may have regarding the environment in which you attend school and the opportunities that are or are not available to assist with our academic achievement. The data collected will be used in conjunction with other data collected through various other interviews, observations, and group discussions on the matter to provide a deeper understanding of Black and Latinx students' experiences in an affluent suburban school. For this study, a consent form has been provided to you to participate. Please look this over and feel free to ask any questions that you may have.

I look forward to hearing your truth and learning from your experiences.

Guiding Facts:

- Black and Latinx students do not achieve at the same levels as their White counterparts in predominately White suburban schools.
- There is a disproportionate number of White students enrolled in Honors and AP courses in comparison to Black and Latinx students.
- There is a disproportionate representation of Black and Latinx students in special education programs (with fewer enrolled in gifted support and more enrolled in learning support) in comparison to their White counterparts.

It is for these reasons that I would like to ask you a few questions and gain an understanding through the students' perspective in his or her own words as to why these phenomena may be so.

1. Do you feel that you are a good student?
 - a. Why?
2. Do you feel that you have the resources that you need to be successful academically?
3. What opportunities do you have to show that you are academically successful?
4. Do you feel you are as successful academically as you can be?
 - a. Would you like to be as successful academically as you can be?
5. Have you taken any AP or honors courses?
6. Why or Why not?
7. Do many of your Black and Latinx peers take AP courses?
 - a. Why or Why not?

8. In your experience, do White students do better academically?
9. Please describe your relationships with your teachers and staff.
 - a. Please give specific examples.
10. Describe getting help from your teachers as you experienced it
11. Please describe your relationships with students of color and with White students.
 - a. Do you have any mixed group of friends?
 - b. Do you perceive any differences in your relationships with students of color and White students?
12. In general, do you think that school is more difficult for Black and Latinx students?
13. What kind of advice would you give a relative or friend that was coming from out of state and was going to attend LMHS?

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Do you like this school?
 - a. Do you feel that you fit in here?
2. Do you think the experiences in school is different for students of different races?
 - a. Why or Why not?
3. Do students of color tend to be friends with each other or with mixed groups?
4. How do you think Black and Latinx students do academically compared to White Students?
 - a. Why do you feel that is?
5. Does taking AP or Honors courses help you achieve more academically?
6. How does the teachers and staff here support your learning?
7. What kind of relationship do Black and Latinx students have with their teachers?
8. Do you have friends in your classes?
 - a. Do you do homework or projects together?
9. Do you feel that it is important to join school clubs and organizations?
 - a. Why or Why not?

APPENDIX C: MAPPING QUESTIONS TO METHODS AND INSTRUMENTATION

Research Question	Data Collection	Why the best method given your questions and context/situation
1. What are Black and Latinx students' perceptions toward achieving at the same levels as their White counterparts?	Focus Group Interviews	The qualitative data that is collected during these sessions will assist me in attempting to understand the issue from the participants' point of view and help me to comprehend the meaning of their experiences.
2. Do Black and Latinx students perceive themselves as having access to the same resources as their White peers?		It will also allow me to begin to find trends, and patterns in the collected responses to develop themes and make sense of the world that they live in.
2 (a). If Black and Latinx students do perceive to have access to the same resources as their White peers, are they used effectively?		
2 (b). What resources do Black and Latinx students identify as important to their academic and personal success?	Observations	The use of observations will allow me to look for patterns of interactions. It will allow me to use this data to help triangulate the data to support and strengthen the interpretation and conclusions in the study. It will also highlight any legitimate differences in the interpretations.

APPENDIX D: CODE BOOK

- 1. Disconnected** – refers to times when students mention a lack of connection with reality between student and student, student and teacher, student and environment, or student and content.
- 2. Do not Belong** – In reference to any mention of one’s perception or feeling as if they are not accepted by an individual, group of individuals, or systemic organization.
- 3. Lack of Relationship** – When does it exist, what does it look like, who has it, who does not? this will include students’ interactions and verbal sentiments towards peers, teachers, staff, and administrators.
- 4. Cultural Difference** – This refers to any time when Black or Latinx students referred to not sharing, being able to relate or understand the expectation of various cultures (e.g. school culture, racial culture, etc.) and the students’ perception of other cultures not understanding them.
- 5. Excluded/Isolated** – Observations and references toward feelings of, or physically being placed in situations where students are separate from others and/or activities.
- 6. Cannot Relate** – Any mention of sharing or not sharing the same experiences that assist in creating a connection or understanding of others, a topic, or academic content
- 7. Attention** – Refers to any observation or reference to peers, teachers, or staff taking interest in or regarding Black or Latinx students as important.
- 8. Constantly Watched** – This is an observation of school staff continuously and closely monitoring the actions of students. This also refers to students’ perception toward teachers, peers, and staff, monitoring them through a lack of trust or suspicion.
- 9. Represent Entire Race** – Times when students felt or were called upon by peers, teachers, or staff to provide the perception of their entire affiliated race. It also refers to the pressure that students felt to act in a positive manner in fear that others will perceive that they portray the same or similar actions of others in that affiliate race.
- 10. Scared to be Incorrect** – Any mention of students feeling concerned, intimidated, or anxious toward answering academic questions testing the student’s knowledge from teachers or peers of a different racial class.

- 11. Must be Exception to Stereotype** – Any reference from students expressing personal pressure felt to act in a manner of or be viewed up as conducting oneself in contrast to the negative racial stereotype that others may place upon them.
- 12. Low Expectations** – This refers to any negative expectations, hopes, or bad feelings towards students regarding meeting academic or social standards.
- 13. Look Down Upon** – This code speaks to any time a student was observed or mention being spoken to or treated in a belittling or condescending manner either by peers, teachers, school staff, or administration
- 14. No Opportunities to Show Success** – Opportunities aside from standardized test scores, or grades that allow students to showcase comprehension of content, ability to perform, or pride in work.
- 15. Harsher Consequences** – Anytime students reported, or actions were observed where Black and/or Latinx students were given a more severe consequence for an infraction, or more intense instruction for redirection in comparison to their peers of other racial make-ups.
- 16. Teacher/Counselor lesser recommendation** – This code refers to anytime a student reported that a teacher or academic counselor recommended that a student take a lower level course, academic or social opportunity than a student was interested in or that followed the student’s current academic trajectory.
- 17. Lesser academic attention** – Any time a Black or Latinx student has been passed over, ignored, or not attended to during instructional time and within academic settings in comparison to their peers.
- 18. Feeling Lucky to attend School** – Broad code (This should capture emotion, satisfaction, appreciation for opportunities (i.e. how it feels to have access to resources) etc.)
- 19. Many Resources** – References to the amount of, observed, and recorded resources or any mention from students of the amount of resources that the school has available.
- 20. Support** –Feeling supported or unsupported by the teacher is an important mediating event that affects other feelings and emotional responses to access to resources, work, and achievement.
- 21. Student Behavior** – Refers to how students conduct themselves both in and out of the classroom. This gets captured in the support category, but I will code for it,

especially in the case of fieldnotes where it might not be picked up by the other codes

22. The Vibe – how classrooms and school feel, as noted during observations, the vibe can come from different sources and might be because of the behavior teachers, students, or staff

23. Values/Priorities – broad code for what is deemed important by Black and Latinx students, what people think is important, when one's actions aligns with one's values and when it does not,

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Understanding Students Perception to Learning Opportunities – Consent Form

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

We invite you to take part in this interview because you have been identified as having a strong ability in expressing your lived experiences attending an affluent suburban high school during the first stage of this study. By sharing your experiences, you can help researchers, policy makers and others understand the experiences of Black and Latinx students in affluent suburban schools and perhaps even the conditions and supports necessary to foster effective opportunities for Black and Latinx students to grow both socially and academically.

What should I know about this research? Someone will explain this research to you.

- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.
- All information provided will be obtained and remain confidential.

Why is this research being done?

There is a gap in achievement between Black and Latinx students and their White counterparts that has existed for many decades. This gap has been studied for many years and an abundance of researchers have concluded that it is a result of a gap in opportunities of access; access to tangible resources such as rigorous curriculum, high quality teachers, appropriate school funding, valuable educational resources, etc. These lack of opportunities that contribute to the gap in achievement have been largely studied in urban school settings where these inequities are apparent, yet very minimal research has been conducted in affluent suburban schools where many of these opportunities do exist yet there remains to be a gap in achievement between Black and Latinx students and their White counterparts. One hypothesis is that there are intangible factors that contribute the gap in opportunities. This study considers the students' perspectives on their lived experiences attending an affluent suburban school that may contribute to the opportunity gap.

What happens if I agree to be in this research?

By agreeing to participate in this interview, you will:

- Participate in a one (1) hour focus group
- Participate in a one (1) hour interview
- The interview will occur at a place of convenience for you.
- The interview will be audio recorded
- If follow-up questions are needed, you will receive an email or phone call

- A written report will be submitted to Dr. Chris McGinley, chair of my dissertation committee, as well as the members of the dissertation committee. Any identifying features will be masked in the final report to protect your confidentiality.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

To the extent allowed by law, we limit the viewing of your personal information to people who must review it. We cannot promise complete secrecy. The IRB, Temple University, Temple University Health System, Inc. and its affiliates, and other representatives of these organizations may inspect and copy your information.

For this research, all records of the interview will be stored on a personal computer and shared only with the dissertation committee. A final written report, which will include data and excerpts from the interview will be submitted to the committee and may be shared with others in the class but will include only generalizations about the school and participants interviewed will be included.

Statement of Consent. I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature: _____ Date: _____

Your Name (Printed): _____