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The Underrepresentation of Black Students in Advanced Placement Courses: Student Perceptions of Peers, Teachers and School

Camille Havis

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ABSTRACT

THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF BLACK STUDENTS IN ADVANCED PLACEMENT: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF PEERS, TEACHERS AND SCHOOL

by

Camille Elizabeth Havis

Under the Direction of Dr. Jami Royal Berry

In its annual Advanced Placement Report to the Nation, the College Board highlights increasing the participation rates of minorities in AP classes. Despite this emphasis, Blacks continue to be the most underrepresented students in AP courses. The research on the reasons for this underrepresentation from the perspective of Black students is limited. The purpose of this study is to determine to what extent, if any, peers, teachers or school influences the enrollment practices of Blacks in AP. Chapter 1 examines the history of AP and Black students, as well as existing literature with respect to peer pressure, teacher expectations and school practices. Using qualitative research, chapter 2 asks Black students to describe their experiences with AP as related to their peers, teachers, and school as influences on their AP course enrollment through Invitational Theory to determine if the environment is intentionally inviting them to enroll in these courses. The findings suggest that the students' interest in the course, parental influence, and eventual college selection were the dominant influences in enrollment decisions. Their experiences can provide insight on academic choices and actions. This study may have implications for the recruitment of Black students in AP.

INDEX WORDS: Advanced placement, College board, Black students, Peers, Teachers, School and underrepresentation, Invitational theory

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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF PEERS, TEACHERS AND SCHOOL

by
Camille Elizabeth Havis

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ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Advanced Placement
IB	International Baccalaureate
PSAT	Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test
NMSQT	National Merit Scholarship Corporation
AVID	Advancement Via Individual Determination
CCRPI	College and Career Readiness Performance Index
SSP	School Strategic Plan

1 THE HISTORY OF BLACK STUDENTS IN ADVANCED PLACEMENT: LITERATURE REGARDING ISSUES OF PEERS, TEACHERS AND SCHOOL

Every year students from all educational backgrounds and ethnicities participate in college level coursework while still enrolled in high school, through participation in Advanced Placement (AP) courses (Cross, 2008; Geiser & Santelices 2004; Winebrenner, 2006). The College Board encourages schools to push for greater access into AP courses for the traditionally underserved populations of minorities to show they can be successful with the right support structures (Griffin & Allen, 2006; Rodriguez, 1998; College Board, 2013). Studies on the phenomenon of Black students not experiencing AP classrooms have revealed that Black students may not consider enrolling in AP courses for reasons such as the following: a desire to maintain acceptance in their peer group (Kunjufu, 1988), lack of teacher recommendation for AP courses for various reasons (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008), and insufficient school resources to support the program and/or an insufficiently challenging curriculum (Darity, Castellino, Tyson, Cobb and McMillen, 2001). The purposes of this literature review are to trace how the underrepresentation of Blacks in AP is traditionally linked to the larger issue of Blacks in education, to review the College Board's stance that the underrepresentation of Black students in AP courses is a problematic issue, and to discuss the literature findings that show peers, teachers, and schools as having the greatest impact on students' decisions to enroll in AP coursework. In order to understand Black student under enrollment in AP courses, this literature review also examines the support structures for which the College Board advocates in order to increase the population of Black students in the AP classroom. The proposed support structures include providing academic guidance and social assistance to Black students so that they feel empowered to take on the demands and challenges of the work required by an AP course.

Through the Advanced Placement's Equity 2000 initiative, which was in effect between the academic years 1999 and 2002, Black student participation in Advanced Placement courses increased by 46%, climbing from 31,023 to 45,271 (Casement, 2003). Black students represented 14.5% of the high school population, but only 9% of the AP population, and the College Board concluded these numbers were due to a gap in equity and access (College Board, 2014). The College Board suggested that in order to achieve equity for Black students, their numbers needed to be more representative of the total school population (College Board, 2014; College Board, 2013; College Board, 2012). For all students, interactions with peers, teachers, and their school, regardless of race, affect the total high school experience, and course enrollment. The need to belong, be accepted, and feel connected to something greater plays a key role in socialization (Constantine & Sha'Kema, 2002) and in the academic identity and course selections of Black students considering Advanced Placement courses (Schneider, 2000). As a result, the decision to enroll in an AP class may be influenced by whether or not a Black student believes it will directly impact him or her socially.

Social factors like peer acceptance, teacher relations, and school connection, affect students' expectations and influence their decision-making, which impacts enrollment in AP and may contribute to the issue of underrepresentation. Literature on Black student academic achievement supports the idea that peers, teachers, and perceptions of the school are key factors leading to the decision of Black students to accept the challenge of AP coursework (Wentzel, 1998; Stewart, 2008). Belonging and group presence assumes that one is able to identify with the various students enrolled in the course (Osterman, 2000). Social personality is one of the roles of peer influence and helps provide students with much needed support (Kunjufu, 1988). This concept also means the student has an appreciation of the teacher, and believes that the school

values and rewards achievement. Therefore, in order to understand the underrepresentation of Black students in AP, a study on student perceptions of their learning experiences should include who supported them or pushed them to take AP courses, as well as their feelings about their teachers and the school setting that allowed them to succeed (Picciano, 2002). Black students in this study share their AP experiences and discuss their AP perceptions in an effort to address the issue of underrepresentation (Chen & Hoshower, 2003; Martens, Bastiaens, & Kirschner, 2007; Elliott & Shin, 2002). The categories of peers, teachers, and the school, as determined through an extensive literature review, reveal under enrollment in AP courses by Black students was influenced by the following: a desire to maintain peer acceptance (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Wiggan, 2008; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ford & Whiting, 2011); lack of teacher guidance into AP courses (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Rubie-Davis, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006; Duffett & Farkas, 2009); and lack of promotion of AP courses as academic choices to Black and traditionally underserved populations on the part of schools (Conger, Long, & Iatarola, 2009; Mickelson, Bottia, & Lambert, 2013; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002).

Blacks in Education: Access, Equity and Advanced Placement

Before discussing what College Board described as the issue of underrepresentation, it is important to understand the historical timeline that frames Blacks gaining access and equity in general and their gradual steps of invitation into the American educational system in particular. From the early colonial days, through the American Civil War, to the fight for equal access as a result of segregation, to today's economic and social issues, limiting the schooling of Black people has been a way for Whites to maintain control (Anderson, 1988). Slavery did not lend

itself to accepting Blacks as equal, and according to Woodson (1933), led Blacks towards the acceptance of all rules adopted by European cultures.

The idea of educating Blacks in America was first addressed through religious organizations in the North (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Allen, Jewell, Griffin, & Wolf, 2007; Walters, James, & McCammon, 1997). In 1837, a Quaker founded the first Black Institute for higher education as a pathway to advance academic studies for “Colored” people; today it is known as Cheyney University (Pagliaro & Bingham, 2009).

In 1865, the United States Congress instituted the Freedmen’s Bureau. The Bureau was an agency formed to assist freed Blacks in the South post-Civil War era (Anderson, 1988). One of the Bureau’s functions was the support of education for Blacks. It supervised schools from the elementary level through college, offering a formal and a practical curriculum including vocational training. For example, through the Freedmen’s Bureau, Shaw University was founded in 1865 in North Carolina for recently freed men and women who wanted to learn how to read the Bible and interpret its doctrines (Carter, 1973). This “Bible study” became the first institute for higher learning for Blacks in the South as most Black colleges were linked to religion or a trade. Carter (1973) discussed that while many leading Black colleges were founded post-Civil War through the early 1900s, access to academic opportunities was limited by economics.

In 1870, the Preparatory High School for Colored Youth, later known as Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, was founded as America's first public high school for Blacks, in the basement of the 15th Street Presbyterian Church in Washington D.C. (Gibson, 1965). The purpose of the preparatory high school was to prepare students for a vocation. While this was a milestone in moving Blacks towards a trade, the education of Black students still had a long way to go in achieving college preparation.

Once the 1954 Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* was ruled upon, the struggle for integration of Black students in White public high schools began with Little Rock's Central High School (1957) and the struggle for integration by nine Black students (Howard, 2011). These students had a voice in correcting an educational issue affecting them and it was an important test of the right to an equal education granted by the 1954 decision. These important events paved the way for the fight to gain access and equity under the College Board, an issue that was not even addressed until the early 1990s.

The College Board was formed in 1900 by Harvard, Princeton, and Yale to identify students for colleges and universities via one common entrance exam instead of one entrance exam per institution (Valentine, 1987). Eventually, The College Board introduced the Advanced Placement program, which began in 1955, as a way to give only the best high school seniors, who had completed their high school requirements, the opportunity to take a college-level course (Casement, 2003). According to Wheeler (2013), the College Board sought to desegregate testing centers throughout the South to create more opportunities for Black students to take college placement exams as they were often turned away from testing centers. Eventually, during the 1960s, schools in the South were told they had a choice of either integrated testing centers or being denied by the College Board to administer exams. This was an important step by the College Board in influencing equity.

However, in order to continue pre *Brown v. Board* traditions, many school systems found ways to continue separate but equal policies within their school walls (Epstein, 1985). This was done through the tracking of White students into AP and Honors classes and the tracking of Black students into other coursework. The College Board makes no mention of helping to address this issue of access and equity. It merely acknowledges that there is existing evidence

regarding tracking and the achievement gap, which is a result of self-reporting from schools, and that the structure of tracking and its selectivity, electivity, and inclusiveness can vary from school to school (Gamoran, 1992). Once the Supreme Court decision for the case of *Swann vs. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1970) was ruled upon to help Blacks gain access to better educational environments through forced busing (Fiss, 1971), the promotion of intergration should have marked greater access for Black students into rigorous courses such as AP (Wolters, 2004).

Even with the Supreme Court decision, Blacks across America may have been exposed to a more diverse student body, but AP classes remained exclusive through much of the 1970s and into the 1980s (Gamoran, 1992). In fact, there were only 2,768 Black students taking AP courses by the end of 1985, which accounted for just less than one percent of the more than 270,000 AP students (Cross, 2008). While numbers alone cannot give the full picture with regard to tracking, the school within a school concept of advancing Whites into Honors and AP courses, and Blacks into on-level or special education unintentionally created underrepresentation (Gilbert & Yerrick, 2001; Mickelson, 2001). Oakes (2008) also discussed how tracking was inconsistent with students performing at high academic standards set under No Child Left Behind. Oakes suggested tracking created educational inequalities, rather than addressing issues of basic learning differences. Kasten (2013) proposed that tracking created separate and explicitly unequal classrooms where Black students were largely channeled into a basic curriculum and an overwhelming majority of White students were channeled into academically challenging (honors and AP) classrooms. According to Kasten, this tracking pattern was more likely to be used in a diverse district than in a district that was either exclusively White or Black (2013). Others have also suggested that the racial composition of classrooms significantly shapes how students

interact with the intended curriculum versus what is actually taught, which leads to educational gaps that force Black students to stay underrepresented in AP courses due to insufficient background knowledge (Chapman, Tatiana, Hartlep, Vang, & Lipsey, 2014; Kanno & Kangas, 2014; Kelly & Price, 2011). Oakes (2008) went on to state that students of color suffered disproportionately by being tracked disproportionately into the lowest classes and creating further inequality in terms of achievement, graduation rates, college acceptance.

In response to the criticism of exclusivity by race, the College Board introduced Equity 2000, which was an educational reform initiative based on the belief that every student, specifically traditionally underrepresented students, should be provided the opportunity to take an AP course (College Board, 2002). It emphasized enrolling Blacks and Hispanics in AP mathematics courses (Green and Dolan, 2001).

By 1997, Black students took 34,514 AP exams, which was a huge increase from the 6,800 who took an AP Exam in 1990 (Rothschild, 1999). As reported by the College Board, over the next five years, from 1998 - 2002, the number of total students participating in AP courses rose 48 percent and the number of Black students participating rose by 77 percent (Cross, 2008). This would appear to be movement in the right direction. However, professor and author, William Lichten of Yale, used the College Board's numbers to illustrate that the access and equity initiative was detrimental, in that the pass rate on exams dropped from 51 percent in 1998 to 39 percent in 2006 for students scoring a 3 or higher on AP exams (Lichten, 2007). For example, the College Board stated that an AP score of 3, 4, or 5 is a passing score. Lichten equated the scores in the following manner: A score of 5 is an "A" grade, and 4 is a "B" grade, 3 is a "C" grade, 2 is a "D" grade and 1 would be considered a failure. He goes on to explain that the access and equity movement of AP for Black students failed in that the most common score

for Black students in 2006 was a “1.” According to Lichten, the AP experience for these students was one of failure and was an ill-conceived plan.

According to Stanley and Baines (2002), the idea of celebrating the fact that these students made it through a year of an AP course without receiving the college credit that their White peers achieved (i.e., a passing score of 3 or higher) on the AP Course Exam is a celebration in mediocrity. As they explained, Black students were being celebrated merely for trying a more challenging curricula rather than being held to the same standard as their White peers. Stanley and Baines described this as an egalitarian view of education and part of public schools’ efforts to ensure that all students have the same educational experience but not everyone has the same benefits. In addition, Lichten (2007) suggested that only a small minority of the total high school population were even advanced enough to do college-level work regardless of color, which means that even the top Black high school seniors were still underrepresented because the actual number of all students capable of handling college level course work was minute. Thus, he recommended that rather than being placed in AP courses to erase issues of inequality, exclusivity, and opportunity gaps, the focus for 99 percent of high school students, regardless of race, should have been on preparation for college while in high school.

On the other hand, inclusion for the sake of equity has been shown as an effective intervention for improving educational outcomes for the traditionally underserved populations of Black and Latino students (Geiser & Santelices, 2004; Jackson, 2010; Hargrove, Godin, & Dodd, 2008). The results of a North Carolina study conducted by Speroni (2011) indicated that AP is strongly associated with college access and degree attainment. His study found that AP students were more likely to enroll in a four-year institution rather than a two-year institution than their high school and dual enrollment counterparts (Hallett & Venegas, 2011).

Yet, with these positives for simply participating in AP courses, has led some institutions such as Yale and Harvard, to announce that a minimum score of 5 be required for college credit for any of the AP exams (Casement, 2003). Thus, as colleges raise their requirements, the push to make AP more equitable and accessible may not be necessary other than to satisfy appearances of equity and access. In fact, highly selective colleges such as Brown and Dartmouth, and several departments at Columbia have stopped giving academic credit for AP scores (Casement, 2003). Stanley and Baines (2010) stated that this one-size-fits-all approach does not take into account that abilities amongst people in general, regardless of race, are not equally distributed; consequently, the truly gifted students are at a disservice because the teachers lower the standards and do not meet their educational needs. By making AP the umbrella for equity and excellence for all students, instead of the select few for whom it was intended, the academically gifted student's learning is dumbed down, and the entire AP process suffers (Sonnert, Tai, & Klopfenstein, 2010).

Current AP Statistics

According to the February 2014 10th Annual AP Report to the Nation (College Board, 2014), any student who is academically ready for AP, whether gifted or not, should experience the rigor of an AP class. The most commonly accepted definition of "academically ready" is based on the scores the students receive on the PSAT. While some believe that additional Black students enrolling in AP will expose them to an academically challenging environment, the PSAT alone cannot predict effort exerted once in the course. The PSAT score is linked to a predicted AP score for a particular subject. Students receive an AP potential letter with this information and an invitation to consider enrolling an identified subject(s) next school year. This letter represents one of the suggested tactics by The College Board to increase AP enrollment of

traditionally underserved populations, such as Black students (College Board, 2014). This is important because this letter may represent students' first encounter with AP. If the students disregard the letter, then AP enrollment is impacted.

The College Board finds the PSAT as one of the strongest predictors of success in an AP class. The PSAT is a national test typically given during the students' sophomore year of high school (Camara, 1997). The first administration of the PSAT began in 1959 as a way to measure students' critical reading and math skills in preparation for college entrance requirements (College Board, 2013). While the PSAT and AP are both under the direction of the College Board, their statistics indicate that thousands of eligible Black students did not take an available AP subject for which they qualified and would have earned a passing score. If this assessment is accurate, having a more successful equity effort could increase the percentage of Black students who take AP courses and receive passing scores on AP exams. In 2013, more than 300,000 Black students qualified for at least one AP class based on the PSAT results (College Board, 2014); however, only a little over 88,000 took one.

The College Board uses these disproportionate numbers to highlight the equity and access issue by continuing to report and publish annually that four out of five Black graduates were either left out of an AP subject for which they had potential, or attended a school that did not offer the subject for which they qualified (College Board, 2014; College Board, 2013; College Board, 2012). The reports also indicate that Black students, as well as other minority students, with the same AP readiness as their White counterparts, as determined by their PSAT scores, were less likely to experience an AP classroom. For example, the 2014 AP Report to the nation showed that White students represented 58% of the high school population and 56% of the AP population; Hispanics represented 18% of the high school population and 18% of the AP

population; and Asian represented 6% of the high school population and 10% of the AP population. The comparison for Black students was a clear indication of the issue of underrepresentation with Black students making up 14.5% of the high school population and only 9% of the AP population (College Board, 2014). The College Board has suggested that this gap in underrepresentation could be lowered if educators and schools used the PSAT potential letter, held AP nights, and introduced more or new AP courses into the curriculum, which appears to suggest that the College Board views these factors as the main underlying issues causes of Black student underrepresentation in AP. However, the idea that these factors are the primary causes of underrepresentation it is not fully supported by the literature. The remainder of the literature review is specific to the research study discussed in this dissertation and the additional factors that may influence a Black student to consider or not consider when enrolling in an AP class.

Student Perceptions of Peers

The first area of discussion surrounding the underrepresentation of Blacks in AP classes is directly tied to the socialization aspects of the high school experience. These aspects include experiences with peers, such as those with whom they eat lunch, attend class, date, or attend parties, as well as their own involvement with social media outlets like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook (Ellison, Wohn & Greenhow, 2014). As stated by Bergin and Crooks (2002), the peers of Black students may have some influence over their perceptions of AP classes. Some social aspects emphasized throughout the literature as reasons that Black students are not taking more challenging course work include being labeled as “acting White,” peer motivation, social issues of historical underachievement, and being the only Black person in the class (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Wiggan, 2008; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ford & Whiting, 2011).

Many intelligent Black students suppress their intelligence for fear of the “acting White” label, which in turn calls into question a person’s “Blackness” (Bergin and Cooks, 2002). The “acting White” concept includes references to situations where Black students ridicule their peers for engaging in behaviors perceived to be characteristic of Whites. Wiggan (2008) described the suppression or sabotage of educational opportunities by Black students as oppositional cultural theory. This perspective states that as descendants of former slaves and the offspring of segregation, Black students today have developed this oppositional identity in school because it represents the views and beliefs of the dominant “White” group. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) stated that academically capable Black students did not put forth the necessary effort in school for academic achievement in order to maintain Black social acceptance while in school. The students in their study defined acting White as: “Speaking standard English (also known as “talking White”), going to the Smithsonian, having a party with no music, or dancing to the lyrics rather than the beat, studying hard, going camping, hiking in the mountains, and so forth” (p. 231).

However, oppositional theory does not take into account that students’ individual varied experiences prior to entering high school may have prevented them from academic achievement (Downey & Ainsworth-Darnell, 2002; Lundy, 2003; Harris & Robinson, 2007). Lundy (2003) argued that Fordham and Ogbu were avoiding the real issue of Black students attempting to maintain their cultural identity. He further argued that Black students have rejected the idea of the Eurocentric view for obtaining success and are advocating for the preference of their own culture, and what they really have sought to do is simply be human (Lundy, 2003).

In all cultures the way one talks, the way one studies, or the activities in which one engages are influenced by more than just being a member of that culture. They are also reflective

the individual's frame of reference beginning at birth (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Therefore, if an individual is not socially conditioned to believe that there is certain way White people behave and a certain way Black people behave, then the individual may not assign race to behavior. Scholars have long asserted that within Whiteness and Blackness, there are socially learned behaviors (Tatum, 2003; Stinson, 2011; Murray, Neal-Barnett, Demmings, & Stadulis, 2012).

This conditioned behavior may influence students' academic choices. The motivation for a Black student to enroll or remain in an AP course can outweigh peer influence (Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002). Bergerson (2009) asserted that early socialization experiences, familial expectations of education, school experiences, information exposure to post-secondary education, and future career pathways influence AP course selection. For instance, Black students may learn that doing well in school is vital to acceptance into a "good" college (Ford & Harris, 1996). In addition, these students have also been informed to strengthen their academic records in order to increase their opportunities for college admission. However, Bergerson (2009) stated that the under enrollment in AP is a result of experiences in K-12 schooling (e.g., limited school resources, lack of teacher and parental support, and peer acceptance) preventing otherwise capable Black students from participating in AP coursework. Additionally, students in high school take into consideration their career options, greatly influencing the AP coursework in which they choose to enroll. For example, Lewis and Connell (2005) conducted a study of 87 Black, high school juniors and seniors in AP science courses to understand the factors that surrounded their enrollment in the course, including career aspirations. The scholars found that considering a science-related career played a major factor in enrollment. In their study, 72 percent of the students indicated that they were considering at least one science-related career and therefore participated only in AP classes related to those aspirations. Lewis and Connell

suggest that these students may have chosen to not enroll in other AP courses for which they were qualified because they did not match their career interests, which could be contributing to the underrepresentation of Black students (2005).

The four-year academic program for high school students requires state-mandated courses, elective course credit, and meeting certain requirements for the post-secondary major or institution being considered (GA DOE, 2014), which alone is very daunting. School demographics, specifically in majority White suburban high schools, can play a part in the various levels of connectedness of Black students to the curriculum (Orfeld, Frankenberg, & Garces, 2008; Wells, Baldrige, Duran, Grzesikowski, Lofton, Roda, Warner, & White, 2009). Therefore, the literature shows that being a Black student at a predominantly White high school, and facing the possibility of being the only Black student in an AP class, may impact students' academic choices (DeCuir, & Dixson, 2004). The pressure of being the "only" one in the class continues to underscore the underrepresentation issue (Fries-Britt and Griffin, 2007). In other words, seeing that there are not any Black students in AP Biology, or hearing gossip that there are not any Black students in European History, may discourage a Black student from wanting to become a member of this academic setting. For example, Hertberg and Callahan (2008) conducted interviews with 200 students in 23 U.S. high schools in AP and IB courses regarding the academic challenge of their courses. The authors suggested minority and low-income students were underrepresented in most of the AP and IB programs involved in the study, which created homogeneous classrooms that were experienced as a barrier to participation by the Black students. When students have to suppress their Blackness or over represent their Blackness because they are "the only" one in the class, an uncomfortable classroom environment is created and has been theorized as a reason for non-continuance in AP coursework (Howard, 2003). One

Black female student in the Hertberg and Callahan study shared that she often felt isolated and different from the other students in her AP class, while a Black male indicated the following:

You feel like they are intellectual Aryans. I'm Black, which is, you know, not hard to see. I'm in these classes, which are, what, ten percent Black? In government we got into this discussion about the Ku Klux Klan, and they're like, 'Why do you think it's so bad?' Somebody says, 'Well, you're the only one that thinks that way.' And I'm like, 'I'm the only one who's Black (p. 207).

This type of discourse in an AP History course, when combined with sentiments like those expressed in Ford and Whiting (2011) regarding environment, might lead Black students to not consider enrolling in AP courses. Their research indicated that Black students do not remain in AP due a lack of attention from their teachers, which further contributes to the underrepresentation of Black students in AP classes. Their research also suggests that Black students' academic and social worth are formed through classroom interactions with other students, adults, and the curriculum. Therefore, retaining Black students in the aforementioned AP History environment would require lessons on multicultural education for everyone in the room so that stereotypes are not reinforced (Sleeter, 2011; Lawrence & Tatum, 2004; McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Bennett, 1995).

Student Perceptions of Teachers

Just like students' peers, teachers also have influence on the overall high school experience of students and, therefore, may influence students' decisions to enroll in AP coursework. There are three major factors involving Black student perceptions of AP teachers: teacher competency in the AP subject, teacher expectations for Black students, and support structures that assist with academic success for Black students (Burton, Whitman, Yepes-Baraya,

2002; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Klopfenstein, 2003; Tyler & Boelter, 2008). The research studies of Burton et al. focus on teachers of minority-majority schools who have had academic success with raising Black student achievement on state and national tests. These teachers are also strong in content knowledge (an understanding of what is to be taught) and pedagogical knowledge (an understanding of how to make advanced content comprehensible to others), and are influential in the coursework students pursue (Tyler & Boelter, 2008). Burton, Whitman, and Yepes-Baraya (2002) suggest that teachers who are successful with minority students have a high opinion of the students, hold the students to high standards, and ensure that the students can apply the fundamental concepts of the subject matter. These teaching behaviors, thereby, create an atmosphere of acceptance, support, and inclusion for minority students.

On the other hand, minority students who perceived a teacher as lacking qualifications, capacity for motivating students, or a reputation of being a bad teacher, were not likely to enroll in the AP course (Hallett & Venegas, 2011). Students in the Hallett and Venegas study, also from underachieving schools, described their teachers who were assigned to teach AP courses as having no credentials to teach the subject area, providing an example of an AP statistics teacher who outlined the book and discussed with the students that she was learning the material as well; as a result, they gave this as a reason for telling other students not to take the class.

Many times Black students feel that teachers are unsupportive of them in class (Rowley, Ross, Lozada, Williams, Gale, & Kurtz-Costes, 2014); therefore, they may feel discouraged and thus do not even attempt to take academically challenging courses such as AP. The literature also suggests that teacher expectations of Black students contribute to students' views of schooling in general (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Rubie-Davis, Hattie & Hamilton, 2006). In particular, teacher expectations of Black

students being successful in AP was documented by Duffett and Farkas (2009) when they conducted a national teacher survey of 1,024 AP teachers and their beliefs for why minority students in AP continues to be a challenge. The teachers reported that Black students are more likely to come from families with lower levels of income and education, are flooded by messages from a culture that holds low expectations, and that they are as less likely to be focused on the importance of college (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Rowley, Ross, Lozada, Williams, Gale & Kurtz-Costes, 2014). This national survey also indicated that AP teachers proposed no solutions to the problem of underrepresentation of Black students. In addition the teachers made no statements taking ownership in the problem. Teachers should recognize their part in the retention and promotion of gifted Black students (Ford & Whiting, 2010). Ford and Whiting (2010) indicated that not being able to retain gifted Black students contributes to the issue of underrepresentation.

Many Black students also feel that teachers see them as smart “Black” students, rather than smart students, thereby limiting their intelligence by tying it to their race (Howard, 2003). With this in mind, many students may report experiencing their teachers as condescending to them based on their race (Landsman, 2004). For example, a qualitative study of Black students at two urban high schools revealed that the students’ perceptions of their teacher’s expectations of them contributed to their views of how schooling worked (Howard, 2003). The students commented that the lack of Black students in AP classes was intentional on the part of the teachers and that if the school was mostly Black, then why did the AP classes not reflect this? The study findings also suggested that next to parents, teachers have the second greatest influence on their students’ academic choices and that certain teacher expectations contributed to their negative views of advanced classes. This was evidenced by one student’s perception of the teachers in his school, who shared:

See, I don't think it has nothing to do with you not being smart, or high school being hard. It has to do with what they think about you, and you fell right for it. I'm in Math 9, and you and me used to get the same grades at Hamilton [middle school]. I'm realizing that counselors and teachers have a lot of power around here. It's a lot of kids here thinking that they are smarter than they really are, or that they are dumber than they really are, just because the counselor put them in a certain class. That's a shame. I'm not saying they do it on purpose or something like that, but it makes you wonder (Howard, 2003, p. 11).

Campbell (2012) echoed Howard's findings, which examined teachers' and students' perceptions of low Black female enrollment in AP courses. Campbell's study, taken from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (of over 15,000 sophomores), reported that 36% of Black girls believed math was fun, and 53% believed they could gain skills to master the class. Campbell concluded that the low confidence contributed to the low number of 51% participating in math class, with only 11.5% of Black females being recommended by their teachers for advanced courses. These numbers were influenced by responses to never participating in class, participating every day, and confidence in math skills. Campbell's study found that teachers perceived Black girls as less attentive and more disruptive than their White counterparts, which resulted in lower probabilities of being recommended for an honors or AP course. Much of the research on this topic focuses on White teachers since they constitute the majority of the teaching population. It suggests negative perceptions of Black students as having behavior issues, which leads to Black students being tracked into non-academically challenging courses and continues the underrepresentation pattern (Ferguson 2003; Tenenbaum and Ruck 2007; Oakes 2008; Ogbu 2003; Gamoran 1992).

As stated earlier, by 1955 the College Board developed AP courses for high school students, allowing them to engage in college-level work while still in high school; thus, according to Lichten (2007), the decision to take an AP course implies that the student is accustomed to a certain level of success within school, without additional support needed. However, high achieving students usually have had the support of parents and teachers at early ages that has led to their later academic success (Jacobs & Harvey, 2005). One such support program can be found through the the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). AVID was created with the premise that students can succeed in rigorous courses, such as Advanced Placement or Honors classes, with extra support (AVID, 2013). In a study by Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola and Alkan (2008), the researchers noted that student perceptions of the AVID teachers as supporting them and caring for their outcomes is a popular aspect of AVID. The students cited that the AVID tutors (college and university trained students in AVID methods) helped them to stay on top of their AP coursework. These methods include Cornell note-taking strategies, Socratic Seminar discussion groups and other AP exam approaches which promote a successful high school experience. In addition to helping students meet the challenge of AP courses, students in AVID also cited being taught to change their perception of intelligence and what it takes to succeed in an AP course (Becker, 2012) as major boost to their academic identity.

Yet when taking support classes into account, the College Board's original purpose of testing only the top students in high school and awarding them college credit through these AP classes, must still be taken into consideration: Is AP just for the best of the best? Are support programs, like AVID, even necessary? Winebrenner (2006) and Lichten (2007) both question how students who struggle to learn can be supported in their endeavors to keep up with the

course content and the pacing of college. Both authors agree that the issue of equity and access for Black students cannot be solved through AP. They believe that the solution lies in the taught curriculum of the high school that the students attend. Lichten (2007) did concede that while racial minorities and low-income students are at a particular disadvantage due to the obvious educational inequities evident in the schools they attend, enrolling in AP coursework was not the answer to the problem, nor could it erase gaps in educational knowledge. Therefore, one place for the educational system to begin is to identify and nurture Black gifted students in the earlier grades to assist in their possible future success in the Advanced Placement courses. The implications for understanding links between teacher behavior and Black students' achievement are important for understanding the under enrollment in AP.

Bandura (1989) described individuals as having a self-system that allows them some measure of control over their thoughts, feelings and actions. This mechanism also allows people to learn from others and self-reflect. As students navigate through high school, there are teachers who enable self-evaluation, push students to accomplish specific tasks and raise students' levels of self-efficacy (Strahan, 2008; Klassen & Usher 2010). The belief that one cannot handle an AP class is another contributing factor to the underrepresentation of Black students in AP classes (Tyson, Darity, & Castellino 2005). Whiting (2006) concluded that gifted Black students did not receive sufficient attention from teachers, which hindered their ability to develop a positive self-image as scholars. He suggested that gifted Black students needed guidance in making sacrifices (e.g., short-term versus long-term goals), and possessing an internal locus of control (i.e., taking personal responsibility for successes and failures). While others have suggested that Black students being comfortable with their racial identity and educators reinforcing that intelligence does not negate a students' Blackness (Awad, 2007; Graham & Anderson, 2008).

Student Perceptions of School

Finally, just as peers and teachers are viewed in the literature as having an influence on the AP experience, the school itself may play a role in the decision to enroll in AP classes (Carbonaro, 2005; Herbert & Reis, 1999; Hunter & Smith, 2007). There are five major factors influencing Black student perceptions of AP classes: whether or not the school creates a familial atmosphere, whether or not the school is a magnet or charter school (Conger, Long and Iatarola, 2009), whether or not the school has local college or university partnerships (Hoffman, 2003), whether or not the students have the freedom to academically challenge themselves (self-selection of classes or no students being tracked into certain classes) (Mickelson, Bottia, & Lambert, 2013), and whether or not the school's economic standing and financial means allow for certain AP courses (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002).

Walker (2007), asked why more minorities are not taking advanced math? She found that limited course options, school tracking, teachers presenting a lower-level math curriculum, and schools not tapping into their school-family relationships as reasons possibly contributing to the underrepresentation of Blacks and Hispanics in AP math courses. Walker, however, did discover during her study of 21 Black and Hispanic students, that when the school created a positive family atmosphere of caring adults in the building, students perceived this atmosphere as contributing to their math success. Of the 21 students, 12 mentioned explicitly that their success in math was due to the adults in the school helping them and their families make important academic choices and encouraging them to challenge themselves academically. The fact that connections were established between the school life and home life of these students that emphasized higher academic achievement made it easier for them to navigate between the two (Long, Conger, & Iatarola, 2012; Riegle-Crumb & Grodsky, 2010).

Another factor that affects a school's AP enrollment is the presence of IB, magnet, and charter schools (Subotnik & Rayhack, 2007). These programs can negatively impact the home school a student should attend because they are able to offer more AP courses and tend to draw AP students who enroll in those courses. While the enrollment for charter schools increases due to these AP course offerings, impacting those schools positively, the reverse can be true for the home school (Gulosino & d'Entremont, 2011). If the home school does not offer programs in which the students are specifically interested, then they are more likely to find a magnet program that does. Conger, Long and Iatarola (2009) used panel data from Florida high school students to examine race, poverty, and gender disparities in AP through certain observed characteristics of 8th grade students and choices made for their high school education. Their study indicated that when minorities choose to attend magnet schools, they are doing so with the purpose of taking AP courses. For example, 89% of Black students chose to attend a magnet school that offered a math AP/IB course over their home school. As the researchers explained, this decision increased the students' chances of taking other AP courses because the opportunities to take such courses are greatly increased in magnet school environments. Therefore, home schools that do not have an AP or IB label may have an underrepresentation of Black students in AP courses due to the fact that the minority students who choose to continue attending the home school lack the preparation or motivation to succeed in AP courses (Conger, Long & Iatarola, 2009).

Researchers have suggested that high schools can address the underrepresentation of Black students in AP courses by discussing their partnerships with local colleges with students and explaining to them the benefits of the AP program as direct link to these colleges and universities (Amey, Eddy & Campbell, 2010; Kanno & Kangas, 2014). Hoffman (2003) suggested that targeting Blacks and Hispanics while they are in high school through dual

enrollment via AP programs was the key to increasing representation. The problem, according to Hoffman, is that minority students are often concentrated in the 40 percent of minority-majority schools that do not have as many AP course offerings linked to neighboring colleges and universities.

Although the data demonstrating the effectiveness of high school and college partnerships is still inconclusive, the College Board continues to stress to students and schools that AP is the best way to provide appropriate academic preparation for a successful post-secondary experience. One research report indicated that students who took AP courses in high school are no more successful in college than those who did not (Geiser & Santelices, 2004). This study followed 81,445 freshmen over four years (1998-2001) attending college in the University of California System. The study looked at test scores, high school curriculum, parental income, campus of enrollment, and major and found that the number of AP courses taken was not related to students' college success. Therefore, it is possible that Black students who have witnessed friends or family successfully obtain college admission and complete college without AP on their high school transcript, may think it wiser to stay in their college prep classes where they can more easily earn A's rather than risking a lower grade point average by taking the more challenging AP courses.

Because minority-majority schools tend to be economically disadvantaged schools, administrators of schools that have an underrepresentation of Black students in AP courses and seek to increase AP participation rates must address the issue of tracking (Mickelson, Bottia, & Lambert, 2013). Southworth and Mickelson (2007) suggested that a school's racial composition has significant effects on various track placements and that Black students who attend White majority schools have less chance of enrolling in AP/Honors classes than Blacks attending

majority-minority schools. This would appear to be an obvious fact, as a school that is 90 percent Black has a greater pool of Black students to pull from for AP courses than a school that is 20 percent Black. However, in a predominantly White high school, Black students still carry the burden of inferiority or the burden of acting White if they enroll in AP classes (Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). Southworth and Mickelson believe this burden dates back to first-generation segregation when schools were separate and inherently unequal, a topic that was discussed earlier in this chapter. These researchers contend that this created a class of undereducated Black students who were not exposed to the same types of materials and educational rigor as their White counterparts, and that Black students needed only an opportunity to take AP classes in order to demonstrate their abilities (Braddock & Eitle, 2004; Brown-Jeffy, 2006). This was also the assertion of the original Equity 2000 initiative (College Board, 2002).

Even though the College Board has the Equity 2000 initiative, it is important to remember that the original Board's original intent was to have the AP Program for the elite of the elite in high school. The goal was not to be equitable in 1955, but rather selective. Therefore, it has been argued that just opening access for the sake of being equitable as a means of achieving educational equity is a form of affirmative action (Tai, 2008). Tai stated that affirmative action was originally designed in response to vast inequities in educational access due to racist segregation practices, yet the educational inequities still exist. Furthermore, Tai stated that Advanced Placement at its core is a highly involved testing program that will not make weak students better, thus implying the harm of sitting a poorly prepared Black student in an AP class for better numbers is disingenuous. It is interesting to note that Tai does not address whether sitting a poorly prepared White student in an AP class is disingenuous. Sadler and Tai (2007) explained that AP courses are simply a means of assisting admissions officers in student

selection. In fact high school seniors can pack their schedule with AP courses and be accepted to a college based on the transcript of AP courses listed, as the AP scores are not available until July (Geiser & Santelices, 2004). Yet some contend that exposure to the content and clientele of the Advanced Placement classroom equate to a better academic experience (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008; and Hertberg-Davis, Callahan, & Kyburg, 2006).

The literature reviewed provides historical context and important educational background knowledge into Black student academic identity (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Allen & Jewell, 2007; Walters & James 1997; Pagliaro & Bingham, 2009; Carter, 1973), academic self-worth (DeCuir, & Dixson, 2004; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Howard, 2003), and social worth as factors that may lead to the underrepresentation of Black students in AP courses (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Rubie-Davis, Hattie & Hamilton, 2006). The literature also discussed teacher influence in maintaining gifted Black students in the advanced curriculum by using teacher recommendations to create an inviting atmosphere into challenging course work and by having the school provide access to the AP curriculum for all students (Ford & Whiting, 2010; Campbell, 2012; Duffett & Farkas, 2009). A positive sense of self is developed not only in the home, (Constantine & Sha'Kema, 2002), but also through interactions with others (peers and teachers), as well as with the school curriculum (Bird & Markle, 2012; Wentzel, Baker, & Russell, 2012). The research clearly indicates that educators should understand the influence that student perceptions of peers, teachers, and school have on their academic identity and that it influences their academic choices (Wentzel, 1998; Stewart, 2008; Osterman, 2000; Kunjufu, 1988).

The AP Statistics presented by the College Board challenges educators to view the underrepresentation of Black students in AP programs as a systemic issue. The historical

timeline indicates that Blacks have had an uphill battle with first access and later with equity in the education that still continues to this day (Gilbert & Yerrick, 2001; Gamoran, 1992, Anderson, 1988; Howard, 2011). The literature addresses various factors contributing to the issue of underrepresentation of Blacks students in AP (Bergin & Crooks, 2003; Wiggan, 2008; Ford & Whiting, 2011; Hallett and Venegas, 2011; Tyler and Boelter, 2008; Carbonaro, 2005). The College Board calls for attention to underrepresentation and attempts to push schools into correcting the issue (College Board, 2014). The demographics of the students in AP classrooms are not reflective of the student population, which College Board asserts is critical to promoting equity (College Board, 2013). If the goal of equity in AP is to truly ensure that those students qualifying for AP have access to enroll in AP, there need to be more in-depth studies on the underrepresentation of Black students in AP courses. As previously discussed, students' perceptions of peers, teachers, and schools are instrumental in their decision-making. Thus, further study of Black students' perceptions of peers, teachers, and schools could provide greater information on what the students view as obstacles to accessing AP courses (Mason, 2010; Winebrenner, 2006). The purpose of the current study is to determine whether the students' perceived their peers, teachers, or even the school as contributing to the underrepresentation in AP participation.

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2 ENROLLMENT AND UNDERREPRESENTATION: THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE THROUGH INVITATIONAL THEORY

The College Board encourages schools to open the doors of AP courses to traditionally underserved populations, and has specifically targeted Black students as being in the greatest need of a push into the classrooms of Advanced Placement coursework (College Board, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2002). The College Board's suggested solutions for identifying more Black students for AP classes include: using the PSAT potential letter, which identifies AP courses in which students have the potential to succeed based on their PSAT score, hosting AP nights, examining course grades, and using teacher recommendations to ensure students have an opportunity to enroll in these courses. The College Board suggested that in order to achieve equity in AP, the number of Black students should be representative of the total school population (College Board, 2014, 2013, 2012). As discussed in Chapter 1, the literature researched conceded that Black students are not adequately represented in Advanced Placement classrooms, and it identified peers, teachers, and school as playing a role in the issue of underrepresentation.

Despite focusing on the underrepresentation issue for the past twenty years, and the recent celebration of the 10th annual "A Dream Deferred Diversity Conference" (College Board, 2014), the problem still exists. What has caused Black students to be underrepresented? Is it as simple as the pressure of their peers to act in a certain way at school? Is it the teachers not recommending them to take these courses? Is it the school not promoting the AP Program? These were common enough questions reported by the College Board in both the last official report (College Board, 2014) and at the diversity conference in Atlanta (April, 2014).

Ironically, the students have remained unrepresented in the conversation and solution. In an effort to understand this issue of underrepresentation of Black students in AP classes, this

study examined the perceptions of Black students regarding their peers, teachers, and school and whether these perceptions influenced their enrollment into AP courses. Invitational Theory was used to have Black students describe their experiences with AP as related to their peers, teachers, and school as influences on their course enrollment at one Georgia high school. Through invitational theory, an inviting environment is created by the school through respect for individuals and their need for independence, as well as a sense of belonging. In addition, educators and schools are examined for maintenance of positive relationships and expectations and making academic connections (Purkey, 1992). This type of qualitative research involved the examination of a single issue for Black students, which was the issue of underrepresentation in AP courses, and the perceptions of these students about an academic topic involving them. The benefits of Invitational Theory included providing more opportunities to address the research questions and also aided the students in understanding the issue.

A group of Black students who were identified as qualified for AP classes, based on their PSAT scores from their sophomore year, were selected to respond to a questionnaire. Although the questions were multiple-choice, there was space for students to provide additional commentary regarding each question. The commentary section of each question asked students to elaborate on their high school experiences with AP enrollment, as well as their experiences with their peers, teachers, and the school in creating an AP accessible environment. They were also individually interviewed to provide them with an opportunity to elaborate on their responses from the questionnaire. Additionally, a focus group of all Black female students participated in a discussion that required them to reflect upon their decisions of whether or not to take AP courses. The members of this all female focus group met all of the same requirements as the questionnaire group.

The Research Sub-Questions:

A qualitative study was used in order to answer the following questions regarding what influence, if any, peers, teachers, or school had on the study's participants when deciding to enroll in Advanced Placement courses.

- 1) How did Black students who were qualified to take AP coursework describe and interpret their experiences with their Black peers when deciding to enroll in AP course?
- 2) How did Black students who were qualified to take AP coursework describe and interpret their experiences with teachers when deciding to enroll in AP courses?
- 3) How did Black students who were qualified to take AP coursework describe their experiences with the school and its influence on their AP course enrollment?

Selected Site

The research site was a high school located in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia. The school's population of 1561 students consisted of 67% White, 21% Black, 8% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 1% other. For the 2014-2015 school year, there were 492 students represented in at least one AP class with 43 of them being Black, which equates to 8.7% of the AP population. The College Board (2014) has stated that a school's demographic population should be equally represented in the AP population; therefore, this school fits the underrepresentation profile because the population of AP students is not equivalent to the total 21% Black student population.

Theoretical Framework

One way to analyze how schools have promoted successful learning environments where students challenge themselves through more rigorous courses such as AP, has included a framework known as Invitational Theory (Thompson-Cabezas, 2011). This theory grew as a result of assumptions seeking to explain a phenomenon, which asked participants within the

issue to contribute in the solving process (Purkey & Novak, 1984; Purkey and Schmidt, 1987; Purkey and Stanley, 1991). In an effort to understand the abstract and concrete, as well as their relationship to one another in success and failure, Invitational Theory has become a deliberative methodology for realizing human potential in achieving positive outcomes (Purkey, 1992). It matured from perceptual tradition, which has been described as one's view of the world, and self-concept theory, described as one's individual fit into the world (Purkey, 1992). An invitation to participate in understanding / solving an issue must include trust, recognition that people carry out tasks in which they have ownership, optimism for change, and intentionality (Purkey & Stanley, 1991). From a simple premise, an invitation is a piece of communication that is sent from one person to another to participate in something (Shaw & Siegel, 2010). While it is hoped that the participation in the activity involved produces something favorable, human behavior can sometimes produce unfavorable results.

There are four levels of Invitational Theory. The first level of Invitational Theory is the intentional act of being disinviting and creating an environment that yields negative outcomes (Purkey & Novak, 2008). In this study, Black students were disinvited from enrolling in AP courses which resulted in Black underrepresentation in AP courses. This included Black peers who discouraged Black students from considering AP, teachers who were not personally inviting or encouraging to Black students about enrolling in AP, and the school creating a presence in the AP program that was not open or accepting of them.

A second level of Invitational Theory is the act of being unintentionally disinviting and creating an environment that is not beneficial to all members of the society (Shaw & Siegel, 2010). Examples of this level included negative comments about the AP program by teachers or

Black students, including the workload in an AP course. The comments did not directly tell students to not enroll but may have factored in the final decision to not enroll in AP.

The third level of functioning in Invitational Theory would be unintentionally inviting, or for this research, understanding the acts that created unplanned beneficial outcomes. An example of this would be when students sought to reconnect with teachers they had before in non-AP classes by enrolling in an elective AP course,

Finally, intentionally inviting described the purposeful acts by peers, teachers, or the school that caused Black students to consider enrollment, such as the school's course waiver policy, students being given an AP potential letter describing the courses for which they were qualified, or teachers having personal conversations with qualified Black students about enrolling in AP.

Throughout Invitational Theory, there are five "Ps" that promote inviting behavior (Shaw & Siegel, 2010). These include a focus on people, places, policies, programs, and processes to support successful environments via continuous interaction (Purkey, 1992). The participants in this research were the Black students, who are the ones underrepresented in AP. The place was a suburban high school in Georgia, and the situation under review was the school's efficacy in promoting an inviting environment to increase Black student representation in AP courses. The policy was the perceived access to an AP classroom, or Black students' perceptions of the extent to which they viewed AP courses as open to all students. The program was AP itself, and whether the Black students found the AP courses offered by the school as meeting their needs. The final P or process, addressed all of the other "Ps" and their functions and activities such as the AP potential letter, AP Nights, and the AP course waiver process. The student perceptions used in this framework concentrated on communication by Black students in a questionnaire,

focus group, or in individual interviews regarding the total school culture (Stanley, Juhnke & Purkey, 2004).

Invitational Theory has supported designing educational programs that have met the needs of the total population and assessing the academic setting on such measures as expectation, equity, and enlistment (Thompson-Cabezas, 2011). This theory maintains that changes to a school's educational program could be successful only if the changes addressed the underlying causes of the detrimental behavior (Stanley et al., 2004). Invitational Theory has asked researchers to keep in mind that individuals have personal motivation, their behavior is a choice, and their decisions are made given the information present at a specific time (Hunter & Smith, 2007).

Examining the students' perceptions of the school environment has explained successes and failures in educational institutions (Killingsworth, 2011). Since Invitational Theory was used to understand the effect that peers, teachers, and school had on the underrepresentation of Black students in AP courses, this research study included a description of the students' experiences based on their perceptions as indicated in responses to a questionnaire, individual interviews, and dialogue from a focus group regarding their school experience with the AP program, in order to determine the meaning embedded within their experiences as being inviting.

Population Sample

Purposive sampling (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002) was used to obtain research participants. This is a non-random method of sampling involved in certain cases for studying specific information (Patton, 2002). It is also represented by non-probability sampling techniques as it relies on the judgment of the researcher when it comes to selecting the components (i.e. people) that are to be studied (Tongco, 2007). Typically, the sample being investigated is small,

when compared with probability sampling techniques, which involve randomly selecting people from a population to create a sample with the intention of making a generalization from the sample to the population (Lowry, 2014; Bernard, 2002). However, the goal of purposive sampling is to emphasize particular characteristics of a population, which will best enable the research question to be answered (Tongco, 2007). Whether the students had taken AP classes throughout their high school career, taken only one AP class, or were simply qualified to take AP coursework but never enrolled in a class, they were selected based on certain characteristics pertaining to the underrepresentation issue at the research site school. These characteristics required students to be similar in nature and included: having to be Black, having been identified as eligible for AP, falling within the age group of fifteen to eighteen, and attending the research site school. The research site had a majority White population, and a Black AP population that was disproportionately low in comparison to the total Black student population. Such a population fits what the College Board considers as being inequitable (College Board, 2014). This purposive sampling technique, for qualitative research, helped provide the justification to make generalizations from the sample being studied, even if the generalizations were theoretical in nature (Bernard, 2002). Qualitative studies often use these purposive sampling techniques for "information-rich cases" to seek deeper understanding about key issues (Patton, 2002).

Data Collection

To determine how Black students perceived AP and how the contextual factors influenced their enrollment decisions, processes were established to gain as much information as possible regarding the AP experience for Black students at this school. A student interest flyer (Appendix A) was sent to 61 Black students who qualified for AP based on their PSAT results in 10th grade. This meant that the population of students who were invited to participate in the

study consisted of students who had taken only one AP, students who had taken all AP courses, and students who had taken no AP courses. PSAT results were verified in the permanent student record file as well as through the College Board AP Potential website for the students' PSAT year. Once a student expressed interest, he or she received a parent consent form or if 18 years of age, a student consent form. As forms were returned, parents were called to ensure understanding of the research and confirmation of their signature.

Although sixteen forms were received, nine were chosen to establish an equal representation in the form of three students who never took AP, three students who only took one AP class, and three students who took multiple AP classes. It was hypothesized that perceptions might vary depending on AP enrollment. Of the sixteen students who agreed to participate in the study, 7 had all AP courses, 4 had no AP courses, and 3 only had one AP course. Therefore, the first nine fitting the aforementioned categories were selected to participate in the questionnaire phase and the focus group; the others were selected as alternates. The nine selected students were notified of their acceptance and given a date to report to the media center to participate in the questionnaire, which also allowed them to add additional commentary to their multiple-choice responses. At that time, the nine students were also invited to participate in the focus group.

Survey Monkey, which is free-online survey software, was used to administer the questionnaire (Appendix B). The questions resulted from the literature review, which suggested that peers, teachers, and the school were factors in the underrepresentation of Black students in AP. The questions were also created to focus answers more specifically towards the research questions. Survey Monkey allowed for individual responses and group responses. The nine surveys were given on Tuesday, September 30, 2014, between 9:10 and 9:45 a.m. This time represented the students' LASSO or Longhorn Academic Student Support Opportunities period,

which is a during-school tutoring program. This time was chosen so as not to interfere with the students' academic classes.

The results from Survey Monkey showed how the nine participants responded to each question as individual and as a group. Again, this purposive sampling of nine students was meant to get the perception of a portion of the group relative to the issue of access and equity. Berg, & Lune (2004) indicated that the results in purposive sampling should reflect the opinions of the larger group.

The questionnaire collected information about the behaviors of the Black students at this particular school in Georgia to measure ideas or opinions about the AP enrollment issues. The questionnaire was meant to allow the participants to express how they feel about their academic decisions, specifically as those decisions relate to enrolling or not in an AP course, and if those decisions were a result of influence from their peers, teachers, and/or their school. As previously stated, after every question students were given space to write additional commentary to explain their multiple-choice responses as needed. This was done in order to find patterns in responses so that generalizations could be made (Fink, 2009). Their written responses were later verified via student permanent records including: middle school transcripts, high school transcripts, current grades, the school cafeteria manager (the only person with access to the names of free and reduced lunch participants), and later in individual interviews to confirm original responses and allow participants the opportunity to elaborate on them for clarification of the ideas they had originally expressed.

The interview involving the participants immediately following the administration of the questionnaire was recorded on an iPhone using MicPro, a free software application, which turns the iPhone into a recording device. This interview was conducted immediately following the

questionnaire. However, due to either group dynamics, fatigue from the questionnaire, wanting to return to classes, or other reasons, the students only responded with limited voice for fourteen minutes. Since the goal of using Invitational Theory was to explain an issue by asking participants within the issue to contribute to the solution, it was determined that these nine students were not adequately involved in the process or intentionality of a focus group. Their responses were limited to yes or no, or “I wrote what I wanted to say,” or at times, just silence. These students were later brought back individually to verify their questionnaire answers, as well as to expand upon written comments for clarification. However, a decision was made to invite the seven alternate students to participate in a focus group interview utilizing the same items from the questionnaire in order to ensure research reliability. The alternates did not participate in the written phase of the questionnaire as they expanded on comments during the interview.

The focus group, involving the alternate students, was conducted on Tuesday, October 7, 2014, between 9:15 and 10:00 a.m., which represented the school tutoring program time. These students were also recorded on an iPhone using MicPro. Again, these students did not take the questionnaire, but were asked the questions verbally, with the exception of the information that could be obtained in the student’s permanent record file such as age, grade, lunch cost, etc. The focus group was supposed to involve two males and five females, but both males were absent, and the decision was made to conduct the focus group without them. The focus group was interviewed once and then brought back later, individually, to confirm responses and to add to previous responses for clarification. This group contained more extroverted personalities, which allowed for a full 45-minute discussion to take place. In addition, the responses provided, exhibited a rich depiction of why these Black students made the academic decisions they did with regards to AP and the influence of their peers, teachers, and school.

Coding

The results of the questionnaire, the focus group, and the individual interviews were used to identify and analyze patterns in responses, in order to determine how these students perceived Black student AP enrollment and the influence of peers, teachers, and school. Coding is the process of taking responses and categorizing them into groups (Berg & Lune, 2004). All of the open-ended responses from the questionnaire, along with focus group comments, and individual comments from the interviews, were reviewed to discover recurring themes from the students that were also found in the literature. Table 1 provides a sample of the data and how it was categorized using the coding methods described.

Table 1

Sample of Participant Data and Coding Categories

PEERS	TEACHERS	SCHOOL	MULITPLE	OTHER
AP is based off of what I know and my strengths, not the negative comments made to me by my Black peers.	I've been recommended for all of my AP courses. The teachers thought I was capable and needed a challenge.	I feel like if you want to pursue the course, the school will try to fit you in if you fill out a course waiver.	My Black friends do not show an interest in AP, so the teachers don't recommend them and then they try to talk me out of it.	Ms. Hertz was such a good teacher for world history and I didn't know she did AP Psych, so I enrolled in the course.
Intentionally Disinviting	Intentionally Inviting	Intentionally Inviting	Unintentionally Disinviting	Unintentionally Inviting

Once all of the comments were assigned to the appropriate category of peers, teachers or school related, the responses were analyzed for common topics such as the PSAT had no influence on AP enrollment, or teacher recommendations for AP, or being called “White” and it having no effect on AP enrollment. If the comment was focused exclusively on one of the three categories, it was placed on a spreadsheet under the heading of peer, or teacher, or school. If the comment contained multiple references, i.e. teacher and school, it was placed in a multiple

category. If the comment was not identifiable based on the established categories, it was placed under a category called “other.” For example, if a student mentioned a parent or a sibling, that comment became part of the “other” category. In addition, based on the four levels of Invitational Theory, comments were later coded as being inviting or disinviting, as well as intentionally or unintentionally. In conducting the focus group and the individual interviews, several themes emerged. There were broad concepts of the literature review that were present, such as “acting white” expressions, the involvement of the teachers in pushing students into AP, and the tracking of students from gifted to advanced content to AP. The analysis goal was to find common themes and broad patterns in the data.

Research Questionnaire Participants

All the necessary protocols needed to ensure participant confidentiality were followed as prescribed by the Institutional Review Board. Subject participation was voluntary.

Table 2

Questionnaire Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Age	Grade	Gender	Living Situation	Lunch \$	AP Category
Niles	15	11th	Male	Both parents	Full Price	No AP
Alan	18	12th	Male	Single parent	Full Price	All AP
Kevin	17	12th	Male	Both parents	Reduced	All AP
Cassie	17	12th	Female	Both parents	Full Price	All AP
Susan	18	12th	Female	Both parents	Reduced	No AP
Jordan	17	12th	Female	Both parents	Full Price	One AP
Joy	17	12th	Female	Both parents	Full Price	One AP
Kim	16	11th	Female	Single parent	Free	No AP
Mark	17	12th	Male	Single parent	Reduced	One AP

Any student who participated was verified to be either eighteen years or older or given a parent consent form to be signed and returned (see Appendix D for parent consent form) if not of the age of consent. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to help ensure their anonymity.

Basic background information was gathered on each participant to understand certain demographics regarding the person in the study (see Table 2). The characteristics listed in the tables do not necessarily speak on the participant's AP qualification since it was already established they received a PSAT - AP potential letter. However, they do provide a background picture for the research study.

Through purposive sampling, the students represented are a heterogeneous and economically varied population. They reflect different parental living situations and a mixture of AP experiences, which included being qualified to take an AP class but never enrolling in AP.

Research Focus Group Participants

The students represented in Table 3 received the same consent forms to participate in the research and were asked the same questions from the survey.

Table 3

Focus Group Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Age	Grade	Gender	Living Situation	Lunch \$	AP Category
Bella	17	11th	Female	Single parent	Reduced	All AP
Tara	17	12th	Female	Parent & One Step-parent	Full Price	All AP
Elisa	17	12th	Female	Parent & One Step-parent	Reduced	No AP
Sara	16	11th	Female	Both parents	Full Price	All AP
Nicole	17	11th	Female	Parent & One Step-parent	Full Price	All AP

They were purposively selected from the original group of alternate students and participants were assigned fabricated names. For both the questionnaire and the focus groups, this qualitative research examined a broad range of interconnected processes (Becker, 1996) with

the goal of understanding the reality of a social phenomenon. In this case, the social phenomenon of deciding to enroll in an AP course was explained as one of individual choice, subject interest, parent involvement, teacher connection, school engrossment, and indirect peer influence.

The inviting behaviors of one or all of the aforementioned areas are discussed to give a full picture of the issue. In other words, an exact number cannot be given or an exact person or entity cannot be separated from one another; it was all encompassing in the effect on the underrepresentation issue.

Research Questionnaire Group Responses

Table 4

Common Questionnaire Responses

Question	Response
Did anyone in your current living situation attend college?	8 out of 9 yes
Which best describes you college aspirations?	9 out of 9 going to college
With whom do you discuss academic goals?	7 out of 9 talk to parents
Who advised you on your 9th grade courses?	9 out of 9 teacher/counselor
Are advanced placement classes open to all students?	8 out 9 yes
Do your Black peers have any effect on which AP classes you take?	9 out 9 no
Does the school offer AP classes that meet your interests?	9 out 9 yes
Have you attended any AP nights while in high school?	9 out 9 no
Did the PSAT influence you to take AP courses?	9 out 9 no

Therefore, the people who lived the underrepresentation issue, Black students, were able to explain their perspectives regarding participation in advanced placement based on a multitude of criteria. Since qualitative data is about the subjects' experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), each individual student perspective on interactions with peers, teachers, school, and how academic choices were influenced contributed to the overall picture of the underrepresentation issue. Common questionnaire, focus group, and individual findings are discussed to provide a

picture of the underrepresentation issue.

Although the discussion following the original questionnaire group did not yield the data anticipated, their responses to the survey did provide insight into future plans, people with whom they share their academic goals, how their elementary and middle school identified them prior to becoming AP eligible, and their ideas on access and equity of the AP program for the school. For example, the students were unanimous on college aspirations (Question 9), with all nine participants stating they were going to college. This highlighted two important facts: first, that all nine participants thought AP increased their chances for college admission (Question 34); and second, at least three of them had never taken an AP class. This could be seen as unintentionally inviting since the students have never been told that AP guarantees them a spot on a college roster, yet the prevailing mindset is that a positive outcome will result even before the first application letter is submitted.

Interestingly enough, eight of the nine had a family member, in their current household, who had attended college (Question 6) and for at least four of the nine, it was an older sibling who had taken one or more AP courses. This context is not necessarily indicative of how their thoughts on college came to be, but it is noteworthy, especially given that seven of the nine expressed that they discussed their academic plans and career goals with their parents (Question 7). This act of behavior would fall under intentionally inviting, but not by the peers, teachers or the school, but rather a parent or sibling, which unintentionally benefited the school. A good example of a parent intentionally steering a child into an AP course was evident from Question 9 and the individual interview with Mark.

Question 9: Which best describes the person who encouraged you or would encourage you to take a particular AP course? Which course and why?

Mark: Parent, AP Psychology, because when I am older I want to get my Ph.D. in Psychology and minor in Business Management.

Moderator: What was the conversation between you and your parent?

Mark: When I first came here and got the sheet of paper of the classes to take, she said you should pick AP Psychology, because that's what I want to major in.

Moderator: How did she know you wanted to major in that?

Mark: I've known that since I was like in middle school. I've always wanted to be a therapist.

Moderator: Why? What made you want to do that?

Mark: I used to be in therapy for like a lot of reasons and they helped me a lot. So I kind of want to do the same thing with other teens and children and give them like a little helping hand. AP Psychology fit with my future line of work.

Lewis & Connell (2005) conducted a study of 87 Black juniors and seniors in advanced placement science courses, to understand the factors that surrounded their enrollment in the course, including college and career aspirations. They found that "students' consideration of science-related careers" played a major factor in AP enrollment. The reasons the students offered for enrolling in AP science courses included 55% indicating career preparation, followed by college preparation, and a desire to learn more. In addition, 72% were already considering science careers. So the implication of their study was to reverse the trend of underrepresentation by promoting the career preparation factors of advance placement courses, which could be defined as intentionally inviting students into AP classrooms for a positive career outcome.

Another concept essential to continued growth of Black students in AP classrooms was the early identification of many of the students as qualified for gifted services or advanced content classrooms. Both of these acts are intentionally inviting by the feeder schools of this high school. Four of the nine questionnaire participants had been identified as gifted in elementary school (Question 14), which could account for academic plans and AP enrollment once in high school. In addition, six of the nine students took advanced content classes in middle school (Question 15), where the teachers had AP discussions as well. This middle school course enrollment followed the pattern of the same six being in all AP classes or at least one AP class in high school, per the comments and student records. These Advanced Content classes in middle school seem as though they could help high schools identify even more eligible Black students to enroll in AP prior to the PSAT-AP potential letter in January of a student's sophomore year of high school as evidenced by the questionnaire responses and individual interview with Alan.

Question 13: Did you receive services through the gifted program while in elementary school?

Alan: No

Question 14: Were you enrolled in Advanced Content classes while in middle school? If yes, which ones?

Alan: Yes, social studies, science and English.

Question 15: Do you think that the classes in middle school prepared you for your academic success in 9th grade?

Alan: Yes.

Moderator: How do you think those specific courses prepared you for AP?

Alan: Because these were the students that were moving faster than the rest of the grade, it kind of taught me to go and learn the content quickly, to study and be prepared to take a test the next day, which has helped me do what I need to do in AP.

In fact, all nine indicated that their 8th grade teachers spoke to them on a regular basis regarding their high school path, and what the high school teachers would be expecting them to be able to do as freshmen. Depending on the tone and delivery of the teacher, their words could be intentionally inviting the students to be active participants in their learning success or unintentionally disinviting if the teacher made the workload or class seem impossible to pass, although none of the students in the study felt this was the case.

Other questionnaire findings that dealt with the school included that all nine were unanimous in their perception of the school as offering AP classes that met the interests of students (Question 28), and eight of the nine perceived the AP classes as being accessible to all students (Question 18). Finally, unlike what the literature stated as an issue preventing Black students from enrolling in AP, all nine of these students stated that their Black peers did not have any effect on which AP classes they decide to take (Question 20). Even though five of the participants had been accused of “acting White” by their peers (Question 27), this unintentionally disinviting language, deemed as such through follow-up questioning, was not interpreted by students as attempts to talk them out of the class, but rather as a questioning of their Blackness. As such, these comments were not coded as elements that undermined the students’ academic plans. More perceptual data on AP classes and the underrepresentation issue, specifically the individual questionnaire comments, will be discussed later in conjunction with the perceptions of the individual focus group data.

Research Focus Group Responses

Table 5

Common Focus Group Responses

Question	Response
Did anyone in your current living situation attend college?	5 out of 5 yes
Which best describes you college aspirations?	5 out of 5 going to college
With whom do you discuss academic goals?	4 out of 5 talk to parents
Does the teacher influence the AP course you take?	5 out of 5 no
Do you like being on a traditional or block schedule for AP?	5 out of 5 block
Would it bother you to be the only Black or one of a handful in AP?	5 out 5 doesn't bother
Have you ever been accused of acting White?	5 out 5 yes
Do your Black peers have any effect on which AP classes you take?	4 out 5 no

Since the questionnaire students had anonymity on the first five questions, and question number seven, the focus group students were not asked to reveal any information that could be found in permanent record files during the interview. For example, it would have been inappropriate to ask a financial question, such as the amount paid for lunch, in front of the group. The focus group students were contacted the day before the interview and met in the same media center conference room as the survey students. While the questionnaire group had complete autonomy in their responses and no outside interference from the beliefs of others, the focus group might have been influenced to react in ways that may have resulted from the group dynamics, which is why they were brought in later to clarify comments individually and to respond if they did not have the opportunity during the group.

When examining the parental involvement discussed earlier with the students from the questionnaire, this group was equally influenced to take AP by their parent discussions. While the school may have been intentionally inviting parents and students to AP nights, the parents found their own way to gain a beneficial outcome for their students with their own inviting

processes.

Moderator: What influenced you to take an AP course?

Tara: Well my mom. I moved to the United States when I was almost ten. Since then she's like been pushing me to take honors classes.

Bella: My mom has been pushing me for AP for a while and I actually got interested in it in 8th grade when (the school) had the AP night. So I thought it was interesting. And then my sophomore year, I got into AP and it was a challenge at first, but then it became easier, and now I'm taking four AP classes.

Sara: Well my parents just pushed me like ridiculously hard because, well first of all, for us to move to America it was for me and my sister to get a better education. So I came here and I took a test so they can see like what grade I should be placed in, and they said I'm too far ahead. The Kenyan system is apparently way more difficult than here. And so I came, and I was doing my homework and my mom was like why are you doing that, you did that, like, a long time ago. She was like you need to do something harder and she heard about AP from her friends and so.

Moderator: What about you?

Nicole: I've been an advanced student since elementary school.

Moderator: Really?

Nicole: Yes. I'm labeled as gifted, I was in target, and um, I've taken AC classes, I've taken honors classes. I'm in four AP classes right now and honors classes. So it was like with my mom, I never had a choice.

These young women all appeared to be under the direct academic influence of their parents. Neither the school nor their Black peers were able to interfere with the bond that was already formed regarding expected academic excellence. It should be also noted that when Sara was asked to clarify her statement on the Kenyan system being more difficult, she reported that it was a private school, and it was expected to be a higher level.

These types of unplanned conversations from the focus group were indicative of the forty-five minutes spent together. While they had forty direct questions that could be attributed to the multiple-choice of the survey group, the follow-up questions emerged from unexpected responses. For example Question 28, Does this school offer the Advanced Placement classes that meet your interests? The choices of the questionnaire group were yes or no, while the focus group's choices were also yes or no, their discussion led one student to reply that she would never take an on-line AP course like she did last year, which prompted a follow-up question regarding her reasons. She stated, she had a horrible experience with her on-line AP Spanish class. Then, a new question emerged through the exchange to see if anyone else in the group would take AP as an on-line course.

This focus on AP courses on-line was something not asked in the computer questionnaire because the school did not technically offer AP classes on-line. The school provided a computer lab for students to access AP courses on-line that were sponsored by the state of Georgia. The research site school did not assign the student's course grade and never interviewed or evaluated the teacher of the on-line AP course. Additionally, the AP administrator did not sign-off as having reviewed the required College Board syllabus per the AP course audit rule. Yet, the College Board and the state of Georgia required the school to order and proctor the AP Exams at the school site.

The two participants who stated they would not take an AP course on-line were now enrolled in AP Biology, which had been on-line the previous year. The school brought it back to the classroom with a new teacher, and both students commented that they would not have taken AP Biology had it been on-line again. While this was the on-line conversation, it showcased the school as being unintentionally disinviting for a non-beneficial outcome. However, bringing the AP Biology course back to the classroom from on-line was intentionally inviting to both of these students. Had the school not brought back AP Biology to the classroom, it would have unintentionally added to the issue of underrepresentation in the school focused on in this study because it was a course for which these two Black students were both qualified but would not have taken on-line. Zarate and Pachon (2006) discussed the issue of schools not being able to offer certain AP classes where minority students did not have “equitable access” to the full educational experience due to budget cuts. Both students agreed that AP Biology being brought back to the classroom was a good decision on the part of the school. In addition, these students commented that AP Biology was their “fun” class, and stated that they were now telling other students about the class, which is an intentionally inviting act.

General Findings and Individual Comments

Table 6

Questionnaire Perceptions of Peers

Question	Response
Which best describes the person who discouraged you from AP?	6-friend
Do your Black peers have any effect on which AP classes you take?	9-no
Would friends say anything if you were the “ONLY” Black in AP?	5-yes
Are you more likely to take an AP class if more Blacks are enrolled?	2-yes
Have you been accused of “acting White”?	5-yes

The questionnaire data regarding the students' perceptions of their friends revealed that even though 66% of them had friends who discouraged them enrolling in AP courses, their Black peers had zero effect in the final decision to actually enroll. In addition, all five of the focus group students stated that they could not be influenced by their peers in a final decision to enroll in AP. Yet, all fourteen students stated that their peers' comments were reasons that many other Black students had been discouraged from AP enrollment. Reasons cited for their friends' discouragement in enrolling included that the AP courses were too strenuous, too hard, or too time consuming. These comments were perceived to be as intentionally disinviting and inhibiting otherwise capable Black students from enrolling in AP courses.

Cassie: There are not as many minorities in the class and I think they get discouraged by it, because I think there are a lot of Black students at this school who could take AP classes and do well. They just don't believe in themselves. And I don't know why, because I think that they could.

Jordan: They were saying (Black peers) that it's a lot of work and on top of the other classes it was just too much. Like when I talked to previous seniors they were saying that they struggled senior year and their GPAs dropped because of AP classes.

Joy: I think the teachers should actually talk to them, because when they hear from other students, it doesn't sound good. If they listen to what we talk about and the amount of work, they wouldn't want to take it. If they hear how much work it is, but I feel like if the teacher were to describe it, it would be totally different, because as a senior, we have senioritis and we just complain a lot.

Bella: People are definitely going to take what they want to take, but some people make it seem like AP classes are going to be the death of you if you take one. So I think that discourages a lot of people.

These comments aside, all fourteen students in the individual interviews concluded that this mindset of their Black peers appeared to reflect more about the work ethic of the person making the comment. Again, the comments had no effect on AP enrollment for these Black students in the study, but may have influenced others. It was also difficult to understand the honor students' or those who decide to take the "track" between AP courses and on-level courses, non-enrollment in AP classes until Kim shared her perspective that it was simply interest in the course and not the AP label of the course that drove her decision.

Kim: I was getting ready to do registration for the next year's courses and they were saying that AP Chemistry is hard. I was like it might be hard to you, but it is not hard to me. And they were just saying how everyone was failing. I was like okay, but I'm different. But I'm in honors chemistry though.

Moderator: What is your current social studies class?

Kim: Honors U.S. History.

Moderator: Are you going to try AP next year?

Kim: I don't know. It depends. I don't really like those subjects.

Moderator: So if I am a student that doesn't like science or social studies, but does well in these classes, I won't take the AP version?

Kim: Basically yeah. I think it really doesn't matter. It depends on how much you are willing to put in to it. I don't like history and somehow I'm in

honors and I don't understand why. I hate maps, but do well, so I will probably never take AP and I don't need it to get into the college looking at.

This student, who is graduating early in December of 2015, repeated what the other honors students and those who only enrolled in only one AP had shared about how their individual end goal after high school affected their decision to limit their enrollment in AP courses. For example, if AP was not a factor for the college that they planned on attending, they might not enroll in AP. Therefore, colleges that do not offer AP credit or reward applicants who have taken AP courses in some way were intentionally inviting students who did not have AP on their transcripts to apply while simultaneously unintentionally disinviting some of the Black students in this study from considering enrollment in AP courses.

Another theme that emerged from the comments, that was also discussed in the literature review, was the "acting White" phrase. These comments specifically related to the context of being the only Black person represented in the class, which was confirmed in the literature as being an issue (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Wiggan, 2008; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ford & Whiting, 2011). However, the students in this study did not view these comments as a reason for whether or not they should take an AP course. The comments could all be viewed as intentionally disinviting to participate in AP classes on the part of their Black peers. The comments included, "you want to be in a class with all White people?" or "how does it feel to be around White people all the time?" Yet, the focus group participants appeared to be making decisions best for their academic future and in their academic interests, with no particular attention to the color of the students represented in the class.

Moderator: Have you ever been accused, any of you, of acting White?

All: Yes (collective laughter)

Nicole: Um, my boyfriend calls me a White girl because of the way I talk.

All: Yes (collective agreement)

Bella: Like a lot of my friends, they're like you act White; you talk White, even at like the homecoming dance, they were like you dance White.

Tara: My friends in marching band, because marching band is mostly White and they're always like you're the Whitest Black person I've ever met to me and my other friend Armani.

Nicole: But it doesn't bother me. I feel like it's always been that way. Like since elementary school. I'm just used to it. It doesn't bother me.

As stated in Chapter 1, social aspects such as being labeled as “acting White” was a common theme of the literature for why intelligent Black students avoided enrolling in AP classes. For the young women in the focus group, it appeared that maintaining friendships in AP with their Black peers played no role in course selection. They each stated that they took AP or honors courses that were best suited for them. In addition, the issue of maintaining Black friends, or any friends for that matter, was not due to being too smart or acting too White; rather, it was mainly due to the work required of AP classes.

Moderator: Do you have trouble; any of you have trouble keeping friendships outside of AP? Like let's say you had a Black friend that wasn't in AP and struggling in school. Do you even hang out with people like that? Or do you have problems / issues maintaining friendship with people who don't take school as seriously?

Bella: Like it gets really hard to balance your social life and your schoolwork with all these AP classes because it's like your friends who aren't taking the same classes as you they don't know how hard you have to work in order to get the good grades in AP.

Sara: Like if you have friends that are not on the same level as you they don't understand because they want to hang out but you like have schoolwork to do. Let's say A-PUSH (AP U.S. History) this past weekend we had a lot of homework and AP physics as well... well AP Lang, like every class ... so this past weekend if you're trying to hangout and I told you that I have schoolwork to do, and you didn't listen to me, I'm going to drop you. It constantly happens.

As for the student perceptions of the Black peers, the questionnaire and focus group both showed that if the student was taking all AP, only one AP, or had never enrolled in AP, the student's decision was not a result of negative peer pressure. Even though their Black peers had questions, may have called them White, or may not have understood why they did not want a stress-free senior year, the disinviting behavior of their friends was not reflected in their friends AP enrollment decisions.

Table 7

Questionnaire Perceptions of Teachers

Question	Response
The person who encourages your AP course enrollment?	5-teacher
Does the person teaching the AP course affects your decision to enroll?	5-yes
Who is the person who advised you on 9th grade courses to take?	6-teacher
Do your Black friends talk about the teachers of specific AP classes?	2-yes

The questionnaire data regarding the students' perceptions of their teachers revealed that their teachers did play an important factor in their decision to enroll in AP. Their teachers encouraged them to challenge themselves and advised them to take their 9th grade honors courses. In addition, if the students had a positive experience with a teacher in an on-level or honors course, they were more likely to take that teacher's AP course later in their academic school years. The student responses were consistent with the literature reviewed (Burton, Whitman, Yepes-Baraya, 2002; Hallett and Venegas, 2011; Klopfenstein, 2003; Tyler and Boelter, 2008), which indicated that teacher expectations for Black students mattered, their support for taking an AP course was needed, and their positive relationships influenced Black students' decisions to enroll in an AP class.

Moderator: Can you give me an example of a teacher that encouraged you and what took place?

Cassie: Probably Ms. Anderson my AVID teacher, my freshman year.

Moderator: What did she do exactly, what made you feel encouraged?

Cassie: Well, it was like time to choose our classes, and I was debating whether or not I wanted to take AP World and I was asking her about it and she told me based off of how I see you in my class and what other teachers say, I think that you can do it.

Moderator: And what, sort of qualities did Ms. Anderson have that you said, well, I'm going to go with what Ms. Anderson said I should do. What qualities made you say, "I trust her, I should do AP."?

Cassie: She is one of those teachers where she builds a relationship with her students. And so, I feel like if she says you have a certain quality then you probably do.

Moderator: What is it that you like about AVID?

Cassie: It's the skills that they teach you like time management, organization, those things, because if I did not have that, I don't think that I would be as good in school as I am now.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the AVID program has been advocated by the College Board as a support program and was created to help students succeed in AP or honors classes (AVID, 2013). The literature suggested that student perceptions of the AVID teachers as supportive, was a popular aspect of AVID (Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola and Alkan, 2008). It also suggested that the students felt the AVID program helped them to stay on top of their AP coursework and changed their perception of what was needed to succeed in an AP course (Becker, 2012). This student, along with two other research participants in the program, viewed their AVID teacher as intentionally inviting them to enroll in AP coursework since all three indicated Ms. Anderson was the reason they took an AP class.

Although the recommending teacher played a positive role in influencing AP course enrollment, Ms. Anderson was not an AP teacher. However, there were some same subject teacher experiences, revealed in the interviews, which yielded later AP course subject enrollment. There was a positive correlation if the students had taken the teacher in an honor's course or on-level course and had the opportunity for the same teacher in AP. These experiences were inviting, both intentionally and unintentionally.

Tara: Yeah. Last year I took AP U.S. History with Mr. Brady just because I had him the previous year and I had a pretty good grade for honors world history. So I had this good grade in class and he was like OK Tara, you have the grades now you just have to challenge yourself a little more with AP, so I took it. And then I heard about Ms. Hertz, that she was a pretty cool teacher, so I took AP Psych as well.

This same teacher came up in a later interview.

Susan: I had Ms. Hertz. I was deciding on taking regular psychology or AP Psychology. She said it was a little bit harder, but that I could use it for college. I told her that I wanted to pursue that career. She said that I could get through it because I've had her since I've been in 9th grade for the different history classes she teaches; and she was like you have a good work ethic and I believe that you can take on the challenge of the class.

Moderator: So you had an already established relationship and when she said take it, you believed her.

Susan: Yes.

Unfortunately, AP Psychology did not fit in this student's schedule, which is why she has not had an AP class. However, this inviting behavior on the part of the teachers served not only the teacher well, but also the school as whole, by attempting to increase Black student representation in AP classes.

These positive experiences aside, there was not a beneficial presence of inviting behavior if the teacher in question had a bad reputation. Of the five students in the questionnaire, who stated the teacher of the AP course would play a factor in their decision to enroll, the reasons

cited were the teacher's reputation for assigning busy work, for not teaching well, or their inability to appeal to all types of learning styles. This was in line with the two responses from the questionnaire that indicated Black peers talk about certain teachers with regards to too much work being given and Susan, from earlier, stated that a friend pulled the racist card about a teacher in an interview.

Moderator: Your Black friends will tell you hey, don't take this teacher because there is just way too much work and she is not going to help you focus?

Susan Yeah, like before I even got to high school, there was a lot of people that were like oh don't take this class because this teacher has a problem with us. Although I took the honors version, it was fine for me; it was just not fine for that person.

None of the fourteen participants stated they had ever experienced anything of a racial nature with a teacher while in class. At one point in the focus group conversation, there was a discussion regarding teachers and if the teacher's race would make a difference in taking an AP course.

Moderator: What Black teachers have you had?

Bella: Zero, honestly I've not had a Black teacher.

Nicole: I don't think I've ever had a Black teacher.

Moderator: You've never had a Black teacher.

Nicole: Oh, I've had – not at [this school], but I've had one Black teacher in my life and that was in the 5th grade.

Moderator: (turning to the 2 girls from Africa) Okay, don't include Africa.

Sara: Well then, no.

Tara: Ms. AKA (this teacher asks that students call her by her initials)

Moderator: You had Ms. AKA?

Tara: Yeah, I had Ms. AKA last year.

Moderator: OK well, she doesn't teach AP.

Tara: Yeah she doesn't. She was just like the coordinator for the (AP) on-line Spanish class.

Moderator: (turning to the girl in honors and on-level) OK, and you?

Elisa: No. Wait, I have Ms. AKA for mentorship.

During the focus group, the students all stated that the race of the teacher did not matter to them when considering an AP class. A discussion ensued regarding whether an AP course specifically geared towards Black students, regardless of the teacher's race, would increase Black participation in AP courses. When asked if they could be talked into a make-believe course called AP Afro Centric History the response was:

Nicole: That would seem stereotypical.

Moderator: Would seem?

Nicole: I don't know if I would take it.

Moderator: (In response to an earlier comment this student said she could be talked into any AP course) so there is a course!

Nicole: Huh?

Moderator: You said there wasn't an AP course that I could talk you into. But there is a course that I couldn't convince you to take!

Nicole: Yeah, I guess so

This was the consensus of the group and suggested that AP course enrollment would not increase if the course were focused on Black history even if taught by a Black teacher. In fact it would appear from the interviews, questionnaire, and focus group that the teacher should not be anything other than challenging and academically qualified to teach the subject. As long as the students felt they could learn from the person, they were satisfied regardless of race. Their statements were in contrast to the literature by Whiting (2006), which concluded that what was missing from teachers of gifted Black students were positive Black teacher role models. All of these students were succeeding without Black teachers in the classroom as evidenced by their academic grade point averages and grades in AP or honors courses. They did not see the race of the teacher as uninviting, or as inhibiting any success they were experiencing in classroom.

Table 8

Questionnaire Perceptions of School

Question	Response
Do the AP classes offered by the school meet student interests	9-yes
Have you attended AP Nights while enrolled in high school	0-yes
Are AP classes open to all students in this school	9-yes
Did the PSAT letter influence your decision to enroll in AP	0-yes
Is there an underrepresentation issue for Black students at this school	6-yes

As discussed in Chapter 1, there has been a constant push for the past ten years by the College Board to advertise AP as accessible to all students and to utilize the PSAT scores for recruiting more students into AP courses for which they were qualified. The young women in the focus group, with the exception of one of the girls from Africa, had all heard of AP prior to coming to high school, and only one attended an AP night while in middle school. This held the same for the questionnaire participants with only two of them attending an AP night while in middle school. The research site school held one official AP night in the fall, went to the middle

schools in the fall with an AP presentation, hand delivered each AP potential letter to students when the PSAT scores were released, and discussed all possible AP coursework with parents during the March 2014 registration period; all befitting of the definition of intentionally inviting and working towards a beneficial outcome, as well as employing the strategies emphasized by the College Board. However, the results indicated that none of these events had any effect on the participants' enrollment into AP courses.

Question 16: Did you attend any open houses while in middle school where they discussed Advanced Placement classes in high school?

Response: Yes – specifically AP Night.

Moderator: With whom did you attend?

Niles: My mother.

Moderator: So why haven't you taken any AP courses?

Niles: I really wasn't ready. I'm ready now and will take one senior year.

Even though this student was qualified for AP World History, AP U.S. History, and AP Psychology per his PSAT letter, and attended an AP night, he has contributed to the underrepresentation issue of the school by not taking any of them. He revealed in his interview that he is only taking one next year because his honors U.S. History teacher will be teaching AP Government and he really feels a connection with her.

Moderator: Why AP Government?

Niles: Ms. Federer thinks that I have good study habits and that I'd be a better fit in AP.

Moderator: Was she speaking to you one on one?

Niles: Yeah.

Moderator: Was this during registration?

Niles: No it was just kind of out of the blue.

Moderator: You have a relationship like that?

Niles: Yeah she is one of my favorite teachers. She is just bit more relaxed than other teachers. She always gives us really detailed notes that help on tests and stuff. She is just a great person. She has a great personality.

Through her intentional invitation to him to take an AP course, she did what the school could not do through any of its College Board productions. In fact, one of the interviews with a student from the questionnaire group revealed that the PSAT - AP Potential letter did not know her as a person and could never influence her course decisions.

Moderator: Let's say that you got a letter from the College Board that said you qualified for AP U.S. Government and AP Econ, and here you are sitting in an honors U.S. History class right now, and they believe you should be in the AP course next year, would that letter influence you to enroll in the course or it would have no bearing?

Kim: It wouldn't have any bearing because I know my standards and I don't think AP is that type of life for me, and I don't like social studies. It is somebody's words on a piece of paper, and they don't know my mind.

Moderator: But they know your score on the PSAT.

Kim: But they don't know me, as a person, and that I have no interest in social studies.

This student is correct in that scores can never provide the full picture of a person, and perhaps the College Board's emphasis on all of the students with AP potential should include an interest

in AP survey immediately following the PSAT. The survey could focus on careers and colleges in which AP courses could prove useful, and thus the College Board and AP coordinators could target those students.

When examining the importance that administrators placed on Black students in AP courses, five of out of nine of the questionnaire responses (Question 21) included yes because “there was a dwindling number of Black students in AP classes,” or “they encouraged me to take many AP classes,” and “they encourage us to see if we wanted to take an AP class.” This question was not clearly defined as to a specific administrator’s title. It was open for interpretation by the student as to whom the administrator in question was. Therefore, their reference could have included the administrator over textbooks, the administrator for athletics, and the administrator for testing. However, during one student’s interview, the entire school administration’s role had perhaps the best response that encompassed all fourteen individual interviews, even though he has never taken AP.

Niles: At the beginning of the year all we hear on the announcements is take challenging courses and work hard. You tell us to think about AP courses and that it is good to get into college, especially the college of your choice. While all school administrators should have had academic conversations with students, including AP related conversations; this question should have been written more clearly to specify a specific administrator. Doing so could provide the administrator over the AP program, who hand delivers the AP Potential Letters, presents the AP Night events, and calls students into the office during the March registration period to discuss AP enrollment, to determine possible changes that are needed to be more intentionally inviting.

All nine of the questionnaire participants indicated that AP classes were open to any

student who wanted to take them and that the school offered AP courses that met the students' interests. Given the original exclusivity associated with AP, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the school appeared to be providing an inviting, open access environment to any student willing to take on the challenge of an AP course, including through its course waiver process. The course waiver process was an intentional invitation to AP for those students that felt they had the skills to succeed in a class of interest to them. The questionnaire students indicated that "any student can take these rigorous courses," and "if you want to take them, you just simply sign up," as well as "I feel like if you want to pursue the course, the school will always try to fit you in an advanced class."

Question 18: Do you think advanced placement classes are open to all students?

Cassie: Yes, because if a teacher does not put you in the class, then you can waive yourself in.

Moderator: What do you mean you can waive yourself in?

Cassie: You can get a waiver form and if you feel like your fit to be in the class then you can sign it, and say I feel like I need to be in this class despite what my teacher says.

Ten of the fourteen comments from the individual interviews discussed the waiver process that the school had for students not recommended for AP courses, or for those that did not receive a PSAT Potential Letter, thus creating an accessible environment.

Another issue discussed in the literature was the idea of being a Black student at a predominantly White school, and being one of a handful or the "only Black" in an AP class. The idea insinuates that the reason more Black students do not take AP courses is that there are not enough Black students already represented in AP courses; therefore, the cycle cannot be broken

(Southworth and Mickelson, 2007; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). The thought behind this unintentionally uninviting atmosphere is that underrepresentation is a result of potential Black enrollees not seeing sufficient numbers of Black students in current AP courses. Seven of the nine questionnaire participants (Question 26) answered that it did not make them more likely to take an AP class if other Black students were heavily represented in the class. Yet, in the following examples, all concerning the government, when individually interviewed, the Black students expressed it might make the AP classroom environment easier to cope with if they had greater representation.

Cassie: So we never had this debate in AP government, but I was actually surprised that we did in one of my other class, but with like the Michael Brown thing that happened, if we were to have a debate like that, in that (AP) class, I already know it would be a one-sided argument. Because there's only like two or three of us, Black students in I; and I don't know what the other Black student, his perspective was on it, but I know me and the other Black girl, we had one view on it, whereas the entire rest of the class had another view on it. And if we were to debate on it in AP, it's like they wouldn't understand where we were coming from.

Moderator: So you think it would be different debate if more Black students were in that AP class?

Cassie: Yes, it wouldn't be so much pressure on us.

In another interview:

Moderator: So it doesn't matter to you the racial make-up of the class? It just about the academic things that you want to do?

Joy: Yes, but at the same time it would be easier to have other Black people in the class, because when something does happen and it's about race, I'm not the only one that has to take up for it and speak for all Black people.

In another interview:

Moderator: Give me an example of debate that would take place in your honors government class.

Jordan: Obama. All the time it is Obama.

Moderator: So are you saying that White students say one thing about Obama and then the 3 or 4 Black students say something else?

Jordan: Yes, and then it's because you're Black you agree – type thing.

Moderator: So what is your response?

Jordan: I tell them no, that is not necessarily it. That just because he is Black doesn't mean I'm going to agree with everything he says.

The social studies classes appeared to be the classes where the Blacks students had the most difficulty in being the “only Black” or one of a handful represented, and it was all based on current racial topic discussions. Nonetheless, they all insisted they had made the right choice in being in the class.

As for this school having an underrepresentation issue of Black students in AP, eleven out of fourteen of the students of the questionnaire and focus group agreed with this statement. However, as a whole, they were indifferent to the issue. Since they were pleased with the courses they had chosen, AP or not AP, they saw the issue of underrepresentation as a work ethic issue, as stated in the Black peer section.

Moderator: Tell me what constitutes the underrepresentation.

Kevin: There are not as many minorities in the class and I think they get discouraged by it, because I think there are a lot of Black students at this school who could take AP classes and do well. They just don't believe in themselves. And I don't know why, because I think that they could.

Moderator: Why did you say there is an underrepresentation issue?

Alan: When you walk in an AP class there is just not that many. It's like sprinkles in there.

Moderator: Is there anything that can be done to reverse that trend?

Alan: I don't know if it is necessarily the program's fault. I think it's some of the students. Like senior year, they don't want to challenge themselves. But I know most of my Black friends have mostly AP classes. I don't really hang out with anyone that is not in honors or AP.

In addition to the above comments, all fourteen of the Black students stated that their Black peers had access to AP and were choosing not to enroll because of the amount of work associated with being in an AP class. They had this perception of not only Black students, but of students representing all racial backgrounds.

Kevin: In many of my classes there are seldom more than three or four Black students, but the population of Black students I see in the hall leads me to believe there is a significant amount of Black students, and they just decide to not take the AP classes.

The main response continued to be that the incredible amount of work associated with an AP course made it undesirable and not the teacher, other Black students, or the school. One of the young women from the focus group who was also in a dual enrollment course stated that her AP

classes were harder than her college classes; and by harder, she meant the amount of work.

Tara: Well, some of my friends and my cousins, I talk to them and they were like you should still take AP with your dual enrollment. And AP is way harder than college, because of all of the assignments, well, at least for the college that I'm attending.

It should also be noted that the focus group students all felt (even the one was not in AP) that they could not get into a good college without the AP courses at the school. When asked to elaborate, the following exchange occurred.

Moderator: Could you get into Princeton with AP?

All: No

Moderator: You all really think that?

All: Yes

Moderator: OK. Could you get into UGA without AP?

Bella: Well

Tara: Maybe, because you know they have their requirements?

Moderator: They don't say you have to have an AP course do they?

Tara: They don't but it's like the standard now.

Bella: It's like a 4 or 5.

Moderator: It looks good on your transcript is what you're saying?

All: Yes.

Nicole: Yeah, pretty much. Like I want to go to Wake Forest.

Moderator: Wake Forest, my brother went there.

Nicole: Really. I want to go to Wake Forest and I went to the college to

visit and everything and they prefer that you take more rigorous courses and not just take them but get good grades in them and have a phenomenal ACT and SAT score and all of the schools that I've gone to ... I've gone to Vandy, uh, where else have I gone ... I've gone to Wake Forest, Vandy, High Point which is one of the lower schools, um Furman, Davidson, Clemson and they all prefer that you take AP classes and get good grades in them.

As stated before, four of the five focus group members and all nine of the questionnaire students all knew about AP prior to starting high school. It appeared just from this portion of the conversation, as well as the individual interviews that the students were all "sold" on the benefits of AP by a variety of people including: middle school teachers, family members, high school teachers, administrators, and anyone they knew who attended college. In fact, all fourteen students indicated via the questionnaire or the focus group that that they perceived AP as increasing their chance of being awarded college admission (see Question 34 - increased chance for college admission results). All of the research participants felt that the school was helping them on their journey through the college admissions process with the available AP coursework at the school, which created an inviting atmosphere.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on students' perspectives of their peers, teachers, and school and if those entities influenced their decision to enroll, not enroll, or continue through Advanced Placement courses. This study was limited to one school in an Atlanta suburb in Georgia. As stated earlier, this school was 67% White and 21% Black, with advanced placement enrollment at 89% White and 8.7% Black. Therefore, findings for this school cannot be generalized to all

schools with AP programs and all schools that offer AP programs. The study was meant only to obtain the opinions of these selected students. The opinions of these students were not meant to conclusively establish a norm to represent the Black students in AP courses across the nation but rather to provide a snapshot of this school's AP program and how student perception might affect its enrollment. Black students in similar situations answering AP questions regarding the importance of access and equity might or might not answer in the same manner.

Study Relevance

As stated in Chapter 1, the College Board has been promoting greater access and equity in AP programs (2014). Additionally, the school where the research was conducted also wrote goals of access and equity, as well as closing achievement gaps amongst racial groups in their School Strategic Plan (SSP). In addition, access and equity were a part of the state of Georgia's College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI), which required that the equity gap for Black and Hispanic students be narrowed for greater student achievement. Furthermore, schools are awarded success points on the CCRPI for narrowing gaps among all students, as well as for students who take advanced placement courses. One strategy listed in the school's SSP was to increase the number of Black students in AP courses and to increase the number of Black students who met and exceeded standards on state and national exams, including the AP Exam.

The College Board encouraged the elimination of barriers that restricted access to AP courses for students that have been traditionally underrepresented in the AP Program (College Board, 2002). Since equity and access was a national, state, and local agenda item being addressed by various agencies, the commitment to study the phenomena of underrepresentation through Invitational Theory was a relevant issue. While the AP courses are not the only means to address gaps, they are one means of assisting Black students with educational rigor and access to

what is often considered to be elite classrooms. Society benefits when the varieties of experiences shared by all members are broadened and when we increase access to exclusive classrooms.

Discussion

Using student perception data to understand the underrepresentation issue of Black students in AP is important for enabling leaders to make informed decisions before expanding initiatives to solve a problem (Chen & Hoshower, 2003; Lee, Srinivasan, Trail, Lewis & Lopez, 2011; Picciano, 2002). Findings from this study suggest that the College Board, while well-meaning in targeting Black students for increased enrollment, were not viewing the issue in the same manner as the students. When it came to their peers, these students indicated that they were not influenced by their peers' discouragement of taking AP classes, nor were they any more inclined to enroll based on the number of Black students represented in an AP class.

In short, any need to suppress any intelligence to reaffirm their Blackness out of fear of being labeled as "acting White," was not a factor in representation in AP courses for these students. Next, the students of this study indicated that their teachers, through their positive encouragement and previous course experiences could convince them to enroll in AP coursework. Even though they may have heard about certain teachers' reputations or had issues with classes being offered on-line, it was interest in the subject matter along with the teacher's willingness to challenge them, as well as meet their learning styles that influenced their enrollment decisions. Although an added influence of AP class selection included a prior positive teacher relationship, the students still took AP classes based on interest in the subject matter. Based on the results of this qualitative study, a better understanding of the AP enrollment was discerned and the inviting environment of the school was determined. According to the

participants in this study, the school's intentional invitations of expanded course offerings, AP events, middle school promotions, and the AP Potential letter had no bearing on increasing representation in the AP classroom. Interest in the course, as well as parental influence, and eventual college selection were the dominant influences in enrollment decisions.

The students represented in this study indicated that they took the AP courses that they wanted, whether recommended by teachers or not, regardless of their peers, or any big presentations or letters given by the school. The underrepresentation issue, as perceived by the participants in the study, was more a matter of understanding how the students perceive the AP workload, how the courses met their specific interests, and their future academic plans beyond high school. Through an invitational theoretical perspective, this research site school was found by the students to be open and accessible with the AP program. According to the participants, the needed behavior, cited by the College Board, to raise the Black student participation in AP did not have an impact on them. In addition, lack of teacher recommendation (College Board, 2014; College Board, 2013), lack of proper school promotion of the AP program (College Board, 2014; College Board, 2013), or desire to maintain peer acceptance (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986), did emerge as causes for the underrepresentation of Black students at this school. While students were well aware of the importance of the high school transcript and what college admissions' officers were looking for, their reasons for enrollment or not enrolling were personal and driven by subject or teacher interest, work ethic, and what they wanted to do in the future.

Future Research

How can school leaders use the findings in this study to address similar issues of underrepresentation within their schools? One, school leaders can question the students within their individual schools to find out if the issue can indeed be addressed. Two, as stated earlier,

perhaps the PSAT needs an interest survey in AP immediately following the test administration. The survey should show students AP courses that are useful with certain academic majors in college and career goals. Once the survey has been taken, the College Board and AP coordinators can keep track of students that ask for additional information, enroll in specific courses and how they do on their exams when they are interested in the specific subject.

Finally, in order to best serve students, it is helpful to know the people, places, policies, programs, and processes that create an increased desire to enroll in an AP class. In the case of this school, the students felt enabled to take the courses they desired, were supported by their teachers, and never felt marginalized by others. These students were individuals with their own specific goals. According to the focus group members' perceptions, faculty at this site engaged students in conversations about their academic future. The perception also revealed the faculty did not force students into academic situations that were not right for them. While the first and most important strategy would be to examine beliefs within a school regarding who could and could not take an AP course, the power comes from the teachers and students working together, regardless of a PSAT score or honors level course grade, to decide on the best fit for a student when it comes to an AP class or not. Advocating for practices that empower people, programs, policies and relationships is the goal of Invitational Theory (Paxton, 1993). This environment was created when students were able to realize their full potential. It was hoped that the results of this study would inform practices that allowed students to self-challenge, yet also enabled them to feel comfortable with their educational decisions.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT INTEREST FLYER

Calling for Participants in a Research Study***What?***

A survey is being conducted regarding Black student perceptions of Advanced Placement courses. Mrs. Camille Havis and Dr. Jami Berry are conducting this survey for Georgia State University. The survey has two parts. The first part is a 15-minute computer survey regarding educational experiences in middle and high school on September 30th during LASSO. The second part is a 30-minute focus group to regarding peers, teachers and school that influence Black student participation in AP courses on October 2nd during LASSO.

Why?

Despite national, state and local gains in AP courses enrollment, Black students continue to be the most underrepresented racial group at each level. Student responses to the survey will be used to improve educational experiences. By understanding student perceptions of their learning experiences, educators can address areas that need improvement in and out of the classroom.

Who?

This survey is open to Black juniors and seniors who are identified as having AP potential (based on PSAT scores), or who are currently enrolled in an AP course, or who were enrolled in an AP course and have decided against further AP enrollment. The focus group will be comprised of 9 student representatives meeting the above criteria.

Anything Else?

Students electing to be part of the research study will receive a \$10 Starbucks gift card and have the opportunity to let their voices be heard as students of this high school.

Contact Information?

If you are interested in being part of the study, please see return this flyer to your homeroom teacher. It already has your CCSD number at the top. You will be contacted by Mrs. Havis to fill out a consent form if you are 18, or you will receive a parent consent form if you are age 14 to 17 years old. You can also have your parent /guardians contact Mrs. Havis for more information at 678-494-7844 ext. 285.

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESULTS

Q1 What grade are you?

Answer Choices	Responses
11th	2
12th	9

Q2 What is your gender?

Answer Choices	Responses
Female	5
Male	4

Q3 When did you first come to this high school?

Answer Choices	Responses
9th	7
10th	1
11th	0
12th	1

Q4 How old are you?

Answer Choices	Responses
15 years old	1
16 years old	1
17 years old	5
18 years old	2

Q5 Which best describes your living situation?

Answer Choices	Responses
Live with both parents	6
Live with one parent	3
Live with guardian	0
Live with grandparent	0

Q6 Did anyone in your living situation attend college?

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	8
No	1

Q7 If you were to purchase lunch, please indicate the purchase price?

Answer Choices	Responses
Full Price	5
Reduced Lunch Price	3
Free Lunch	1

Q8 Which best describes your college aspirations?

Answer Choices	Responses
I am going to college	9
I may go to college	0
I have no interest in college	0

Q9 Which best describes the person who encouraged you or would encourage you to take a particular AP course?

Answer Choices	Responses
Teacher	5
Counselor	0
Parent	3
Friend	1

Q10 Which best describes the person who discouraged you or would discourage you from taking a particular AP course?

Answer Choices	Responses
Teacher	1
Counselor	0
Parent	1
Friend	6
NA	1

Q11 Which best describes the person with whom you discuss academic and career goals?

Answer Choices	Responses
Teacher	1
Counselor	0
Parent	7
Friend	1

Q12 Which best describes the person at middle school who advised you on which 9th grade class to take?

Answer Choices	Responses
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Teacher	6
Counselor	3
Parent	0
Friend	0

Q13 Did you receive services through the gifted program while in elementary school?

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	4
No	5

Q14 Where you enrolled in Advanced Content classes while in middle school?

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	6
No	3

Q15 Do you feel that the classes in middle school prepared you for your academic success in 9th grade?

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	7
No	2

Q16 Did you attend any open houses while in middle school where they discussed Advanced Placement classes in high school?

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes – specifically an AP Night	2
Yes – but AP was not the focus	5
No	2

Q17 Did you take any of the following classes in 9th grade?

Answer Choices	Responses
Honors 9th Lit	7
Honors Biology	2
Pre AP Social Studies	3
AP Human Geography	2
Accelerated Math	2
None of the Above	1

Q18 Do you think advanced placement classes are open to all students?

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	8

	No	1
Q19	Does the person teaching the course have any effect on which AP classes you decide to take or not take?	
	Answer Choices	Responses
	Yes	5
	No	4
Q20	Do your Black peers have any effect on which Advanced Placement classes you decide to take?	
	Answer Choices	Responses
	Yes	0
	No	9
Q21	Do administrators stress the importance of Advanced Placement class; in particular do administrators place importance on Black student participation in AP classes?	
	Answer Choices	Responses
	Yes	5
	No	4
Q22	Do your Black friends talk about certain teachers of Advanced Placement classes?	
	Answer Choices	Responses
	Yes	2
	No	7
Q23	Would your Black friends say anything to you if you chose to be in an Advanced Placement class where you may be the "ONLY" Black student represented?	
	Answer Choices	Responses
	Yes	5
	No	4
Q24	How would you describe your classes?	
	Answer Choices	Responses
	Easy	4
	Challenging	5
	Hard	0
Q25	How do you think you would describe your Advanced Placement class experience if none of your friends were in the class?	

	Answer Choices	Responses
	I would be okay because the subject is what is of interest to me, not the people in the class	3
	I would not enjoy being in the class which is why I don't take	1
	I would make new friends in the class	5
Q26	Are you more likely to take an Advanced Placement class if other Black students are heavily represented in the class?	
	Answer Choices	Responses
	Yes	2
	No	7
Q27	Have you ever been told you are "acting white"?	
	Answer Choices	Responses
	Yes	5
	No	4
Q28	Does this school offer the Advanced Placement classes that meet your interests?	
	Answer Choices	Responses
	Yes	9
	No	0
Q29	Do you make good grades in school?	
	Answer Choices	Responses
	Yes, in all classes	8
	Yes but only in AP classes	0
	Yes but not in my AP classes	1
	Not really	0
Q30	How would you describe your grades?	
	Answer Choices	Responses
	All A's	0
	A combination of A's & B's	9
	Mostly B's	0
	A combination of B's & C's	0

Q31 Have you attended any Advanced Placement nights while in high school?

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	0
No	9

Q32 Did you receive a PSAT – AP Potential Letter regarding Advanced Placement course work?

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	4
No	5

Q33 If you received a PSAT letter, did it influence you to take AP courses?

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	0
No	9

Q34 What do you think are the benefits of taking an Advanced Placement course? (Indicate all that apply)

Answer Choices	Responses
Being intellectually challenged	9
More preparation for college	7
Higher grade point average	9
Increase chance in college admission	9
Chance to earn college credit and spend less time at college	7
None	0
Other	0

Q35 Do you think there is an underrepresentation issue of Black students in AP classes at this school?

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	6
No	3

APPENDIX C
RESEARCH FOCUS GROUP
QUESTIONS AND RESULTS

- Q1 Of the people living in your situation, in your household situation, how many of you have someone that attended college?
Response (All five of the students raised their hand)
- Q2 Of the people in your situation, did anybody who attended college also take an AP class?
Response (1 – no and 4 not sure)
- Q3 Does anybody else have someone (parents) that didn't go to school here in the state?
Response (1 Nigeria and 1 Kenya and 3 from New York)
- Q4 What influenced you to take an AP course?
Response (1 teacher and 4 mom)
- Q5 Did you take advanced content when you were in middle school?
Response (1 yes and 4 no)
- Q6 Was there any teacher that was an influence to take AP? Or is there any teacher that you gravitated towards that made you want to take an AP course?
Response (1 yes and 4 no)
- Q7 Is there any particular teacher that you would not want as an AP teacher (and you don't have to say the name, you could just say the subject)
Response (0 yes and 5 no)
- Q8 How many of you took the PSAT?
Response (5 yes and 0 no)
- Q9 Did you get a PSAT Letter that said you qualify for the following AP?
Response (1 yes and 4 not sure / don't remember)

Q10 Are there any Black students who graduated from this school, that you keep in contact with that said you should take AP or no you shouldn't take AP?

Response (0 this school and 2 other schools [in favor of AP] and 3 no)

Q11 Did anybody hear about AP prior to coming to this school?

Response (4 yes and 1 no)

Q12 Who was in an advanced content? – You were in target and advanced content, you didn't get here until 6th grade

Response (3 yes and 2 no)

Q13 If you weren't in AC classes, what made you decided to go into honors?

Response (1 placed by teacher and 1 AP night)

Q14 Did middle school prepare you to be successful in high school?

Response (2 yes and 3 no)

Q15 Do you like being on a traditional schedule for AP or would rather be on a block?

Response (5 block schedule)

Why?

Response (Too many classes)

Q16 Would any of you take an AP class online?

Response (1 yes and 4 no)

Q17 Are there any concerns about being the “only” Black or one of two Blacks, three, four or whatever in your class? Do you have any concerns?

Response (It doesn't bother me, I've always been like the token)

Response (I'm okay with it, I'm used to it now)

Response (I like it because people don't expect something of you cause you're Black)

Response (I'm used to at this point)

Response (Hum, I really don't care, it doesn't bother me)

Q18 Have you ever been accused, any of you, of “Acting White”?

Response (Collective yes [at the same time])

Q19 Why would they even say that to you?

Response (Because of the way I talk)

Response (When my Black friends see me with my White friends)

Response (At the homecoming dance, they were like you dance white)

Response (My friends in marching band, they're always like – you're the Whitest Black person I've ever met)

Response (Most definitely the way I dress sometimes)

Q20 Would a particular teacher or administrator talk you into being in an AP class? For example, if tomorrow we started offering AP U.S. Government and Taxes, could I talk you into an AP class?

Response (You could talk me into it)

Q21 Would it matter if the administrator were a White, could she talk you into it?

Response (Collective yeah)

Q22 She could still talk you into it?

Response (Collective yeah)

Q23 So you just want AP regardless?

Response (Collective – yeah)

Response (Like - I'm interested in AP. It's not like I don't want to take AP. And the AP classes I take, like, I want to take.)

Q24 Is there anything more this school could be doing to increase the number of Black people in an AP class? How can it do a better promotion or do you think people just take what they want to take?

Response (People are definitely going to take what they want to take, but some people make it seem like AP classes are going to be the death of you if you take one. So I think that discourages a lot of people.)

Q25 Do you guys think you could get into a good college without AP?

Response (Collective no)

Q26 No? Why do you (all) say that?

Response (Well define like a college? Are we talking like Ivy League?)

Ivy League – could you get into Princeton without AP?

Response (Collective no)

Q27 Ok – could you get into UGA without AP?

Response (Collective maybe)

Response (Maybe – because you know they have their requirements)

Q28 What requirements? They don't say you have to have an AP course do they?

Response (They don't but it's like the standard now).

Q29 So you all are doing this for transcript purposes?

Response (Collective yes)

Q30 So – you think / all of you think that you have an edge over let's say another Black student who has straight A's, but no AP, just on level, strictly on-level classes, not even honors, just on-level, you think your AP gets you in the door before that person?

Response (Collective yes)

Response (I would expect them to pick me over an on-level student. At least that is how they play it out.)

Q31 Even an on-level student that is white?

Response (Collective yes)

Q32 Do you feel like you have any advantage by being a Black woman to get (in)?

Response (Collective yes)

Q33 Have any of you had a negative experience being in an AP class?

Response (Collective shaking of the heads no)

None of you have ever personally experienced anything negative being Black in AP?

Response (Collective no)

Q34 Do you sit at a Black table in the lunchroom?

Response (3 – Yes and 2 – no)

Q35 As an AP student, do you find yourself just hanging out with just other AP students?

Response (1 - I hang out with everybody)

Response (4 - It depends on the class)

Q36 Do your friends influence the way you take a course? Like – would you say she's taking AP Psychology, so I'm going to go ahead and take AP Psych?

Response (4 - no)

Response (1 - Unless I thought about it but I was like second-guessing myself and they told me oh should - maybe you should, because I was in there and I liked it. Its like I thought about it first and they're giving like feedback. But not because they took it so I'm going to take it.

Q37 Do you have trouble – any of you have trouble keeping friendships outside of AP? Like let's say you had a Black friend that wasn't in AP and struggling in school. Do you even hang out with people like that?

Response (My mom basically screens all my friends)

Response (My mom has to know my friends)

Response (I have friends who aren't as serious about school as I am)

Q38 Is there anything that I should know about you being a Black person in an AP class that I haven't asked you about?

Response (You get used to it after a while because honestly I've been seeing the same faces from being in honors classes in high school)

Q39 Same Black and White faces?

Response (Collective yes)

Q40 And you're all going to college?

Response (Collective yes)

Response (That's not even a question)

Response (It's a parental requirement)

APPENDIX D

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Parental Permission Form

Black Student Perceptions of Advanced Placement Courses:
Peers, Teachers, and School

Principal Investigators: Camille Havis and Dr. Jami Berry

I. Purpose:

Your child is invited to participate in a research study. This is a study about Black students in Advanced Placement classes. The research asks students what they think about their AP classes. The questions are specific to Black students and include thoughts about teachers, classes, and friends.

II. Procedures:

Nine students will be asked to be part of the research. The study involves a 15 minute computer survey during LASSO (Longhorn Academic Student Support Opportunities) on September 9th. The assistant principal, Deborah Marker, will give the survey in the computer lab. If your child participates, he or she will get a \$10 Starbucks Gift Card or \$10 school store credit. On September 11th, your child will participate in a 30-minute focus group to discuss the results. If your child decides not to participate, he or she can keep the Gift Card or school store credit.

III. Risks:

Your child will have no more risks than in a normal school day.

IV. Benefits:

Your child may not benefit personally. We hope to learn about his or her feelings towards advanced placement classes.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Your child does not have to be in this study. You or your child can decide at any time to quit the research study. Even if you give permission, your child can refuse to be in the study. If you decide that it is okay for your child to participate and you change your mind, he or she can stop. Absolutely nothing will happen to your child if he, she or you want to end participation.

VI. Confidentiality:

Dr. Berry and Mrs. Havis will keep the records private. The only information shared will be with the Georgia State University Institutional Review Board, and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). The information will be kept for 6 years before being destroyed. Your child's name and other facts will not be in the study.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Mrs. Camille Havis at 678-494-7844 ext. 285 or cgomez1@student.gsu.edu or Dr. Jami Berry at 404-413-8258 jberry2@gsu.edu if you have questions, concerns, or complaints. You can also call if you think your child has been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu to talk to someone not part of the study team. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about parents' rights in this study.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this form to keep.

If you would like your child to volunteer for this research, please sign:

Child Participant

Date

Parent of Child Participant

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX E

Georgia State University
 Department of Educational Policy Studies
Student Assent Form – Ages 14 to 17

Black Student Perceptions of Advanced Placement Courses:
 Peers, Teachers, and School

Principal Investigators: Camille Havis and Dr. Jami Berry

I. Purpose:

We will be conducting a research study on what it is like to be the only Black or one of a handful of Black students in an advanced placement class. If you decide that you want to be part of this study, you will be asked to discuss your interaction with Black peers, your teachers and the school.

II. Procedures:

You will be involved in a survey during LASSO (Longhorn Academic Student Support Opportunities) for a total of 45 minutes over 2 school days in September. You will be asked to fill out a 15 minute computerized survey on September 9th with Mrs. Deborah Marker, PSAT Coordinator in room 1114 the computer lab. The survey has questions on your middle school experience, what made you choose to take AP courses or what prevented you from AP coursework. You will then participate in a 30-minute recorded group meeting on September 11th during LASSO in the same room to discuss some of the survey questions. There is no cost to participate, and all participants will receive a \$10 Starbucks Gift Card (or \$10 school store credit), even if you begin the survey and refuse to participate in the focus group, you retain the Gift Card.

III. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

You can refuse to be in this study. In addition your parent(s)/legal guardian(s) cannot force you to be in this study. If you decide that you want be in the study now and then change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time.

IV. Copy of Assent Form to Subject:

If you decide you want to be in this study, please sign your name.

I, _____, want to be in this research study.

 (Sign here if you agree to be in the study and audio recorded)

 Date

 Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

 Date

APPENDIX F

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Student Consent Form
Ages 18 and 19

Black Student Perceptions of Advanced Placement Courses:
Peers, Teachers, and School

Principal Investigators: Camille Havis and Dr. Jami Berry

I. Purpose:

We will be conducting a research study about what it is like to be the only Black or one of a handful of Black students in an advanced placement class. A research study is a way to learn more about people. If you decide that you want to be part of this study, you will be asked to discuss your interaction with Black peers that are not in AP and White peers in the course. You will also be asked to examine what kind of support you get from your teachers, and if the school is doing a good job of supporting diversity in AP courses.

II. Procedures:

There are some things you should know about this study. You will be involved in a survey during LASSO (Longhorn Academic Student Support Opportunities) for a total of 45 minutes over 2 school days in September. You will be asked to fill out a 15-minute computer survey on September 9th with Mrs. Deborah Marker, PSAT Coordinator in room 1114 the computer lab. The survey consists of questions regarding middle school and what made you choose to take AP courses once enrolled in high school. You will then participate in a recorded 30-minute group meeting on September 11th during LASSO in room 1114 for survey follow-up questions. There is no cost to participate, and all participants will a \$10 Starbucks Gift Card, even if you begin the survey and refuse to participate in the focus group, you retain the Gift Card.

III. Risks:

There are no more risks associated with this study than would occur in a normal school day survey or class discussion.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may benefit you personally, offering additional time for personal reflection.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide that you want be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time.

VI. Confidentiality:

When we are finished with this study, Mrs. Havis will be writing a report about what was learned. This report will not include your name or that you were in the study. Records will be private to the extent allowed by law. Only I as the principal investigator will have access to the information provided. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)). The data will be kept for 6 years after completion of the study before being destroyed. An alias will be used rather than your name on study records and this alias is in no way linked to personally identifiable information. Only I as the principal investigator will know the association to an alias. Your name and other facts that may point to identity will not appear when this study is presented or published.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Mrs. Camille Havis at 678-494-7844 ext. 285 or cgomez1@student.gsu.edu or Dr. Jami Berry at 404-413-8258 jberry2@gsu.edu if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

If you decide you want to be in this study, please sign your name. You will receive a copy.

I, _____, want to be in this research study.

(Sign here if you agree to be in the study and audio recorded)

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX G

SITE PERMISSION LETTER

Carlton J. Kell High School
4770 Lee Waters Road
Marietta, GA 30066
678-494-7844



Ed Wagner, Principal

April 2014

Dear Georgia State University IRB:

On behalf of Carlton J. Kell High School, I am writing to grant permission to Mrs. Camille Havis, Principal Investigator, to conduct their research titled, "The Underrepresentation of African Americans in Advanced Placement: Student Perceptions of Peers, Teachers and School." I understand that Mrs. Havis will seek permission from all of the nine juniors or seniors who will be voluntarily participating in one semi-structured focus group to record their dialogue on the Advanced Placement Program of Kell High School. Additionally, I understand that Ms. Havis will also conduct a survey of nine juniors and seniors, followed by a focus group interview participating in the research during the week of September 8 – 12, 2014. I am pleased to allow students the opportunity to voluntarily participate in this research study and contribute to this important research.

Sincerely,

Ed Wagner
Principal
Kell High School

