June 2023

A Qualitative Study of Facilitators and Barriers Perceived by Black Students and Their Effect on Advanced Placement Course Enrollment in High School

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A Qualitative Study of Facilitators and Barriers Perceived by Black Students and Their Effect on Advanced Placement Course Enrollment in High School

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Educational Specialist
with a concentration in Curriculum and Instruction
Department of Educational and Psychological Studies
College of Education
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
May 29, 2023

Keywords: Disparity, Equity, Minoritized Student, Diversity

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am extremely grateful for Dr. Shannon Suldo, my committee chair and major professor, for her guidance, meaningful feedback, and support for this project.

I would also like to express deep gratitude for my thesis committee members, Dr. Elizabeth Shaunessy-Dedrick and Dr. Jennifer Wolgemuth, who have graciously helped guide and shape this study.

I am also deeply thankful for the Florida Association of School Psychologists (FASP) for generously providing grant funding that made this project possible.

I also want to express gratitude to the faculty and my colleagues who have provided feedback and conversation that has broadened my understanding in supporting students from diverse backgrounds.

I am also grateful for my wife and family who have endured hours of opining about the inequities in accelerated courses and who have encouraged me all the way across the finish li

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ABSTRACT

Advanced Placement (AP) classes can provide many benefits to students. The rigorous curriculum gives students an academic challenge to expand their educational abilities (The College Board, 2014). However, students of color are often underrepresented in AP participation (The College Board, 2014). Research has investigated factors among students of color that predict participation and success in AP courses, suggesting that family SES and prior academic achievement (Dixson et al., 2017; Ndura et al., 2003), and racial barriers impact students' ability to choose to take AP courses (Jeffries & Silvernail, 2017; Walker & Pearsall, 2012).

This study addressed a gap in the research using qualitative interviews developed from a framework of ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) to investigate Black students' perceptions regarding the accessibility of AP courses. Sixteen Black and African American high school students (8 enrolled in AP courses and 8 not enrolled) completed two interviews and a writing prompt to share their perceptions of barriers and facilitators to AP course enrollment. Using reflexive thematic analysis, themes were inductively coded and compared across groups. For participants in AP courses, reported barriers included low confidence, time management concerns, and the workload. Facilitators included college benefits, academic challenge, content interest, and peer and family encouragement. Participants not in AP courses reported teacher perceptions, limited representation of people of color, lack of information about AP courses, motivation, and time management as barriers to enrollment in AP. Facilitators included family, teacher, and peer encouragement, college

benefits, and pride in accomplishments. Implications of these perceptions and recommendations for future directions are discussed.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

The Advanced Placement (AP) Program, accredited by The College Board (also known for Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and College Level Examination Program (CLEP) assessments), offers high school students the opportunity to engage in academically rigorous course work through various subject areas. In addition to higher rigor, students who score sufficiently high on the end-of-course AP exam may be awarded college credit by colleges and universities (The College Board, 2014). Beyond rigor and college credit, colleges and universities tend to view AP courses on student transcripts favorably when considering applicants for admission, and passing AP exam scores correlate with successful college outcomes (Phillips & Lane, 2021; Rothschild, 1999). Due to the benefits of participating in AP courses, many districts practice open access, intending for students to access AP courses if they choose (Johnson & Larwin, 2020; Schneider, 2009).

Despite open-access practices and increased physical access to AP courses, non-White students remain underrepresented in both participation in AP courses and passing exam scores (Kolluri, 2018; Shores et al., 2020; The College Board, 2020a). Specifically, The College Board (2020a) presented AP enrollment numbers for the graduating class of 2020. These numbers show that while Black students comprised 14.2% of seniors nationwide, they represented only 8.3% of students who took an AP course and only 4.6% of students who earned a score of three or

higher[1]. Comparatively, Hispanic and Latino students made up 24.7% of graduating seniors, 26.6% of AP participants, and 24.8% of students earning a three or higher on the exam, suggesting representative levels of enrollment and success. White students represented 54.3% of graduates and 47.6% of AP participants, and 51% of students with passing scores. Students identified as Asian represented 6.4% of graduates, 10.3% of AP participants, and 12.7% of students who scored a three or higher, suggesting particularly high levels of representation in enrollment and disproportionately higher success.

Recognizing that disparities continue to exist in AP participation and success, researchers have looked for potential reasons. In early studies, Ndura et al. (2003) and Klopfenstein (2004) found a positive relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and access to AP courses. More recently, Dixson et al. (2017) examined psychosocial factors (i.e., grit, growth mindset, ethnic identity, other group orientation) that impact achievement, finding that SES was a more significant predictor of achievement than all psychosocial factors combined.

Other studies have found that teacher training (i.e., culturally responsive teaching, feedback practices), school environment and policy (i.e., support of Black student success, identification and recommendation practices), and cultural identity play a significant role in AP enrollment. In an early study, Darity et al. (2001) reported the importance of preparing students of color in K-8 schools to improve equitable access to AP courses at the secondary level. Greer et al. (2018) found that investments in AP preparedness and teacher training around feedback and scaffolding techniques were positively related to African American boys' view of themselves as learners.

[1] AP Exams are scored on a scale of 1-5, with three or higher considered passing

Adding to this research, Davis (2021) and Kolluri (2018) conducted systematic literature reviews, finding factors like institutional environment (i.e.., institutions being supportive of Black student achievement or biased against students of color), racial identity, K-8 preparation (i.e., the feeder schools to the high schools offering AP courses), and relationships with others (i.e., peers; parents, specifying both fathers and mothers; teachers) impacted students' achievement and access to AP courses. Walker and Pearsall (2012) conducted focus group interviews with Latino parents and students. Their study found that meaningful relationships (i.e., parents, teachers, friends, adult role models in the community) positively impacted students' decisions to enroll in AP courses. They also found barriers that deterred students included peer teasing, AP classroom environment (e.g., being the only "brown" student), and ethnic labeling by teachers (e.g., assuming English is a second language). Jeffries and Silvernail (2017) conducted interviews with Black students eligible for AP but not enrolled. Their findings were consistent with Davis (2021) and Kolluri (2018) and extend research demonstrating similar barriers identified by Walker and Pearsall's (2012) exist for Black students, including parental and peer influence, instructional practices of teachers (i.e., deficit mindset, not caring about students) and course rigor, and cultural identity (i.e., being in class with students that I am not friends with).

Gaps in the Research

A large amount of research has been conducted regarding underrepresentation in gifted and talented programs (Allen, 2017; Anderson & Hébert, 2020; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). These studies evaluated the gifted identification processes and guidelines implemented at the state, district, and local school levels. The researchers critiqued these programs' ability to identify minoritized students for gifted and talented psrograms effectively. Further, gifted and

talented research often includes Advanced Placement courses under the umbrella of advanced curricula or accelerated course work (Anderson & Hébert, 2020; Ford et al., 2011). However, due to the open enrollment nature of most AP course offerings and the structured, regulated identification of gifted and talented students, access to these advanced pathways should be examined as two different programs rather than under the umbrella of advanced coursework. Because of this grouping, there is limited research that focuses explicitly on Black student access to AP.

Additionally, much of the literature investigating underrepresentation in AP courses involves quantitative analyses (Greer et al., 2018; Johnson & Lawren, 2020; Ricciardi & Winsler, 2021). Such studies use inferential statistical methods (i.e., correlation, regression) to identify how specific, predetermined variables are significantly related to and predict AP enrollment and achievement. However, these quantitative studies may overlook deeper meanings within individual student experiences (Patton, 1999). Few studies have examined the lived experiences and perceptions of Black students specifically regarding AP enrollment and achievement (Jeffries & Silvernail, 2017; Kang et al., 2018). Kolluri (2018) commented:

> the vast quantity of statistical analyses of AP might benefit from the addition of more localized investigations to the literature. More qualitative analyses could provide insight into how the challenges observed in the quantitative data unfold—or are overcome—at the local level. (p. 702)

Kolluri (2018) also suggested that investigating the social constructs in which students live and their perception of those realities has the potential to provide new insights that may help shape the academic environment in which students of color exist. Further, Ricciardi and Winsler (2021) commented that much of the literature studying the "excellence gap" (p. 292) focuses on

achievement (i.e., the effects of race and poverty on test scores). Few studies have focused on access and enrollment, "a topic that is critical because underrepresented students have to first be in such spaces (i.e., advanced classes) before one can examine performance differences across groups" (p. 292).

Based on the literature reviewed, a gap seemed to exist in providing Black students a voice to express their educational experience, their perception of facilitators and barriers, and how those factors have impacted their AP enrollment decisions. A qualitative analysis of these factors may provide insight into the lived experiences of Black students and their ability to access AP courses. Chapter 2 contains a thorough description of historical features of AP that may contribute to the current problem (underrepresentation of Black students in AP), a discussion of research regarding AP disproportionality, and presents two theoretical frameworks-Ecological Theory and Critical Race Theory - that are relevant to this study.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify facilitators and barriers perceived by Black students and understand the impact these facilitators and barriers have on the student's decision whether or not to enroll in Advanced Placement courses. As expressed previously, much of the current literature explores quantitative analyses regarding facilitators, barriers, and factors that predict academic success. This study aimed to centralize Black student voices and give them a space to express their perspectives, recognizing that their unique identity allows them to speak authoritatively on their lived experiences (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Further, this study sought to move beyond listing the range of factors related to AP course access to explore how students perceive these experiences have impacted their decision to pursue advanced course work. This study has significance in informing future research regarding an ecological and CRT approach to

understanding equity in AP Programs, influencing more inclusive and positive school cultural practices, and understanding factors that influence students to overcome barriers and enroll in AP courses. With this purpose and goal in mind, this study sought to answer:

1) What factors do Black students perceive inhibit them from pursuing AP courses?

    1a) How do these barriers affect their decision to enroll in AP courses?

2) What factors do Black students perceive encourage them to pursue AP courses?

    2a) How do these facilitators affect their decision to enroll in AP courses?

Subjectivity, Positionality, and Reflexivity Statement

As a White male researcher, racial and gendered socialization impacts all aspects of this research process (i.e., environment, setting, planning, interviewing, analysis). In recognition of these biases, it is imperative to present a description of researcher positionality and reflexivity. However, positionality statements often seem to be performative, almost confessional in nature. In previous attempts at expressing positionality, such statements have ventured more towards expressing White guilt in an attempt to find absolution for being a beneficiary of oppressive systems. Accompanying thoughts were, “if I can convince my reader that I am aware of how my identity presents various opportunities and privileges, I may be perceived as genuine and not and less biased." In an effort to avoid such requests for absolution, I will engage in what D’Arcangelis (2018) refers to as a radical reflexivity, consisting of a “reflexive double turn,” (340), in which one recognizes the tension between individual positionality and privilege and the collective systems that both propagate power and oppression and are sustained by individual complacency. To recognize one apart from the other ignores the collective and individual responsibility for dismantling oppressive systems.

I am a White, heterosexual, cisgender male who grew up in a two-parent household with a younger brother. The family structure was close, nearly egalitarian, and identified as conservative Christian. My father completed high school and worked two jobs so that we could have everything we needed and often most of what we wanted. My mother earned a GED and was a stay-at-home mother until I was old enough for school. My grandmother lived nearby and homeschooled me while my mother was at work until 4th grade. After 4th grade, I attended private schools, exclusively. I did not enter a public school until my first practicum experience in a school counselor training program. My immediate family did not have concerns around substance use or incarceration, though it certainly existed in my extended family.

Many of these experiences are identities that have afforded me privileges by no merit of my own. Because of the unearned privileges bestowed upon these identities, it seems appropriate to draw attention to some of the racializing systems that have propagated these privileges in which I have been a complacent benefactor. First, I grew up and lived in a small town in Northwest Arkansas. It was a quaint town, with a beautiful downtown park split by a creek fed by multiple springs. Formerly a sundown town[2], the city ran advertisements circa 1919 advertising "No Malaria, No Mosquitoes, No Negroes" as an attractive slogan (Encyclopedia of Arkansas, 2022). Additionally, this small town had a large chicken processing plant. The owners of this plant sponsored a significant number of work visas for people from Mexico to live in the area and work at the plant. Due to the influx of Mexican families, it was not unusual to hear talk around town, blaming "those Mexicans" for various concerns. Living in a Southeastern state in the Bible belt, I was able to fit in and be celebrated due to being a Christian and from a good intact family. Following September 11, 2001, non-Christians were looked upon with suspicion

[2] Towns where signs were posted expressing that non-White people were not welcome, especially after dark, and accompanied with threats or acts of violence (O'Connell, 2019)

and discrimination. The county in which I grew up in was a dry county, with no alcohol or liquor sales allowed, further exacerbating disdain of those who did not uphold conservative Christian morality.

The socialization into Whiteness I experienced living in Arkansas was challenged when I began working as a high school counselor at a highly diverse high school in Florida. Over the 6 years I worked in this setting, I found myself becoming more aware of my presence in my interactions with families, students, and educators. The population of students I worked with included a wide range of gender diversity, ethnic diversity, language diversity, and many students who immigrated from countries around the world (i.e., Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Ireland, Turkey, Venezuela). Interactions with this level of diversity broadened my appreciation and respect for people from diverse backgrounds and caused me to reconsider my position in each interaction.

Reflecting on these "growing pains," my role within such systems, and recent high profile racial incidents (i.e., the murder of George Floyd, murder of Ahmaud Arbery), I am actively working to desocialize myself from a position of comfort within whiteness. This process requires the identification of systems and structures that perpetuate and propagate whiteness as normal and work to dismantle policies and procedures within these systems that promote inequity. For me, this work began with recognizing the disparate enrollment in AP courses. Though AP courses are not a perfect path towards achievement for every student, they are a premier pathway for high achievers that continues to be promoted and codified (Abrams, 2023).

I share my privileged identities and the systems in which I grew up and worked in that propagated such racialized, gendered, and religious preferences to demonstrate the need for me as a researcher working with Black high school students to continuously engage in radical

reflexivity. Though much work has been done interrogating these systems and the symbiotic relationship between my privilege and these systems, I am not free from biases and preconceived ideas. Due to my privileges within society, I have not had to face many of the oppressive structures that these students have. In interviewing these students about their lived experiences, my biases make it difficult for me to enter their world, and impossible for me to see through their eyes. This inability on my part can make it difficult for the students of color I am talking with to open up and engage with me about their racialized experiences. To facilitate a richer discussion, I am open about my identities and the challenge they may feel about talking to me about these experiences. I want to let them know that I am not pretending to understand their lives, but I am recording their experiences to share with others to make education more accessible. Still, I am interpreting what they say through my lens, privilege, and biases. During this research, I am in a constant state of a radical reflexive processes to understand and express my biases and the systems that perpetuate power and oppression as I make meaning out of their lived experiences.

Definition of Key Terms

Disparity –In the context of education, disparity is generally defined as proportional differences in outcomes based on group differences (i.e., race, ethnicity, class, gender identity, and sexual orientation; Phillips & Lane, 2021; Shores et al., 2020).

Equity – In reference to education, equity is providing fair and just opportunities, access, and resources based on students' needs with the intent to create conditions for optimal outcomes for everyone (American Psychological Association [APA], 2021; Pijanowski & Brady, 2021)

Inequity – Relating to education and race, inequity is a lack of fairness and justice regarding opportunity and access for minoritized students, which leads to disparate outcomes. (Shores et al., 2020).

Minoritized Students— Minoritized students are defined as students belonging to a group that has been marginalized, exploited, or excluded (i.e., racial/ ethnic minority, LGBTQ+, low SES by a dominant group through explicit acts of aggression and control or implicit policies, laws, and social expectations (Shields, 2021)

Socioeconomic Status (SES) – SES is the financial and social position of families and, in educational studies, is typically represented through identifying a student's free or reduced lunch status (Klopfenstein, 2004) or assessing parental income (Ndura et al., 2003). SES is consistently related to many psychosocial outcomes (APA, 2021).

Perceived Barriers – Factors across ecological systems that students believe inhibit them from pursuing and enrolling in AP courses.

Perceived Facilitators - Factors across ecological systems that students believe encouraged them to pursue and enroll in AP courses**.**

Limitations

Cultural Limitations

As a researcher, I am a White adult male who grew up in a middle-class community and attended private schools from kindergarten through college. As such, I have not had to experience the biases, prejudice, and oppression that many students of color may have experienced. Because of our different cultural backgrounds, the high school student participants and I bring to the interview setting individual biases that may impact the quality and depth of the interview data. To account for these biases, I kept a field journal of the research process from recruitment through completion of the final report that noted experiences, feelings, and biases as they arose. During the initial interview, I explained the purpose of the research study, recognition

of possible tension discussing racialized experiences, and allowed the students to express their feelings about discussing racial disparities with a White male researcher.

Interview Data

As is the case with much interview-based research, a limitation to this study is generalizability. However, generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research. Instead, qualitative methods aim to explore and make meaning from the deep nuances of lived experience and how those experiences impact the ways individuals interact with their environments. Qualitative data from open-ended questions is necessary to understand the viewpoints of others without predetermining their options through preselected questionnaire items (Patton, 1999). Consistent with the purpose of this study, qualitative methodology allows the researcher to engage with the lived experiences of Black students to explore their perspectives on AP enrollment access without being guided by a predetermined set of responses.

Contributions to Research and Practice

This study contributes to the existing literature by sharing meaningful experiences about how Black students who enroll in AP courses and Black students who do not enroll in AP courses perceive factors that encouraged or discouraged them from enrollment. Previous research has explored perceived barriers for advanced course enrollment (Jeffries & Silvernail, 2017; Walker & Pearsall, 2012) and factors that may explain disparities in AP course success (i.e., SES, academic success; Ndura et al., 2003; Ricciardi & Winsler, 2021). This study adds to the literature a qualitative analysis of the lived experiences of Black students and their perception of facilitators and barriers for accessing AP courses. It will also compare responses between Black students who enrolled in AP courses and those who did not to provide insight into how students interact with facilitators and barriers to make an enrollment decision.

These findings provide further insight into the factors that school psychologists might consider when promoting system-wide changes in how Black students are prepared for accelerated courses, particularly Advanced Placement. Domains 5 and 8 of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2020) practice model require school psychologists to engage in "School-wide Practices that Promote Learning" (p. 6) and promote "Equitable Practices for Diverse Student Populations" (p. 8). These standards mandate that school psychologists utilize their knowledge of systems and learning theory to encourage practices that create an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students. Further, NASP (2020) states that their ethical duty is to collaborate and consult with other educators to ensure the learning environment is inclusive and supportive for students from diverse backgrounds. To this end, this study informs practice by identifying how perceived barriers and facilitators impact Black student enrollment in AP courses. When integrated with findings from prior research, this information allows school psychologists to engage more effectively in consultation and collaboration with teachers and school leadership at all levels of education. Together, school personnel can use this information to create a school climate of inclusion, promoting excellence among Black students and other students of color, effectively reducing the impact perceived barriers may have on AP enrollment decisions.

CHAPTER TWO:

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

The research questions in this study sought to draw connections between previous research regarding inequitable AP access and individual student experiences. A brief history of the AP program provides foundational background context for understanding the underrepresentation of students of color experienced today (Rothschild, 1999; Schneider, 2009). Following this review, further historical context is provided regarding the impact of housing and school segregation on students of color accessing high-quality education and opportunities for advancement. Even though *Brown v. Board of Education* ended legal racial segregation in schools in 1954 (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017), historical neighborhood segregation and current school funding policies continue to influence Black family SES and Black students' ability to access high-quality early education and advanced course opportunities (Frankenberg, 2013; Reardon et al., 2000; Reardon & Owens, 2014; Reavis, 2019; Rothstein, 2017).

Following a review of the historical context of advanced academic inequity, research regarding AP enrollment for Black students is discussed. Prior research has often used quantitative methods to evaluate relationships and trends among students in AP courses (Darity et al., 2001; Dixson et al., 2017; Ndura et al., 2003; Ricciardi & Winslar, 2021). Findings from these quantitative analyses suggest that prior academic achievement and SES status account for

most of the variance in AP participation, with racial factors having an insignificant contribution. However, other quantitative and qualitative research seeking to understand the impact race has on AP enrollment suggests that factors including relationships (i.e., peer, teacher support, parental encouragement), institutional policies (i.e., dress code, tracking for advanced programs, course availability), teacher effects (i.e., biases, culturally-responsive training), and racial identity (i.e., the only student of color in the class, taking a class with students I'm not friends with) are related to AP outcomes and perceived access (Greer et al., 2018; Jeffries and Silvernail, 2017; Shores et al., 2020; Walker & Pearsall, 2012, Whiting & Ford, 2009).

Finally, this literature review will introduce theoretical frameworks—Ecology Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and Critical Race Theory (CRT; Delgado & Stefanic, 2017))—that suggest systemic biases within varying systems may impact both family SES and access to educational opportunities. In addition to providing the findings from prior research, this review will discuss the quality of the studies. When reviewing data, the quality of the measures and methods used is crucial to draw proper conclusions. Most of the underrepresentation research relies on surveys, interviews, or analyses of existing data as it is not ethical for researchers to randomly assign students into environments that may cause harm. However, researchers can collect random samples from various groups for variable control and comparison purposes.

Historical Underrepresentation of Minoritized Students in AP

A review of the AP program's history and the impact of segregation on educational access provides a foundation for understanding the underrepresentation that students of color continue to experience.

Origins of the Advanced Placement Program

The inception of the AP Program can be traced back to the early-1950s. In 1951, prestigious and high-status private secondary schools and colleges began discussing curriculum revisions to advance the academic activity of high-achieving students (Schneider, 2009). This group expressed concern that secondary and introductory college courses overlapped too much, allowing otherwise advanced students to lose interest in scholarly activities due to boredom from the repetition. Additionally, due to the socio-political environment of the Cold War and the orbit of Sputnik, American leaders were concerned about the United States' innovative future (Rothschild, 1999).

To assist with the exploration of supporting the best and brightest students, the Ford Foundation created the Fund for the Advancement of Education (FAE) in 1951 (Schneider, 2009). These discussions explored two potential solutions. One solution placed advanced secondary students into colleges after their sophomore year. However, as Rothschild (1999) points out, secondary school administrators did not like this approach, as it removed their top students from the school before graduation. The other method, championed by John Kemper, Headmaster of Phillips Andover school, suggested keeping students in their respective secondary schools and increasing the rigor of the courses (Rothschild, 1999). This pathway allowed highly motivated students to pursue advanced scholarly endeavors in their preparation for college. After completing the rigorous work in high school, students became eligible for advanced placement in college, effectively skipping the introductory-level classes. Schneider (2009) asserts that the original intent involved only the very best and brightest students, who could only come from the most prestigious schools of the time. The plan also included assumptions that students would participate solely for the sake of learning and academic inquiry, not for added prestige or college

admissions benefits. Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Andover, and several other prestigious schools agreed to pilot test the new advanced placement courses.

In 1953, 18 schools tested the program. The following spring brought the administration of 929 exams among 532 students. A blind comparison of these high school exam scores with college freshman scores demonstrated promise in Advanced Placement courses (Schneider, 2009). Because Harvard, Yale, and other high-level schools supported the program, word of Advanced Placement courses spread, and schools, students, and parents began requesting the program for their school.

In 1955, Charles Keller was named the first Advanced Placement Program Director, and the College Board assumed oversight. Participation in Advanced Placement courses was for the best students who attended the best schools, which, as Schneider (2009) observed, was composed of White students from wealthy families. The program gave students already destined for prestigious schools an increased advantage. In the following years, the AP program continued receiving funds from the FAE, and its prestige grew among students and college admissions counselors. In 1958, the second program director commented that the AP Program relies on the premise that not all students are created equal (Schneider, 2009).

The mid-1960s brought changes to the AP Program as societal pressure called for the democratization of education. Rather than providing high-quality education only to the elite students, advocates began to demand high-quality education for all (Rothschild, 1999). However, The College Board was hesitant to increase the availability of AP courses for fear of losing the rigor and prestige that accompanied AP completion. Despite the hesitation from The College Board, more schools began to incorporate AP courses to provide a competitive edge for their students. By 1970, accusations of institutional racism prompted The College Board to increase

access to AP courses for minority students (Finn, Jr. & Scanlan, 2019). However, they still restricted the program to prestigious and suburban schools (Rothschild, 1999).

Though access to AP courses increased, the cost of participation and the exam continued to restrict access for those who could not afford to participate. However, during the mid-1970s, educational programs began to subsidize AP fees for students with financial hardship. Several states (i.e., Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, North & South Carolina, Minnesota, District of Columbia; Finn, Jr. & Scanlan, 2019) took the subsidization a step further in 1994 by declaring that all AP fees would be paid entirely or in part by the state department of education (DOE; Rothschild, 1999). Beginning in 1987, teachers in schools that predominantly served minoritized students also received subsidies to attend AP summer institutes and receive training to provide higher quality AP courses to their students (Rothschild, 1999).

In the early 2000s, schools and districts began allowing open access to AP courses for all students (Schneider, 2009). Although states, school districts, and the College Board have made strides to improve equal access for all students, the College Board (2014) data show that disparities in participation still linger today. Additionally, Kolluri (2018), Rothschild (1999), and Schneider (2009) have expressed concern that due to open access for all students, prestigious schools are shifting away from AP courses to remain distinguished from urban schools that are still "playing catch-up" due to a historical lack of access to the AP Program. These moves away from AP continue to facilitate disparities and inequity for minoritized students.

The history of the Advanced Placement Program consists of a desire to increase the academic rigor and outcomes for the best and brightest students (Schneider, 2009). However, implementing this desire created an educational system that advantages those who attend well-funded and high-quality schools over those who attend underfunded schools, widening

educational inequities among students. Reardon et al. (2000) found that families with White students have gradually moved towards suburban areas, whose schools typically have better funding, while minoritized students remain in underfunded urban schools.

Compounding access to the AP program is the issue of school funding. As Reavis (2019) points out, a significant portion of public-school funding is dependent on neighborhood property taxes. Thus, students in low-income neighborhoods attend schools that tend to be underfunded because low-income communities pay lower tax rates. Conversely, the more wealth a community has, the more funds the school can utilize towards high-quality education and resources. For example, in the 2019-2020 school year, local property taxes in Florida accounted for 50.11% of a district's revenue. An additional 39.15% was from state funding, and 10.73% was from federal funding (FLDOE, 2021). Using national data, Reavis (2019) notes that poorer school districts are spending an average of 15% less per pupil than wealthier schools. While SES status may be the reason for the variance in school funding, Rothstein (2017) argues that people of color continue to have a higher representation in these low-income communities through *de jure* rather than *de facto* segregation, meaning that modern segregation is the result of intentional historical legislation rather than decisions and associations made by private individuals. Ladson-Billings (2006) adds that while much research has been invested in understanding and mitigating educational inequality, school desegregation and funding equity are two interventions that have not received full and sustained testing. The following section provides further context for underrepresentation through research on modern segregation and AP course availability that may impact Black students' access to educational opportunities.

Modern School Segregation

Following *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and subsequent desegregation legislation in the late 1960s (*Green v. County School Board of New Kent County*; Reardon & Owens, 2014), students of color began to attend formerly White-only schools. Additionally, districts attempted to entice White students to attend formerly Black schools with incentives. However, as these incentives ended, White students returned to their previous schools, and predominantly Black schools experienced a decrease in funding, resulting in many closures. These closures forced Black students to be "bussed" to other schools outside of their communities. As more students of color attended these schools and accessed advanced classes, White families who could afford to move began migrating to less diverse schools with smaller class sizes and more rigorous courses (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Many families within majority Black districts left public education entirely and enrolled in private schools (Reardon & Owens, 2014). This phenomenon is known as White flight, or "the movement of White families to districts with fewer Blacks to avoid racially integrated schools" (Reardon & Owens, 2014, p. 206). These moves meant that the funding that came with the high and middle SES families now went to the other schools, which already provided advantages to their students. Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995) explain that this White flight can lead to a loss of material resources and access for the students of low SES and students of color.

While some argue that modern segregation is no longer *de jure*, the results of *de jure* segregation continue to impact access to high-quality educational opportunities and AP programs, further widening the gap between White students and students of color. This section on modern segregation aims to show that while SES and early educational experiences may be related to AP access and achievement, historical legislation and trends targeting people of color

continue to have ramifications for families and students of color today. As Rothstein (2017) suggests, low-income communities and underfunded schools continue to disproportionately impact Black families and other families of color due to historical *de jure* segregation.

Reardon et al. (2000) analyzed data collected by the Agency and School Universe components of the Common Core of Data (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996, as cited by Reardon et al., 2000) which contains national school enrollment data, including race beginning in 1989. Using Theil's entropy index of segregation (*H*; Theil, 1972, as cited by Reardon et al., 2000), the researchers analyzed the segregation trends from 1989 through 1995. *H* is measured from 0 to 1, indicating a range from no segregation to perfect segregation, respectively. $H=0$ is attained when the racial composition of a school population reflects the same proportion as the total student population. Using *H*, Reardon et al. (2000) found that among 253 metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) with complete data, segregation among Black, Hispanic, and Asian students significantly decreased from $H= 0.2415$ to $H= 0.2133$ between 1989 and 1995 ($\Delta H= -0.0282$ (-11.7%), $p<.001$). However, segregation between White students and all other students increased from $H= 0.2366$ to $H= 0.2457$ ($\Delta H= +0.0091$ (+3.8%), $p<.001$). Additionally, further analysis revealed that segregation between White students and other minoritized groups represented about 36% of the segregation between urban and suburban schools. This percentage is greater than the segregation between White and minoritized groups among urban schools (23.6%), suggesting greater segregation exists between urban schools and suburban schools than within urban schools or within suburban schools. Overall, researchers found significant increases in the level of segregation between White students and minoritized students within the whole MSA (+3.8%) and between urban and suburban schools (+7.8%) from 1989 to 1995. Conversely, levels of segregation significantly decreased among Black, Hispanic,

and Asian students in the MSA, urban schools, suburban schools, and between urban and suburban schools (min:-11.3%, max:-12.4%). These results suggest that while minoritized groups have become more integrated in urban and suburban schools, White students have increased segregation levels, moving from urban to suburban schools, continuing the historical trend of White Flight (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Reardon & Owens, 2014).

Continuing to investigate current school segregation, Reardon and Owens (2014) reviewed the literature on methods of segregation measurement, how racial and economic segregation has shifted over the years, and the consequences of segregation on educational opportunities and outcomes. Within school segregation analyses, two leading indices are assessed (i.e., isolation/exposure and unevenness), and the index used can impact conclusions. Measurements of isolation and exposure "measure the extent to which students are enrolled in schools with high or low proportions of a given racial group" (Reardon & Owens, 2014, p. 201). Isolation, for example, measures the proportion of Black students in a majority Black school, or isolated from different races. Isolation indices above .70 are understood to represent high segregation. On the other hand, exposure measures the proportion of Black students in a majority White school or how exposed students are to a different population. Exposure indices below .30 represent high segregation. As a measure of segregation, unevenness essentially measures how uneven the distribution of a population is among schools. On such measure of unevenness, Theil's *H*, was used by Reardon et al. (2000).

Dividing the segregation timeline into two periods (i.e., 1954-1970s, 1980s to present), the researchers explain that although *Brown v. Board of education* was decided in 1954, desegregation efforts were sluggish until 1968's ruling in *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County*. Before this ruling, the average within-district/between-schools unevenness index

between White and Black students in 1968 was about .80, higher than the .70 threshold (Reardon et al., 2000). However, due to court-ordered desegregation plans, within-district segregation dropped from 1968 to the mid-1970s by about .30, to about .50 on the unevenness index. During this same time, between-district segregation rose, offsetting the gains made within-district. Since the 1980s, results in the literature have varied. Evidence suggests that segregation has either stalled or slightly increased since the late 1980s. Some findings indicate that in 2005, the Black-White exposure index was .27, down from .36 in 1988, and the proportion of Black students attending majority-minority schools rose from 63% to 73% in the same time frame. Reardon and Owens (2014) point out that a portion of the change in exposure may be explained by a shift in American demographics, with the proportion of White students decreasing over time.

Regarding economic segregation, Reardon and Owens (2014) provided evidence that residential income segregation rose sharply between 1970 and 2009, impacted by increased segregation of high-income families from other households. This economic segregation had a more significant impact on between-district segregation, as between-district segregation increased in three-fourths of the 100 largest metropolitan areas during the 1990s and 2000s. While between-district economic segregation has increased significantly, between-school segregation has increased only slightly.

Reardon and Owens (2014) posit that consequences of current school segregation may impact student outcomes by determining the total amount of resources available within the district and how those resources are distributed among the school. The same logic can be applied to between-district segregation as well. The researchers reviewed findings suggesting that desegregation has provided schools and Black students more resources than before. Though still low in many schools and districts (Ladson-Billings, 2006), the higher level of resources has

increased outcomes and achievement for students of color. These outcomes include higher graduation rates, improved outcomes later in life, and higher test scores. Reardon and Owens (2014) conclude that more research is needed regarding between-school segregation and student outcomes. This review demonstrates the effect that policies regarding segregation and funding can have on neighborhood and school populations. As school and district resources depend on the surrounding communities, historical policies regarding housing access continue to impact the resources available to local schools their students.

Frankenberg (2013) investigated the relationship between residential segregation and school segregation using US Census and National Center for Education Statistics data. The data ranged from 2000 to 2010 and were analyzed to compare primary school populations with under-18 populations in 362 MSAs. Frankenberg (2013) used the Index of Dissimilarity (*D*) to evaluate pair-wise comparisons of how racial groups are distributed among geographical areas. The analyses included White-Black and White-Hispanic comparisons. A limitation to this design is that primary schools have children from K-8, while the under-18 population contains high school students. This limitation may impact the accuracy of the comparisons. Findings showed that in primary school enrollment for 2009-2010, Black students represented about 18.2% of enrollment and only 14.84% of the under-18 population. As Frankenberg (2013) notes, this could be due to primary schools having disproportionately higher diversity than the population and a greater reliance of Black families on public education. However, the population and school enrollment percentages reflect proportionate representation for all racial groups except Black students. Frankenberg (2013) suggests that researchers commonly interpret *D* scores greater than 60 as extreme segregation. Though *D* scores are lower for 2010 than they were for 2000, the dissimilar scores for Black-White school populations and Black-White under-18 population were around 65

for at both times. Comparatively, the Hispanic-White schools had a score of approximately 58, and the Hispanic-White population scored around 52. The Black-White scores suggest that changes in segregation were relatively stable, while the Hispanic-White scores decreased over that decade. Additional linear R^2 analyses indicate that 2010 school dissimilarity scores and residential dissimilarity scores have a strong, positive linear relationship (R^2= 0.910). This relationship explains that about 91% of the variance in school segregation in MSAs is accounted for by residential segregation.

AP Course Availability and Access

Related to modern segregation, access to AP courses for students of color requires the availability of AP courses. As discussed by Rothschild (1999) and Schneider (2009), there was a significant push by elite schools and high-achieving White families to prevent schools predominantly serving students of color from adopting AP courses for their students. Once these schools made AP courses available for students of color, enrollment increased throughout the early 2000s. Recognizing this saturation of passing AP scores, elite schools became concerned about the rigor and credibility of AP courses and began negotiating with prestigious post-secondary institutions about crafting their own advanced curricula. Schneider (2009) commented that only elite schools who have the privileged status to negotiate with admissions offices at prestigious institutions could make such decisions.

Further, as Reardon and Owens (2014), Frankenberg (2014), and Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995) point out, White flight from urban schools and schools with a high population of minoritized students drains those schools of funding due to school funding's connection with property taxes and per-pupil-expenditure (PPE; Reavis, 2019). This decrease in funding and

resources directly impacts the availability of AP courses in schools that primarily serve students of color.

However, availability of AP courses, alone, does not increase the enrollment for students of color. Researchers have found that increased availability of AP courses in schools with high populations of White students is conversely related to the number of Black students accessing those courses. Rodriguez and McGuire (2019) investigated the relationship between AP course availability and Black student enrollment. Reviewing the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) survey administered biannually by the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, Rodrigeuz and McGuire (2019) evaluated 2011-2012 enrollment data for 12,237 high schools that offered at least 1 AP course. They found that though Black students and White students were nearly as likely to attend a school with at least 1 AP course (89.6% and 89.3%, respectively), Black students are more likely to attend schools with fewer AP course offerings that White students. Regarding schools with larger offerings of AP courses, Rodriguez and McGuire (2019) found that for every additional AP course offered, the Black-White enrollment gap increased by about $1/6^{th}$ to 1.1 percentage points. Finally, $2/3^{rds}$ of the schools with the largest Black and White AP participation gaps were schools within the top 2 quartiles of AP course offerings. Thus, these findings suggest that increasing the number of AP courses offered does not necessarily increase the opportunity or enrollment for students of color. Rather, in schools that primarily serve White students, increases in AP courses is related to a widening of the Black-White enrollment gap, suggesting that reasons for the disparate enrollment expand beyond availability.

It is important to include an evaluation of the history of educational access when discussing current disparities in academic opportunities. Reviewing the historical beginnings of

the AP program alongside historical and modern segregation provides a foundational understanding for the current underrepresentation of students of color. Ladson-Billings (2006), Reardon and Owens (2014), and Rothstein (2017) provide evidence that barriers for students of color (institutional policies, teacher preparedness, peer and family relationships) have their roots in historical policies and practices and Rodriguez and McGuire (2019) show that these barriers extend beyond availability. The next section will discuss what research has found regarding these barriers to AP access.

Current Participation of Minoritized Students in AP

Representation of Students of Color in AP

Significant underrepresentation continues to exist in Black students' participation in AP courses (Kolluri, 2018; The College Board, 2020a). According to The College Board's (2020a) national survey of AP participation for the 2020 school year, Black students represented 14.2% of the graduating seniors. However, they made up only 8.3% of seniors taking AP exams and only 4.6% of seniors who scored a three or higher. Comparatively, White students represented 54.3% of graduating seniors, 47.6% of AP exam takers, and 51% of students who scored a three or higher. Similarly, Hispanic/Latinx students made up 24.7% of seniors, 26.6% of AP exam takers, and 24.8% of scores three and higher. These numbers reflect proportionate representation in participation and passing scores for White and Hispanic/Latinx students. The participation numbers for Asian students reflect a high level of representation. Of the senior population, Asian students represented 6.4%. However, they represented 10.3% of exam takers and 12.7% of seniors earning a three or higher. The College Board's (2020a) numbers show that Black students are significantly underrepresented in AP participation and success nationally, whereas other groups have proportionate or disproportionately high representation.

More localized data from Florida reveal even greater disproportionate participation for Black students in AP courses. Figure 1 illustrates the population of high school students in Florida, AP Exam participation, and scores of three or higher separated by race. Comparing AP participation data from The College Board (2020b) with high school enrollment data from the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE; 2020) shows that while Black students made up 21.5% of all high school students, they only comprised 8.3% of AP exam takers and 5.5% of students scoring a three or higher. White and Hispanic/Latinx students demonstrate proportionate participation, while Asian students have disproportionately high participation. White students represented 38.1% of high school students, 42.8% of AP exam participants, and 44% of passing scores (three or higher). Hispanic/Latinx students comprised 33.7% of high schoolers, 33% of AP exam takers, and 33.5% of passing scores. Finally, Asian students made up 3% of the population but represented 8.7% of exam takers and 10.3% of passing scores.

While White, Hispanic/Latinx, and Asian students, on average, experience proportionate representation nationally and locally, this representation exists in stark contrast to the significant underrepresentation of Black students. The FLDOE (2021, February 25) expressed that they have effectively closed the participation gap for Hispanic/Latinx students. They also explained that AP participation and achievement continue to rise, ranking Florida as the #2 state nationally for improvement in exam scores. While these accomplishments are notable, the data continue to demonstrate the underrepresentation of Florida's Black students participating in AP courses. The following section reviews research investigating factors that may influence whether Black students and students of color participate in AP courses.

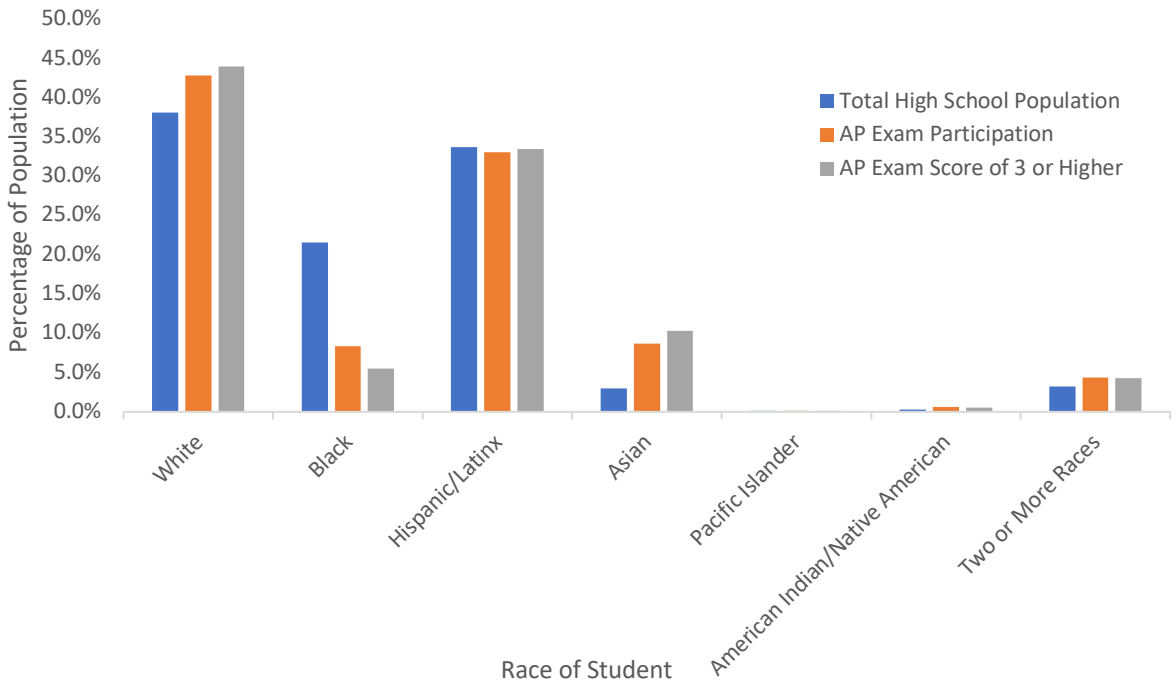

Figure 1. Proportion of Florida AP Exam Participation by Race in Spring of 2020

Note. Total High School Population represents the proportion of all high school students in Florida who identify with the respective race during the 2019-2020 school year. AP Exam Participation represents high school students who registered for an AP exam in the spring of 2020. AP Exam Score of 3 or higher represents students who earned a score of 3 or higher on the AP exam.

Factors Influencing Participation in AP

Studies have commented on the disparities in AP course participation and achievement among students of color (Jeffries & Silvernail, 2018; Ricciardi & Winslar, 2021). Because of the desire to reduce this gap and provide equitable educational access for all students, researchers have conducted studies to identify possible reasons for the underrepresentation to inform policies and practices to reduce existing disparities. Many of these studies are quantitative studies that

utilize preexisting data from the school, district, and state levels. The findings from these studies indicate varying reasons for the disproportionality in AP courses. Some research suggests that SES and early academic preparedness explain the majority of variance in participation (Dixson et al., 2017; Klopfenstein, 2004; Ndura et al., 2003; Ricciardi & Winslar, 2021).

Other findings, including the limited number of qualitative studies available, suggest that variables including institutional policies (i.e., dress code, tracking for advanced programs, course availability), teacher training (i.e., biases, culturally-responsive training), educational environment (i.e., acceptance, encouragement, expectations), relationships (i.e., peer, teacher support, parental encouragement), and racial identity (i.e., the only student of color in the class, taking a class with students I'm not friends with) impact AP enrollment accessibility through the construct of race (Greer et al., 2018; Jeffries and Silvernail, 2017; Shores et al., 2020; Walker & Pearsall, 2012; Whiting & Ford, 2009). The literature reviewed in this section represents what research has found regarding factors that influence AP participation**.**

Socioeconomic Status and Early Academic Preparedness. In an early study, Ndura et al. (2003) asked four questions: how non-White student participation in AP courses compares to non-White students in the school population, what influence is most impactful in a students' decision to take AP courses, how SES and AP participation are related, and how parental profession is related to AP participation. To answer these questions, the researchers asked AP teachers to distribute a survey to their students during class. From ten schools surveyed, researchers received a roughly 50% response rate from eight schools (n=315). Results show that while non-White students comprised about 30% of the total school population, they only represent 17.5% of AP enrollment. Concerning influential people, Black students expressed that their parents were most impactful in their decision to take AP courses, followed by friends,

counselors, and teachers. Students from minoritized backgrounds reported taking AP courses to have a challenge, earn college credits, and prepare for college. Interestingly, the top reason mentioned for accessing AP coursework aligns with the original intent for the AP program. Namely, AP courses allow bright students to pursue rigorous studies for the sake of academic rigor and learning (Rothschild, 1999). Regarding SES status, most AP participants reported an annual family income of $75,000 and up. Native American and Hispanic students were the only groups whose majority fell below this line. Finally, regarding parental professions, parents of minority students were more likely to be casino workers, teachers, and professors. White students' parents were more likely to be homemakers, accountants, engineers, and managers. These differences in occupation may reflect the SES of the families, suggesting White students are more likely to come from high-SES homes (i.e., ability to be a homemaker, accountants, engineers). In contrast, minority students are more likely to come from low-SES backgrounds (i.e., teachers, casino workers). In sum, findings from this study provide an early look at how SES and positive relationships may impact AP participation. However, it is limited in its lack of statistical analysis. While the study reported the frequency of responses, no inferential conclusions can be drawn about relationships between variables. Also, of the respondents, only four students identified as African American. This small sample size limits the researchers' ability to assess relationships between the variables for Black students. Additionally, SES status was reported by the students, who may not always have accurate information on family finances. Thus, conclusions about SES should be made with caution. Limitations aside, this study provides early evidence of the impact that SES and positive relationships may have on student participation in AP courses.

Dixson et al. (2017) sought to explore the relationship between psychosocial variables (i.e., grit, ethnic identity, other group orientation, and growth mindset) and academic achievement. Additionally, the researchers asked if these variables add variance to the predictability of academic achievement beyond SES alone. To test their hypotheses that these variables would have a significant relationship with academic achievement, the researchers selected a sample of 105 (59% female) Black students ranging from 14 to 18 years old. Parental education levels consisted of: did not finish high school (3.8%), high school graduate (3.8%), attended but did not finish college (28.6%), completed college (20%), and earned graduate degrees (31.4%). Instruments used include four multi-item scales to measure: grit (Grit-S, 8-items, α=.73-.83), growth mindset (Theories of Intelligence Scale, TIS; 8-items; α=.78–.92), ethnic identity (Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, MEIM-R; 6-items; α=..81–.89), and other group orientation (MEIM-O, 6-items, α=.71–.74). Despite the small sizes of each scale, the reported alphas support acceptable reliability. SES status was indicated by maternal education level. A hierarchical regression analysis revealed no significant relationships between psychosocial factors and academic achievement. However, once researchers entered SES into the regression analysis, SES significantly accounted for 17% of the variance in academic achievement, whereas psychosocial variables remained insignificant. These findings suggest that external environmental factors (i.e., SES) have a more significant impact on the academic achievement of Black students than internal factors.

Ricciardi and Winsler (2021) analyzed longitudinal data to explore factors that may predict future achievement in advanced courses for underrepresented students. Research question one asked how many students in the sample enrolled in advanced courses (i.e., advanced, honors, and AP) and when they enrolled. The second question asked how demographic factors (i.e., race,

gender, SES, and disability), school readiness at kindergarten, and prior academic achievement predict advanced course enrollment. The sample consisted of 32,885 students (59% Latinx and 34% Black; 82.2% on free or reduced lunch) from an urban setting tracked from pre-school through high school. The 15-year, cohort-sequential longitudinal design allowed the researchers to assess pathways and predictors of advanced course enrollment. All participants were assessed for school readiness at the age of 4 years. Following this screening, participants were matched to administrative records with nonidentifiable IDs and tracked. Students continued to be followed if they moved schools, as long as the school was within the district participating in the study. Results conclude that as students moved from 6th through 11th grade, the percentage of students participating in any advanced course increased from 48.78% in 6th grade to 67.22% in 11th grade. This increase in participation is understandable, as advanced course options increase in upper-grade levels. For the students who made it to 9th-11th grade before the study ended, 20.58% had enrolled in an AP course at some point (3,356 students out of 16,307). This total breaks down to 12.56% of 9th graders, 19.31% of 10th graders, and 30.63% of 11th graders. In comparison, 55.48% of 9th graders took an honors course, as did 56.87% of 10th graders and 57.79% of 111th graders. Next, Ricciardi and Winsler (2021) used bivariate and multivariate analyses to identify predictors and interactions that impact future enrollment. The bivariate analysis of demographics found that Black and Latinx students were less likely to enroll in any advanced course, including AP courses, than White and Asian students, and girls were more likely than boys. Students identified as English Language Learners (ELL) were more likely than non-ELL students. Finally, students who did not receive free or reduced-price lunch and those who received reduced-price lunch were more likely to enroll in advanced courses than students who qualified for free lunch, although this varied based on the type of advanced course. Analyses on school readiness and

prior academic achievement found that the mean score on the school readiness screener (Learning Accomplishment Profile—Diagnostic, LAP-D; Nehring et al., 1992) taken at age four was higher for students who enrolled in advanced courses seven years later than for those who did not. Scores on standardized math and reading assessments and GPA were also significantly related to advanced course enrollment.

The multivariate analysis for any advanced course enrollment consisted of three steps: demographics only (i.e., race, ethnicity, SES, gender, ELL status), school readiness skills at age 4 (i.e., LAP-D) added, and the final step added early academic achievement (GPA, test scores, and gifted status). Results from the first step indicated that all demographic factors significantly predicted enrollment. Students receiving reduced-price lunch were 85% and students ineligible for discounted lunch were 45% more likely than students eligible for free lunch to enroll in any advanced course. Regarding race and ethnicity, Black and Latinx students were less likely than White and Asian students to enroll in advanced courses, with Black students being the least likely. ELL status was not a significant predictor. Adding in the school readiness screening for step two found that most of the demographic effects lost significance once school readiness was considered. The largest effect was for the cognitive portion of the LAP-D, where a 1-point score increase corresponded to a 0.5 increase in the odds of advanced course enrollment. While the school readiness score mitigated the impact of race, Black and Latinx students were still less likely to enroll in advanced courses than White students, with Black students being the least likely. However, being an ELL student, though not significant in step 1, represented a 19% increase in the likelihood of enrollment compared to non-ELL students. Step three added in prior school achievement (i.e., GPA, Gifted status, and standardized test scores). Prior school achievement was, as expected, significantly predictive of advanced course enrollment, with

gifted students being five times more likely to enroll than non-gifted students. Interestingly, SES status was still a significant predictor when controlling for academic achievement. However, students not receiving free lunch were about 40% less likely to enroll in advanced courses than those who received free lunch. Finally, race and ethnicity did not have significant effects in this step. The multivariate analysis was repeated for each advanced course category (i.e., advanced class in middle school, honors class in high school, Advanced Placement). The findings for advanced and honors classes analyses closely mirrored the "any advanced course" analysis results, whereas the AP results differed significantly. Race, ethnicity, and SES status continued to predict future enrollment after controlling for prior academic achievement and school readiness. Black students were 40% less likely than similar White students and significantly less likely than Latinx students to enroll in AP. Further, students not receiving free or reduced-price lunch were significantly more likely to take an AP course than students receiving free lunch. This final analysis of AP enrollment suggests that while prior academic achievement and school readiness are significant predictors of taking advanced classes, Race and SES continue to impact AP enrollment when achievement and readiness are controlled. A considerable strength of this study is its large sample size (n= 32,885) and the longitudinal, cohort-sequential design. This design allows the researchers to evaluate how varying factors predict outcomes within the same students. A limitation to this study is the majority-minority composition which is unique to the location used. This sample composition impacts the generalizability of the findings as many districts are not majority-minority. Ricciardi and Winsler's (2021) study shows that while prior academic achievement and school readiness impact advanced course enrollment, race and SES account for significant predictability in AP course enrollment. The results from Dixson et al. (2013), Ndura et al. (2003), and Ricciardi and Winsler (2021) suggest that while open access

assumes freedom of selection (personal choice), students of color and students from low SES backgrounds may be impacted by limited access to advanced educational opportunities in early academics, leading to disproportionally lower participation.

Racial Impact on Accessibility. Investigating the disparate outcomes that school policies and practices may cause for Black students, Shores et al. (2020) argues that while many studies look at achievement-based outcomes (i.e., test scores), non-achievement-based outcomes (i.e., discipline, retention, gifted identification, AP participation) can have significant long-term consequences as well. The studies that focus on achievement-based outcomes tend to conclude that differences in test scores are attributable to differences in school quality and home/neighborhood differences. Additionally, Shores et al. (2020) note that in many studies, once SES is controlled for, the disparities in test scores become insignificant. However, disparities in non-achievement outcomes may not be easily explained through SES or early school quality. They may be the result of school policies and biases impacting how students are identified and assigned into socially meaningful categories. Drawing from the theory of categorical inequality, Shores et al. (2020) identified five meaningful, non-achievement outcome categories in which racial disparities exist: a) discipline policy, b) grade retention, c) gifted classification, d) special education, e) AP participation. These categories are created and implemented by institutional systems, and the differences become meaningful when the outcomes advantage one group and disadvantage another. To study these categorical inequalities, Shores et al. (2020) asks three main questions: a) what is the magnitude of the inequality? b) are the inequalities systematically related? and c) are the categorical inequalities more attributable to discretionary factors (i.e., policies, individual biases) than test scores are? District-level data from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) Civil Rights Data Collection and the Common Core of

Data were collected for 2011-2012, 2013-2014, and 2015-2016 school years. This sample included 1887 districts and represented about 71% of the total Black student public school population. Using absolute and relative risk ratio analyses, Shores et al. (2020) found that categorical inequalities were pronounced, even when controlling for SES and parental academic attainment. Results indicated that Black students were two times more likely to get suspended than White students and 1.8 times more likely to be retained. Further, White students were more likely to be identified as gifted or enroll in AP courses (2.36 times and 1.65 times, respectively). Correlational analysis showed that all categorical inequalities, including the test score gap, are significantly and positively correlated, ranging from .09 (between AP participation gap and grade-level retention gap) to .54 (between multiple suspension gap and single suspension gap). Regression analysis indicated that SES and parental education level were better at predicting test score gaps than at predicting nearly all categorical inequalities. Since the categorical inequalities were found to be significantly correlated and had similar predictive variables (e.g., discipline rates), Shores et al. (2020) hypothesized that there would be cumulative effects. This hypothesis suggested districts that ranked high in one category would be likely to rank high in other categories. The researchers found that the probability of having multiple categorical inequalities increases significantly as test scores and SES gaps increase. Finally, Shores et al. (2020) hypothesized that since categorical inequalities are significantly correlated with each other and not highly predicted by district demographics (i.e., SES and parental educational attainment), district demographic variables will explain more variance in test score inequality than categorical inequality. Multivariate regression analysis showed that district demographics accounted for 1.65 to 6.9 times more variance in test scores than categorical inequalities, suggesting that variance within the categorical inequalities may result from decisions made within the school through

policy or personnel rather than factors outside of the school. Taking all these results together, Shores et al. (2020) argue that while previous research has demonstrated a relationship between family SES, educational attainment, and test score gaps, categorical inequalities are direct results of school policy and personnel decisions. Although this study does not directly address disparity within AP participation individually, it does provide evidence that while AP courses are open enrollment in many states, Black student access might be impacted more by school policies or teacher selection biases than family SES status or parental education attainment.

Walker and Pearsall (2012) conducted a qualitative study using focus group interviews with Latino parents and students. The purpose of the study was to examine the barriers that Latino students and parents perceive inhibit AP participation. The underlying theory for this study was Critical Theory, a theoretical tradition that critiques social structures through conflicts between social groups (i.e., social inequalities, oppression, and privilege; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019). Students had to identify as Latino and be a current junior or senior to be eligible for participation. Additionally, students were divided into two groups: one group contained students enrolled in AP courses, and the other included students not enrolled in AP. After pooling students into the two groups, researchers randomly selected two students from each pool. Parent focus groups and student focus groups lasted for about one hour. The researchers established trustworthiness by having both researchers present at the focus groups, meeting interrater reliability during coding, and providing transcripts to participants to review. The analysis consisted of inductive analysis and connection of themes to components of critical race theory. Results found that barriers to AP enrollment consisted of feeling like college is inaccessible and so there is no reason to take advanced courses, fear of not performing well, and general monetary costs of AP participation. Another barrier cited by students was feeling like they don’t belong,

with one student commenting that they didn't want to be "the only brown kid in class" (Walker & Pearsall, 2012, p. 18). The factors that provided the most encouragement for AP participation included parental support, positive role models, and peer and teacher support. Concerning sociocultural factors that impact Latino students' decisions, parents cited peer teasing, inequitable conditions for college access, and lack of support and communication with parents who don't speak English. Parents and students both reported the need to "underachieve" to fit in, racial labeling and course misplacement (assuming the student is an English-Language Learner), and culturally insensitive dress code policies. Students also mentioned they feared that their communities would assume that they thought they were better and were trying to escape the neighborhood. The findings from Walker and Pearsall (2012) demonstrate the need to explore the lived experiences of underrepresented students regarding accessing AP courses. While other quantitative data suggest that SES and prior academic achievement are the most predictive variables in AP enrollment (Dixson et al., 2017; Ndura et al., 2003), student and parent experiences indicate that social (i.e., peer relationships), school (i.e., teacher support, culturally-responsive environment), and home environments (i.e., parental support, expectations) can be significant facilitators or barriers for Latino youth.

In a more recent qualitative study, Jeffries and Silvernail (2017) interviewed three Black students who were eligible to enroll in honors and AP courses but decided not to. For this study, eligibility for advanced courses (i.e., honors and AP) was determined by a predetermined score on a standardized assessment or identification and recommendation by a teacher. The students in this study attend a suburban high school in the southeastern US. In contrast to similar schools in the area, the school's demographics showed a large population of minoritized students (52% Black, 38% White, 6% Asian, 3% Latinx). However, only 28 of the 1,030 Black students were

enrolled in at least one AP course. Since the purpose of CRT is to deconstruct systemic racism, the researchers used this framework to analyze the interview responses and inform the questions. Interviews were conducted individually, then in a focus group setting with parent(s) present. The interviews lasted for about an hour on average. The researchers employed member checking with the interviewees and used triangulation techniques to achieve credibility and trustworthiness with both authors. Three overarching themes were apparent following the interviews. These themes were perceptions about course rigor, influence from relationships (i.e., teacher, parents, peers), and cultural identity. Interestingly, though not necessarily surprising, these themes are similar to those found with Latinx students in Walker and Pearsall's (2012) study. Regarding course rigor, two students expressed a desire not to take more challenging classes due to a fear of failure and just needing enough credits to graduate. The other student had previously been enrolled in AP and honors courses yet dropped to regular classes because the advanced courses were a lot of work. While these students were recommended for advanced classes and there was no evidence that they were not capable, their perception of class rigor influenced them against taking the classes. Regarding the influence from relationships, participants expressed that their peers had little impact on their decision. However, responses demonstrated that there is influence from peer pressure. The participants said that factors included not wanting to be in class all day with people who are not their friends outside of school and a fear of being labeled a "nerd." Parents and teachers also affected their decision. While encouragement and support from parents provided positive influence, the participants expressed that most of their interactions with teachers were generally negative and dissuaded them from pursuing advanced courses. This negative experience stemmed from a perception that the school culture, beginning in elementary school, relegated these students to a position where they felt that they could not succeed in advanced

courses. Exacerbating this feeling, biases in selecting students for inclusion in advanced courses induced feelings that the participants did not belong in those classes. These teacher and school biases influence the final theme of cultural identity. Each participant's identity is a product of intersecting settings and identities. While they are encouraged by their parents, and perhaps by educators, to take rigorous courses, this advanced student identity conflicts with being a Black student in a space dominated by White students. The students feared that participation in advanced courses would lead to rejection by their peers (i.e., other Black students), being perceived as a "cultural traitor: (p. 74). These findings extend the results found by Walker and Pearsall (2012) and provide qualitative data demonstrating what Shores et al. (2021) explained as the direct impact of school policies, school culture, and educator decisions (beginning in early education) on secondary students accessing AP courses.

Theoretical Frameworks Relevant to this Study

Two theoretical frameworks relevant to the study emerged following a review of the AP Program's history, the impacts of modern segregation on academic access, and prior research on AP enrollment disparities. Findings reported in the literature suggest that factors impacting minoritized student access to AP courses reside outside of the student, meaning that underrepresentation is not a result of a student's inability to achieve academically. Instead, family, peer, societal, and institutional factors impact students' choice to access AP courses (Dixson et al., 2017; Greer et al., 2018; Jeffries & Silvernail, 2017; Shores et al., 2020). Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological theory allows for an investigation of the impact that systems outside of the student have on the student's ability to access advanced coursework. Additionally, biases in societal and educational policies have impacted how minority students access academic opportunities. Historical policies such as red-lining (i.e., the process of identifying Black-

majority neighborhoods as high risk, resulting in inaccessible mortgages, low property value, and inflated housing cost; Rothstein, 2017), school segregation and desegregation, and school funding policies have placed minority students at a disadvantage in accessing advanced academics. A Critical Race Theory (CRT) approach to education (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 2017) provides a framework to investigate how societal and institutional policies and biases have maintained restrictive access to AP classes.

Ecological Theory

Bronfenbrenner (1977) posited an ecological theory of human development that states a person develops within nested systems. These systems represent the context and setting around the individual. Four systems impact child development: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. The microsystem contains the immediate setting in which one finds themselves (e.g., school, work, home) and their role within that setting (e.g., student, employee, child/sibling). The mesosystem steps further back and explores the interaction between settings in the microsystem. This system includes interactions between home and school settings (e.g., parent-teacher conferences), peers and home (e.g., friends from school come over for dinner), and how those interactions impact each microsystem. The exosystem includes other systemic structures (e.g., government, community, media, social networks). While these structures do not contain the individual, the exosystem exerts a substantial influence and impact on the meso- and microsystems. Finally, Bronfenbrenner (1977) conceptualized the macrosystem as the "institutional patterns of the culture or subculture" (p. 515), which includes broad systems of economy, education, politics, etc. This theory informed this study by providing a framework that explains how individual students develop within nested systems that impact their life experiences.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) formed in the 1970s out of the Critical Theory tradition as legal scholars became frustrated with the stalling of civil rights and racial reform (Taylor, 1998). Critical Theory attempts to understand society through conflict and oppression with the goal of social change (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019). Coming from Critical Theory, CRT evaluates societal structures by understanding that race, though not a biological reality, has significantly impacted society through forms of racialized privilege and oppression (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017).

CRT posits six central tenets. The first tenet is that racism is ordinary, suggesting that racism is difficult to combat because it is unacknowledged. Thus, attempts at "color-blind equality" (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017) maintain the status quo rather than reducing disproportionality. The second tenet is called "interest convergence" (p. 9). This tenet suggests that the dismantling of racist policies occurs when it directly benefits the interests of the dominant group (i.e., the White population). The third tenet recognizes race as a social construct and, as such, has no biological or genetic reality. Because race is socially constructed, race and racialization can be manipulated to benefit the dominant group. The fourth and fifth tenets are the ideas of intersectionality and antiessentialism. Intersectionality is the understanding that every individual has complex and overlapping identities. For example, my identities include White, male, cisgender, heterosexual, graduate student, etc. My experiences in society may be vastly different from someone who mirrors my identities but is gay, transgender, or female. Understanding intersectionality allows for a recognition that individuals have many identities that may conflict with each other and impact how society interacts with them. Antiessentialism stems from intersectionality by suggesting that because of these multiple identities, every

individual has a unique voice and may not conform to stereotypic norms. The final tenet is "the voice-of-color thesis" (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017, p. 11). In slight tension with antiessentialism, this thesis suggests that because of their unique experiences of minoritization and oppression, people from racially-minoritized backgrounds have the authority to speak about matters of racism that White people may not know.

Although many of the explicitly racist policies and laws are no longer legislated, the consequences of these policies continue to endure (Rothstein, 2017). To combat race-based privilege and oppression, CRT scholars embrace perspective, "openly acknowledg[ing] that perceptions of truth, fairness, and justice reflect the mindset, status, and experience of the knower" (Taylor, 1998, p. 122). Incorporating CRT into the educational experiences of Black students provides researchers with theoretical and historical grounding to engage with the perspectives of their lived experiences, recognizing that they have a unique voice and identity to contribute to understanding (antiessentialism), and they can speak about their experiences with authority from a minoritized position (voice-of-color thesis; Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995) and Roberts and Rizzo (2021) argue that racism is deeply rooted in American society and, by extension, the educational system. While some findings seem to suggest that students of low SES perform poorly compared to students of higher SES, regardless of race (e.g., Dixson et al., 2017), CRT argues that a disproportional number of minoritized students experience poverty because of institutional and structural racism. Thus, CRT gives a framework to study the lived experiences of Black students in a racially biased system.

Summary and Connection to the Present Study

The current literature demonstrates that the underrepresentation of Black students is a significant issue within advanced academics and the AP Program. Although The College Board

(2019) recognizes the gap, disparities persist (Greer et al., 2018; Johnson & Lawron, 2020; Kolluri et al., 2018). Much of the quantitative literature has investigated factors that predict enrollment and success within AP courses, showing that parental profession, family SES, and prior academic achievement are strong predictors of enrollment and success (Dixson et al., 2017; Greer et al., 2018; Ndura et al., 2002; Ricciardi & Winslar, 2021). Other quantitative and qualitative studies suggest equitable access to AP courses consists of factors beyond SES and academic achievement (Greer et al., 2018; Jeffries and Silvernail, 2017; Shores et al., 2020; Walker & Pearsall, 2012). Coinciding with the theoretical frameworks used in this study (i.e., ecology theory and CRT), factors within the student's microsystem (i.e., family and peer support, school environment, teacher biases), the student's mesosystem (i.e., effective communication between school and home), and the student's exosystem and macrosystem (i.e., community disapproval, inequitable policies like dress code, and societal biases) may impact the student's ability to access AP courses.

Further, modern segregation due to phenomena such as "White flight" and families' desire to attend schools that will give their students an advantage perpetuate disparate educational opportunities for families who cannot afford to move and for schools that need resources to provide high-quality education for their students. As Rothschild (1999) pointed out, many of the prestigious schools in the 1990s began moving away from AP courses to differentiate themselves from "lower schools" that had started offering AP classes. Assessing AP accessibility through a CRT lens allows for an examination of how historical and discriminatory housing policies have shaped the current housing system and how racial biases continue to disadvantage minoritized students and their ability to access quality educational opportunities (Frankenberg, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Rothstein, 2017).

This study sought to understand the perceived facilitators and barriers to AP access and explore how these facilitators and barriers impact Black students' decision to enroll in AP courses or not. This study adds to quantitative literature on AP access by providing a qualitative analysis of the deeper meanings and implications of equitable AP access. Additionally, it adds to the qualitative literature by comparing the perceptions of students enrolled in AP to those not enrolled in AP. Through the framework of Ecological Systems theory and CRT, this study looks beyond the identification of factors to understand the lived experience of Black students and their perception of AP course accessibility.

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experience of Black high school students and their perceptions of AP course access. A qualitative approach with two interviews and a journal prompt per participant was used to provide space for participants to deeply consider their academic experiences in relation to their home, social, and academic life, and explore how those experiences affected their decisions to enroll in AP courses. Multiple interviews were conducted to allow the participants an opportunity develop a reasonable level of familiarity and comfortability in discussing difficult topics with me. In addition to two interviews, a journal prompt was provided after the first interview for participants to reflect on the discussion and consider the effect that their experiences may have had on their enrollment decisions.

Setting and Recruitment Procedures

Participants were recruited from a school district in a Southeastern state. Following IRB approval from the University (see Appendix A) and approval from the school district (letter of approval not presented in appendix in order to maintain school privacy), a high school with a diverse population (46% White, 32% Hispanic, 14% Black, 4% Asian, 4% Two or More Races, 0.5% Native American, 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander) was contacted for permission to work with their students. The principal granted permission to work with their students, and the administrative team provided names and contact information of students who met the inclusion

and exclusion criteria. To be eligible to participate in this study, participants had to identify as Black high school students (including, but not limited to, Caribbean and African American), and have above a 3.0 GPA. Due to my language limitations, eligible participants needed to speak English.

A total of 124 students were identified as eligible for participation in this study. Of the 124 students, female students comprised 67% (n=83) of the participants and male students totaled 33% (n=41). There were 76 students (64% female, 36% male) in the enrolled in AP courses and 48 students (71% female, 29% male) not enrolled in AP courses. Table 1 shows total number of eligible participants in each group. Eligible participants were sorted by grade level and by AP enrollment. Once eligible participants were sorted by grade level and AP enrollment, random numbers were assigned to participants within each group. For example, 9th grade Black students who were not currently enrolled in AP and had not taken AP previously were randomly assigned a number. Similarly, 9th grade Black students who were either enrolled in AP or had taken AP previously were randomly assigned a number. After random number assignments, participants were selected in numerical order to be recruited, with the goal of enrolling 4 students per grade level, with 2 from each group (AP enrollment vs. no AP enrollment) within a grade level. If a participant declined to participate or returned permission forms that denied participation, the next participant in numerical order was contacted for recruitment.

Recruited participants were provided a parental permission form (see Appendix B) which detailed the content and purpose of the study and included my contact information. Upon return of the permission form, participants were given an assent form (see Appendix C and a demographics survey (see Appendix D) to complete. Once participants provided assent and

completed the demographics survey, I scheduled a date for the first interview to occur during the participant's lunch period.

In total, 37 eligible participants (8 male, 29 female) were contacted for recruitment. Of those 37, seven returned permission forms declining participation (1 male). Three students, a sophomore, a junior, and a senior enrolled in AP courses, had parent permission to participate but declined to assent when they were called for the first interview. Ten students either declined to participate when being recruited or did not return the permission form (4 male). The first

Table 1

Total Numbers of Eligible Participants by Grade-Level and Group

	No AP enrollment		AP enrollment		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	*N*
9th Grade	7	8	7	4	26
10th Grade	4	16	4	11	35
11th Grade	2	6	4	15	27
12th Grade	1	4	12	19	36
Total	14	34	27	49	124

Note. No AP enrollment indicates students who are not currently enrolled in AP courses and have no history of taking an AP course. AP enrollment indicates students who are either currently enrolled in AP courses or have an AP course on their course history.

participant who returned the permission form and completed the assent form (a female junior enrolled in AP courses), was selected to pilot test the interview questions. Sixteen participants (2

per AP enrollment category, per grade level) returned signed permission forms, provided assent, and completed the interviews and writing prompt as part of the formal research procedures. In sum, 45.9% of invited students participated in the study, either in the pilot (n = 1) or in the sample of focus for data analysis (n = 16).

Participants

Participants (n=16; age range= 14-18 years old, mean age= 15.75; 4 per grade level) in this study were current high school students who identified as Black or African American. Participant socio-demographic information is summarized and displayed in Table 2. Of the participants, 25% receive free or reduced-lunch prices, primarily used as an indicator of socio-economic status. Further, 5 of the 8 participants who were enrolled in AP courses attended feeder-pattern elementary and middle schools, while 6 of the non-AP participants transferred from out-of-district or out-of-state. Specific demographic for each participant is presented in Table 3.

Students who were currently enrolled in or had previously been enrolled in International Baccalaureate or dual enrollment courses were not eligible for this study. In Florida, International Baccalaureate (IB) Programmes utilize processes that require students to apply for admission and school teams either accept or deny students. Students must meet specified letter grade requirements in middle school (i.e., A's and B's) and achieve specified scores on the State administered Florida Standards Assessments (FSA) for math and English language arts. Further, students in the IB program must follow a rigorous course sequence. As a diploma program, students do not enroll into an IB course, they apply for the IB program (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2023). Additionally, few schools (i.e., 1-2 schools) in each district are authorized to offer the IB Programme, making attendance difficult for those who live outside

Table 2

Summarized Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	No AP enrollment		AP enrollment		Total	
	n = 8	%	*n = 8*	%	*n = 16*	%
Gender identity						
Female	8	100	5	62.5	13	81.25
Male	0	0	3	37.5	3	18.75
Racial identity						
Black	8	100	8	100	16	100
+ White	0	0	2	25	2	12.5
+ Hispanic	2	25	0	0	2	12.5
+ Pacific Islander	1	12.5	0	0	1	6.25
Socio-economic status						
Full-price lunch	6	75	6	75	12	75
Free/reduced price	2	25	2	25	4	25
Previous school attendance						
All feeder pattern schools	2	25	5	62.5	7	43.75
Out of district/state	6	75	3	37.5	9	56.25

Note. All participants identified as Black. "+Race" denotes participants who identified a racial identity in addition to Black. Average age of participants was 15.7. "All feeder pattern schools" represents participants who exclusively attended schools that were zoned for the participating high school.

of bus transportation routes. This process removes the option for students to choose to enroll or not by requiring applications and allowing a team of educators determine access. Dual enrollment in Florida requires a sufficient GPA (i.e., 3.0 unweighted GPA) and demonstration of

Table 3

Demographic Information by Participant

	Age	Gender ID	Grade	AP Enrolled	Ethnic ID	Additional Ethnic ID	SES	Feeder Pattern	# Days
Destiny	15	Female	10	No	Black/AA		FP	No	7
Nevaeh	14	Female	9	No	Black/ Jamaican		FP	Partial	10
Serenity	14	Female	9	No	Black/AA		FP	No	22
Jada	16	Female	11	No	Black/AA	Hispanic	FP	Partial	7
Aaliyah	16	Female	10	No	Black	Italian/ PI	F/RP	All	3
Simone	18	Female	12	No	Black/AA	Hispanic	FP	No	14
Kyrie	17	Female	11	No	Black		F/RP	No	53
Kiara	17	Female	12	No	Black/AA		FP	No	14
Jayden	17	Male	12	Yes	Black	White	F/RP	All	9
Anthony	14	Male	9	Yes	Black		FP	Partial	30
Caleb	15	Male	10	Yes	Black/AA		FP	All	90
Zuri	14	Female	9	Yes	African	White	FP	Partial	7
Imani	16	Female	10	Yes	Black/AA		FP	All	6
Nicole	16	Female	11	Yes	Black		FP	All	3
Daisha	16	Female	11	Yes	Black/AA		FP	Partial	9
Jasmine	17	Female	12	Yes	Black/ Caribbean		F/RP	All	9

Note. All displayed names are pseudonyms to protect participant identity. AA= African American. PI= Pacific Islander. SES was determined by participation in Free or Reduced-Price Lunch program and was self-reported: FP= Full Price; F/RP= Free or Reduced-Price Lunch. Feeder Pattern reflects attendance at an elementary or middle school that is zoned to feed into the participating high school and was self-reported: No= Participant did not attend any feeder schools; Partial= Participant attended either an elementary or middle feeder school; All= Participant exclusively attended elementary and middle feeder schools. # Days= The number of calendar days between the first and second interviews.

college readiness for participation, again removing the ability for students to choose to participate freely (FLDOE, 2023). College readiness may be assessed using tests including the Florida Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT) and the SAT, among others (FLDOE, 2023). On the contrary, AP courses operate under open enrollment in most districts, providing free access to participation and waived exam fees if the student chooses to enroll. The open enrollment policy for AP courses allowed this study to exam barriers and facilitators that impact the student's choice to enroll without the added effect of participation eligibility barriers.

Data

For each participant, data collection consisted of two interviews and a journal prompt. The first interview provided an opportunity to build rapport with the participant and begin to explore their academic experiences. This interview also prompted participants to consider their experience in education through a racialized lens, reflecting on their perceptions and experiences being a student of color in majority White classrooms and with White teachers. The discussion aimed to prompt participants to consider how these racialized experiences may have impacted their academic identity and perceived access to AP course enrollment. This first interview was semi-structured, allowing the participants time and space to consider their educational experience and providing an opportunity to ask follow-up questions to expand on aspects of their experiences. The interview duration for the first interview ranged from 43 minutes and 48 seconds to 1 hour and 37 minutes (3 of the interviews were conducted over two meetings due to school schedule time constraints), with a mean of 50 minutes and 43 seconds.

Following the first interview, participants were provided with a journal prompt to complete before the second (final) interview. The journal prompt asked students to reflect on their perception of facilitators and barriers to participation in AP courses. The prompt then asked

them to explore how those factors affected their decision to enroll in AP courses or not. The purpose of the journal prompt was to provide participants with time outside of the interview to engage in deeper self-reflection about their lived experiences that they may have been hesitant to bring up in the interview process. For many of the participants, they may not have reflected on their experiences as Black students in the educational setting. Thus, after the priming questions in the first interview, the writing prompt gave them space away from the interview setting to reflect and process.

The writing prompt was provided on an unlined paper for students to complete bring back to the second interview. Of the 16 participants, 11 completed the writing prompt; most of them typed their response and brought it to the interview or handed it in to the front office for me to pick up, and two participants emailed their response to me. Five participants did not complete the writing prompt. These students were provided time at the beginning of the second interview to reflect on or write about their thoughts regarding the prompt. Prior to beginning the second interview, I asked each participant if they had reflected on the prompt and were ready to discuss their responses. All participants, including those who did not complete the writing prompt, affirmed that they were ready to discuss their thoughts and responses. Most of the students who completed the prompt read their responses as I asked them to share. After sharing their response, I asked follow-up questions to further understand the meaning in their responses. Several students (e.g., Jada) commented that they had not previously reflected on their educational journey that deeply, and they felt they were better able to express feelings they may have suppressed after completing the prompt.

The second interview discussed what the students wrote in response to the journal prompt and provided an opportunity to debrief from the first interview and the writing prompt. Perhaps

because participants had personal time to reflect on their experiences, they appeared more willing and able to discuss how their decisions have been affected by these factors. Finally, this interview debriefed with the students about how they felt discussing racial issues as Black students with a White male interviewer. Responses to this debrief were compared with my impressions as written in the field journal. The duration of the second interview ranged from 8 minutes and 7 seconds to 37 minutes and 23 seconds, with a mean of 24 minutes and 41 seconds.

The original planned timeline for the completion of the first and second interviews was a month, meaning that an individual student's participation time would be around 30 days from the first interview to completion of the second interview. However, several variables impacted this timeline. Student absences were a significant barrier for meeting this timeline. School holidays also affected the time between the interviews (e.g., Thanksgiving, Christmas) by either extending the amount of time between interviews (Caleb) or shortening the time to avoid waiting until after the break to finish the interview (Nicole, Aailyah). Several students (e.g., Anthony, Caleb) requested to reschedule the second interview due to class assignments they needed to work on. Further, since I was only able to meet with students during their homeroom period, there were a few instances when one interview ran over into another class period, and I was unable to call for the next student. Because of these unforeseen variables, the time between the two interviews varied from a few days (Nicole) to almost three months (Caleb). The time between the interviews for each participant is shown in Table 3. The mean number of calendar days between the interviews was 18.31 days, which is still within the month goal. Though the extended time between some of the interviews may have posed a barrier in students recalling the first interview, students reported continued excitement for participating in the interview. Several students came to the office, without being called for, to ask when they were going to have their second

interview. No students expressed frustration or concern about having the second interview and writing prompt completed within a few days or having to wait a prolonged amount of time between interviews.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed using a secure online transcription service. Generated transcriptions were compared to the playback of the recording to ensure the accuracy of the transcript and to remove identifying information. Participants received the transcription for review after the accuracy check and deidentification processes and were provided an opportunity to ask any questions about the transcripts.

Interview Processes

Considering the topic of perceived access for minoritized students into an organization developed to propagate social privilege and power (Schnieder, 2009), the critical paradigm in which this study is situated (Sipe & Constable, 1996), and the social power differential between the researcher and the participants (i.e., race, age, gender), the researcher used a feminist approach and a romantic conceptualization for the interview process (Lichtman, 2013; Roulston, 2010).

According to Scheurich (1997), feminist research, though primarily concerned with examining and dismantling systems of patriarchal privilege and power, provides four aspects that were relevant to this study and interview process. Feminist research is concerned with social change, represents human diversity, provides a perspective rather than a method, and includes the researcher as a person accompanied by biases and socialized understandings (Scheurich, 1997). Thus, critical theory, and its CRT derivative, grew out of feminist theory in its devotion to social change and its inclusion of the researcher as a participant of the research, and expanded on

feminist theory to include intersecting identities in the consideration of power and privilege (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Lichtman, 2013).

Roulston (2010) described the romantic conceptualization of interviewing as "one in which genuine rapport and trust are established by the interviewer in order to generate the kind of conversation that is intimate and self-revealing" (p. 56). Through this conceptualization, researchers approach the interview as a relationship building process, with the goal of establishing an interaction built on mutual trust and respect for each other's personal stories. Central to romantic interviewing is an acknowledgement of the researcher's positionality in the interview, relational use of conversation and tactful question progression, and an inclusion of the participants into the research process. By using a romantic approach to the interview, participants are more likely to provide and experience revelations about themselves than they would otherwise be with a person they recently met. These revelations were evident with several participants sharing things they report not considering prior to the interview.

Considering the feminist framework and a romantic approach, the interview processes were conducted as guided conversations rather than distant and neutral questions asked by an expert researcher. The interview protocols that guided the conversations are included in Appendices E and F, with the writing prompt included in Appendix G. These conversations included an explanation of the purpose of the study and my recognition of positionality in the study. I also encouraged participants to comment on or ask questions about the researcher's purpose and position, in order to reduce the racial and gendered power differential. As a White male engaging in interviews about Black high school students' experiences, it was critical to express an understanding of social constructs that create tensions between racial identities and encourage the participants to express their own understandings of the social constructs.

Following several of Hermanowicz's (2002) steps to great interviews, the interview questions progressed from introductory and easy-to-answer questions to more in-depth and difficult questions. The interviews were also divided into topical stages, exploring the participants perspectives across ecological settings, beginning with the self at home and with family, moving to the academic self, and concluding with the interpersonal self in the school setting (Hermonowicz, 2002). Throughout the interview questions, I maintained a conversational tone and showed "quiet concern" (Hermonowicz, 2002) to establish rapport, sincerity, and trust with the participants. Following each interview, I solicited feedback from the participants regarding their experience within that interview session, including what made them feel comfortable and how they felt having conversations about racialized experiences with a White male interviewer.

Data Analyses

The interview responses were transcribed and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In addition to analysis of transcripts, audio recordings were reviewed and annotated and then added to the transcript analysis. The purpose of reflexive thematic analysis (TA) is to make meaning of the themes, or "stories about particular patterns of shared meaning across the dataset" (p. 592), rather than derive domain summaries "of the range of meaning in the data related to a particular topic or 'domain' of discussion" (p. 592). Essentially, reflexive TA goes further than summarizing responses and topics and seeks to draw out of the interview responses patterns of meaning. The reflexive component of reflexive TA denotes the researcher's position, role, and self-awareness within the study's context.

Reflexivity states the need for the researcher to "bend-back" (p. 594) on themselves, challenging and interrogating their knowledge, biases, and impact on the participants, interview questions, theoretical frame, and interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Taking the reflexive

"bending-back" a step further, D'Arcangelis (2018), in her meta-narrative analysis about being a White woman engaging in social justice research, suggests a "double-turn" (p. 343) of radical reflexivity. She argues that many who engage in self-reflexivity run the risk of engaging in a ritualistic positionality confessional, in which the researcher "confesses" (p. 342) all of the identities in which they experience privilege in an attempt to demonstrate a critical self-awareness (D'Arcangelis, 2018). In contrast, radical reflexivity utilized a "double-turn" (p. 343) in that the researcher turns towards themselves to identify socially privileged positions, and then turns back to call upon the systems and institutions that perpetuate and propagate such power and privilege. This radical reflexivity is considered and discussed through the reflexive thematic analysis.

Finally, the thematic analysis utilized primarily inductive analysis with secondary deductive processes. Inductive analysis identifies themes within the interview responses and constructs meaning from the response. Deductive analysis identifies connections between meaning within the responses and established theoretical frameworks and previous research. To this end, the researcher sought to make meaning of themes within the interview responses to identify unique perspectives and then draw connections between the responses and theoretical frameworks of the ecological model and CRT, and variables identified in previous research.

Data Presentation

Analysis of the interview responses is presented by themes within perceived barriers and perceived facilitators. In accordance with reflexive thematic analysis processes (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2021), themes are presented with the goal of sharing rich meanings within the emergent themes. Rather than describing the range of responses within identified themes, the presented analysis will focus on how the responses across participants reflect shared

meaning within the lived experience of Black students navigate the education system and how their experiences impact their enrollment decisions. To this end, data is organized thematically with participant responses, shared meaning, and researcher reflexivity presented within each theme.

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study to test and further develop interview questions, understand potential responses, and provide practice to improve interview skills. The pilot study was comprised of a Hispanic male who participated in AP courses and recently graduated from high school, and a Black female 11th grade student who was participating in AP courses at the time. The Hispanic male provided consent to participate in the pilot study and the Black female received parental permission and provided assent to participate. Following the pilot interview, the participants had an opportunity to debrief and provide feedback regarding the interview questions and my skills.

Participant feedback about the interview protocols was positive, and both participants stated they appreciated the questions asked. The order of one question in the first interview (sense of belonging) was moved from being question 11 to question 14, better representing a transition from questions about perceived academic self to questions about school environment and connection. In the second interview, a question was removed that inquired about the participant's experience answering questions about race from a White interviewer and replaced with question 11, which asks about comfort with me as an interviewer and if the comfort would be different with a Black interviewer. Aside from these minor revisions, the pilot participants recommended approval for the interview protocols to be used.

Ethical and Data Quality Consideration

Anytime research investigates issues of racial inequity, strong feelings are expected. Walker and Pearsall (2012) expressed that emotions intensify and language becomes charged when discussing inequities in schools. Because of the sensitive nature of the research questions, there is a risk that these questions may cause emotional responses, including anger, sorrow, and depression. These concerns were first expressed in the consent and assent forms. If such emotions arise, the procedure was first to attempt to talk through the response and understand the root of the feeling. However, if the feelings were elevated beyond the ability to talk through them or there is a concern for prolonged distress, the parents were to be notified of the participant's condition. I may also recommend that the parents and participant speak with the participant's school counselor for counseling service recommendations. Additionally, to reduce the risk of highly elevated emotions, participants were notified that they can stop the interview at any point if they feel the need to do so. Though this was considered a slight risk, no such emotions arose. Notably, a few students expressed sadness when discussing a lack of exposure to teachers of color. However, this emotion did not escalate beyond solemn contemplation.

In consideration of the trustworthiness and quality of data collection and analysis, Tracy's (2010) big tent criteria were considered. These eight criteria include (a) Worthy Topic, (b) Rich Rigor, (c) Sincerity, (d) Credibility, (e) Resonance, (f) Significant Contribution, (g), Ethical, and (h) Meaningful coherence. Tracy (2010) suggests that these considerations provide common language and guidelines for evaluating the quality of qualitative research. A discussion of the alignment with these eight criteria is provided in Chapter 5.

Researcher's Position in the Study

To further express my position within this study, I am a White, male, cisgendered, heterosexual adult who grew up in a middle-class community and attended private schools from kindergarten through college. As expressed in the positionality, subjectivity, and reflexivity statement in Chapter 1, I have not experienced the same prejudice, biases, and oppression that many students from minoritized backgrounds have. However, the underrepresentation of minoritized students in AP classes has significant meaning for me. I was a high school counselor and AP coordinator for six years. During that time, I became aware of the continued disparity between students participating in the AP courses and those not participating. My district partnered with an organization to reduce the achievement gap and improve underrepresented student participation in AP courses. Though the effort was well-intended and increased participation, the action did not increase underrepresented students' course or exam pass rates. These results led me to hypothesize that there is more to minoritized students accessing and being successful in AP than being identified and encouraged in high school. Reviewing the literature on AP participation and theoretical frameworks about child development and racial issues showed me that, though many factors impact students' decision to enroll in AP courses, there was not much literature that explored the student's perception of these factors. Therefore, this study has significant meaning for me as I work to increase equitable access to AP courses by understanding the students' lived experiences and perceptions of educational access.

Limitations of Methods

Though this study has a small sample size and utilizes subjective measures, the purpose of this study is to identify patterns of meaning and shared experiences among Black high school students that generates transferable knowledge. This study's purpose exists within the tension of

antiessentialism and “the unique voice color thesis” as described by Delgado and Stefancic (2017, pp. 10-11), where it is understood that while there is no singular “Black” experience (stereotyping), Black individuals have a shared experience in navigating a racialized society on which they can speak with authority. By the nature of the theoretical frameworks and the study design, the objective is to provide deeper understanding the subjective lived experience of individual Black students and find thematic connections and meaning across the participants’ experiences. Future research may use the findings from this study to inform a study with a larger sample size and quantitative measures that will increase generalizability.

Additionally, my position within the study also adds cultural limitations. As a cultural and racial outsider, the participants may have guarded their responses do to discomfort in discussing racialized concepts. While the researcher engaged in introduction and interview practices to reduce discomfort, this may still be recognized as a cultural limitation to this study.

CHAPTER FOUR:

RESULTS

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the interviews conducted with the 16 participants. This chapter discusses the results of the reflexive thematic analysis and shares the themes and meanings of the students' responses. The research questions for this study were:

1) What factors do Black students perceive inhibit them from pursuing AP courses?

1a) How do these barriers affect their decision to enroll in AP courses?

2) What factors do Black students perceive encourage them to pursue AP courses?

2a) How do these facilitating factors affect their decision to enroll in AP courses?

To answer these questions, the findings are organized and shared by question. The first section shares findings regarding perceived barriers (RQ 1), and is separated by AP enrollment status, presenting the perceived barriers of students enrolled in AP courses first, followed by responses from students not enrolled in AP courses. Responses regarding perceived facilitators (RQ 2) are then shared in the same manner. Next, student responses across the two groups are compared to answer RQs 1a and 2a in a discussion on which factors students felt affected their ultimate AP enrollment decision. Chapter 4 is then concluded with a discussion about the interview context and a summary of the findings. The next section presents the findings and shared meaning from these interviews regarding the barriers students perceive inhibit their enrollment into AP courses.

Barriers

Barriers are factors across ecological systems that Black high school students perceive inhibit them from pursuing and enrolling in AP courses. Research question 1 asks what factors do Black students perceive inhibit them from pursuing AP courses? Differences exist between the AP enrollment groups regarding the focus of the perceived barriers, with students in AP courses placing more significance on self-reflective barriers (e.g., low-confidence, time management skills) and students not in AP courses ascribing more meaning to external barriers (e.g., perceptions of teachers, low Black student enrollment). This section discusses the perceived barriers that were shared by the students, beginning with students enrolled in AP courses and then sharing barriers reported by students not in AP courses.

Barriers Reported by Participants Enrolled in AP Courses

Barriers described by students enrolled in AP courses are shown in Figure 2. The most reported barriers include low levels of confidence, concerns about time management skills, passing the AP exam for college credit, and the academic workload. These barriers are discussed further.

Low Confidence. This factor was the most cited barrier for enrolling in AP courses. Participants described this factor in several ways. One participant, Nicole, said:

> I mean, I think the only thing that has discouraged me at any point was I felt like I wasn't smart enough to be in like advanced. I felt like I was not smart enough to be in advanced, but too smart to be in regular, I guess. So, I feel like those are the things. I guess it being too hard would've discouraged me (Nicole, 2nd interview, 9:59).

Feelings of low confidence can stem from thoughts that, “I am not smart enough,” (Caleb, 2nd interview, 2:47) or “I’m not a hard-enough worker.”

I don't know if I was supposed to write that [on the writing prompt]. I did, but I added a little note that said I didn't know, but I said honestly, it was like the main reason was self-doubt. I was not sure at all. Like if I did do it, if I failed then you know, that would look bad on like, you know, report card whatnot. And that's there forever. So, [Zuri ended her thought] (Zuri, 2nd interview, 2:40).

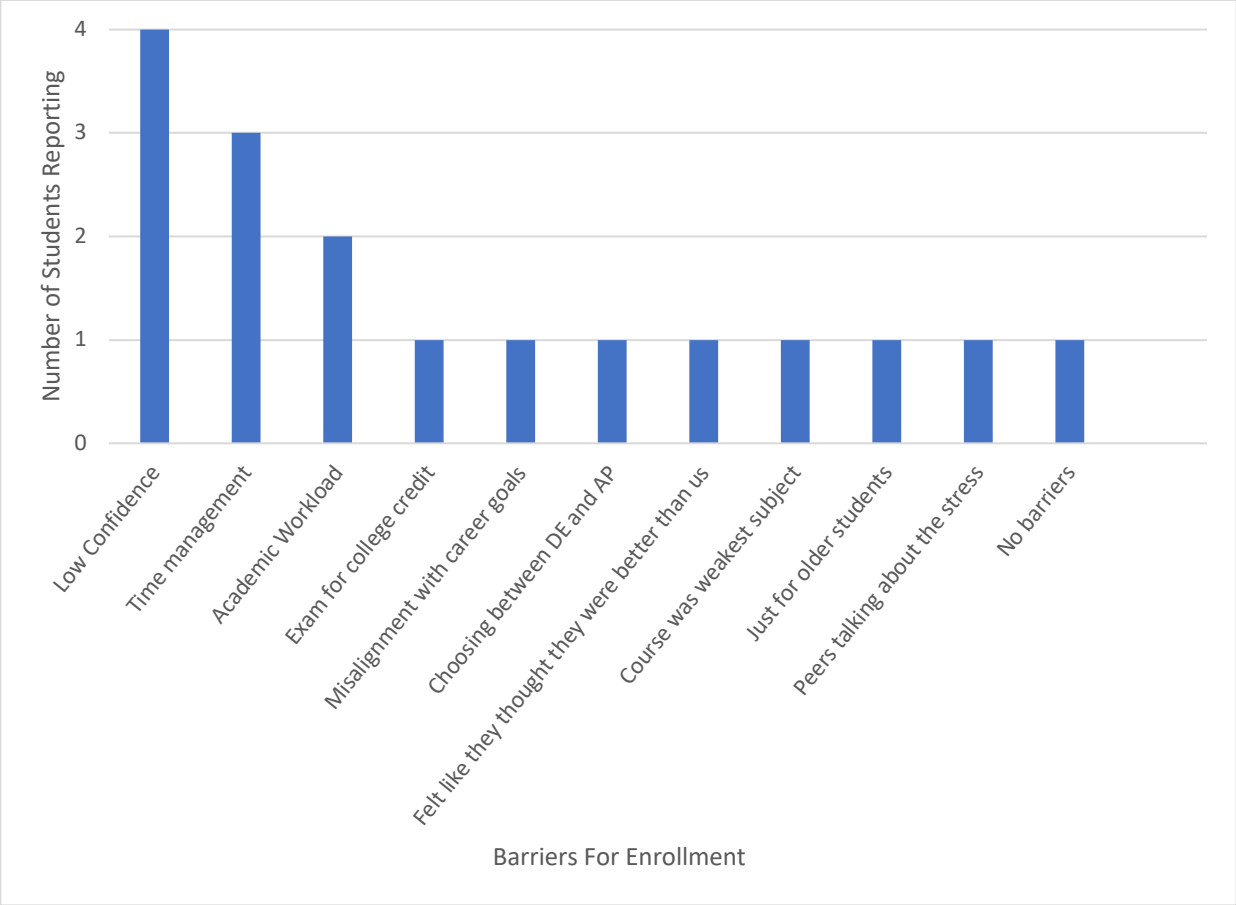

Figure 2. Barriers for AP Enrollment Perceived by AP Enrolled Students

Note. Frequency count reflects the number of students reporting the specific barrier.

Zuri then added,

> Um, it just kind of discouraged me because it also, in the past I had not always done the best with my schoolwork, and I was afraid like if I didn't like apply the right effort that, yeah [Zuri ended her thought] (Zuri, 2nd interview, 4:08).

These feelings of self-doubt and low confidence about intelligence and effort may be related to past experiences with discouraging teachers and are related to the CRT tenet of race being a social construct, where these students may internalize the belief that there are real, biological differences between them and White classmates due to experiences within the educational system. Jayden recalled being a second grader and having his teacher tell him that he was, "not going to be much in your future if you keep acting like that" (Jayden, 1st interview, 56:00). This comment made Jayden feel like he was a bad student, as thought he had committed, "like, like a sin or something" (56:55). Other participants recalled being made to feel dumb after asking questions in class. Daisha commented on a teacher who taught math through PowerPoint and did not demonstrate problems on the board. "So then you don't really actually get to see her work through the steps. Yeah. And then if you'd ask a question, she would just make you feel stupid or, yeah, it's, she wasn't a good teacher" (Daisha, 1st interview, 15:35).

Feelings of low confidence are hard to overcome for students. However, the students who reported this barrier overcame the self-doubt enough to enroll in at least one AP course. Zuri commented about how she gathered up the motivation to navigate her self-doubt, "Well, I would say I, you definitely have to push through that and it's just like, oh, but, okay. But you never know until you try. And if I don't wanna regret not taking the decision and you know, if I, if I failed then I do fail, but at least I went into it, you know, and I tried my best" (Zuri, 2nd interview, 8:15).

Time Management. Time management was cited by several students as a significant barrier for enrolling in AP courses. In my previous experiences with high school students, time management and organization skills are necessary to navigate their busy schedules, which often include a full day of class, volunteering, athletics and band, and homework. Caleb, a basketball player, commented on how his grades typically dip during basketball season, and did not want to get behind in an AP course.

> Okay. Because I was thinking I didn't want to put too much of a load on me during the season or anything. And then I get behind for sure. Grades start dropping cause my schedule gets more busy during the season. So then I was just double guessing myself on whether I should take it or not because I didn't want to just drop out of a class or anything (Caleb, 2nd interview, 4:33)

Jayden gave some insight to additional responsibilities that interfere with time to study for an AP course,

> High school's a big factor of change and people's lives, you gotta like worry about family, your future, car, you know, getting your car and stuff, um, a job, more responsibilities. So this can be, it can be a lot. <Interviewer: That is a lot.> Yeah. It is 100% a lot. And it can, oh, and if you're an athlete, you got sports. Um, Yeah. And, that's when, that's when AP can get kind of tough (Jayden, 2nd interview, 13:05).

Another perspective shared by Imani was the timing of the course within the day. She has her AP course right after lunch, which makes it difficult to focus on the content because, "And you're coming right off of lunch too, so you're already in that chatty mood and you already want to keep doing stuff" (Imani, 2nd interview, 13:16). The timing of the course within the school day, though it may not always be flexible, may be an important consideration when building the

master schedule, as students who take rigorous courses right after lunch may have a harder time focusing and engaging with the material.

Jayden and Caleb, both, gave advice on what could be done to improve the time load students in AP courses face. Jayden suggested implementing a study hall for students to access during the school day that does not interfere with transportation,

> Cuz I notice that when I go home or something like that, I, I can't, I can't even focus. I'm like, I gotta do something else. And um, but when I'm at school I'm like, I could just focus like laser, laser pointed and just I'm done. And you realize like, oh, it's not as much work as I thought I was gonna have cause I'm already done (Jayden, 2nd interview, 18:01).

Caleb's advice revolved around building planning and organization skills. He suggested planning ahead so that students can have more time to work on larger projects,

> So I really like start labeling stuff by like due dates and depending on dates due is like the way I time manage things. I don't need to work on all my classes on one day. Like if something in English or math is due in two weeks in their projects, I'll start, like, I'm a fast worker so I could start like four or five days before it's due. But like if it's something in AP due in like two weeks, I kind of want to start it now (Caleb, 2nd interview, 8:14).

Time management can also be more challenging for minoritized students and students of color due to potential responsibilities at home. Particularly students from low-income backgrounds, but also from cultures that prioritize family contribution, students may have responsibilities of watching their younger siblings, cleaning the house, preparing dinner, or working after school to help make ends meet. Jayden's comment above alludes to the increased

responsibilities he feels in reporting, “you gotta like worry about family, your future, car, you know, getting your car and stuff, um, a job, more responsibilities" (Jayden, 2nd interview, 13:05). This aspect of time management is one that, reflectively, I would have liked to explore a little more with the participants. As an older child with a sibling and a stay-at-home mother in a lower to middle-income family, I did not grow up in a setting where I had to attend to such responsibilities, so this aspect is not one that readily comes to mind. However, increased responsibilities outside of school-related activities may have been a significant contribution to the time management barrier.

Academic Workload. This factor is related to time management, as it involves planning and organizing an academic schedule to ensure that the student keeps up with the fast-paced rigor of the AP course. Imani stated that she almost chose not to enroll because of the workload, “I was like, maybe I shouldn't do this because there is a lot of work, a lot of notes. I don't like writing, maybe I shouldn't do this” (Imani, 2nd interview, 3:20). Caleb also expressed hesitation on enrolling in an AP course:

> I felt kind of determined on whether or not I should take it or not because the advanced classes, you obviously get more work and everything, but this was a double of it. It was a lot more. So, this could take up majority of my day after practice, but I have to try and fill in with the rest of my classes too to manage it out (Caleb, 2nd interview, 5:10).

Imani also noted that, due to the nature of AP courses, they are different from honors, regular courses, and other AP courses:

> I don't think anything could have prepared me for the workload because I guess there are AP classes that are different. It's just like this one. You had to write a lot of notes and stuff. I think my friend said like the AP psych was just mostly listening, so not a lot of

> note-taking. And then there's some classes where they like give you the notes and you should like, go through and highlight. So, it was probably just that one class because they're all different (Imani, 2nd interview, 4:05).

AP courses have a standardized curriculum that determines the content taught and the standards in which that content is taught. However, the AP curriculum allows flexibility for the teacher to teach the content how they prefer (The College Board, 2023a). Therefore, each AP course can be significantly different from another due to teacher preference.

To adapt to the workload, Caleb shared that he sets a strict schedule so that he gets everything done.

> Cause I really be busy when I get home. Cause I have like a schedule for myself when I get home, like an order of things that I need to do. And it just leaves me a little bit of time for certain things. And if a certain class throws a project at me, I got to balance it out with something else (Caleb, 2nd interview, 7:38).

Other Barriers. These barriers were reported by individual participants to describe barriers that are significant to them but were not expressed by any of the other participants. Table 4 shows the comments students made about why these barriers are significant to them.

Table 4

Barriers Expressed by Individual Participants

Barrier	Participant	Quote
Exam for College Credit	Nicole	"I would say the fact that with AP, you can only get the credit for college if you pass the exam at the end of the year."

Table 4 (Continued)

		"Because I know for, there are certain classes that you have to take for certain career paths. And I know that, I've known people that have got a four on the AP exam, but they needed a five to get the credit for the type of study that they were going into. So, they never got the credit, even though they took the class twice."
		"I probably wouldn't have taken it just because I'm not a good test taker, and I probably would've felt like, oh, well, there's no point in me taking this class for a whole year if I'd never end up getting the credit for it."
		"I don't think, especially for my career path, taking rigorous courses that will probably have nothing to do with what I'm going to do for as a career, I don't think it's necessary. So that was how it was in the past."
Misalignment With Career Goals	Jasmine	"If I want something to be rigorous, I want it to be something that's tied into my career, or at least something that will help me later on. So, like the finance classes or financial classes, even though that'll be very, very difficult at least you know, and you have a lot of information that will help you later on."
		"Probably just the choice between dual enrollment and AP. I never actually pursued dual enrollment. It's only been AP, but there was definitely a time where I was like, I just didn't know which one to do."
Choosing Between DE and AP	Daisha	"It was difficult to sign up for dual enrollment. I think that was part of just knowledge from my counselor. Cause I had asked her and she didn't really help me. AP seemed easier. You're have to worry about off-campus classes. You don't have to worry about doing it online or anything. Like almost all AP courses are offered on campus compared to dual enrollment."

Table 4 (Continued)

		"I didn't really like advanced students in elementary school. I felt they thought they were better than us and smarter."
Felt Like Students in Advanced Courses Thought They Were Better Than Us	Caleb	"And because it was one of my hardest subjects, too, because I told you history is not my biggest strong suit. So, I feel like I did not comprehend the information as I should have, especially for the final exam. And I don't think like I was prepared like at all to take it."
Course Was Weakest Subject	Nicole	"Yeah, I think it would be more encouraging and they should say that it's not just a class for like just older students..."
Thought It Was Just for Older Students	Jayden	"Um, cause I guess like how others act around um, AP. Cause some, some students stress about it and that can like deter you from wanting to take the class, cuz you don't wanna be in a stressful position."
Peers Talking About the Stress	Jayden	"I don't think there was any, because like, when you get the course card*, it's just there, so like, it's like there, but if you just don't want to pick it, then that's all your decision."
No Barriers	Anthony	"I mean, I didn't really like have like a hard decision. I just saw it on the paper [course card] and it looked alright, so I just took it."

Note. This table presents quotes from participants regarding significant barriers that the individual participant found meaningful.

* Course cards are course selection papers that list all of the courses that a student in a given grade-level can sign up for. These sheets include core classes (e.g., English, Math, Science, History), electives, and advanced courses (e.g., AP, DE). Students complete course cards once a year in spring to prepare for the next school year.

Barriers Reported by Participants Not Enrolled in AP Courses

This section presents data from interviews with the 8 students not enrolled in AP courses regarding their perceived barriers for enrollment. These barriers are shown in Figure 3. The most significant barriers include perceptions of the teachers as rigid and mean, limited number of Black students reflected in AP courses, lacking information about what AP courses are like, low self-motivation to do the work for an AP course, and concerns about time management skills. These barriers are discussed.

Perceptions of Teachers. One of the most significant barriers reported by students who do not have an AP course is their perception of the teachers. One of the negative perceptions they cited was a belief that AP teachers will not provide support if they need it. Kiara stated, "I wouldn't say it depends on the teacher per se, but I feel like it depends on their mindset and how they will help the student with the, with the, with the material in the classroom" (Kiara, 2nd interview, 3:05), and,

> I understand they love teaching material, but they stack a lot of work. And some of the work they probably can go over, they'll probably will forget some things or they say, use your notes. And that really doesn't necessarily help in my generation. Cause we really don't use notes. We mostly use, we just learn by visually seeing it front our faces and not necessarily by notes. So, I feel like teachers don't really help kids in that certain way because they give us things that we could actually help ourself with… They just stand back and let us do what [we] want to do. Even though they always tell us that they want us to succeed, they're not really putting an effort to help us succeed. So [Kiara ended her thought] (Kiara, 2nd interview, 5:28).

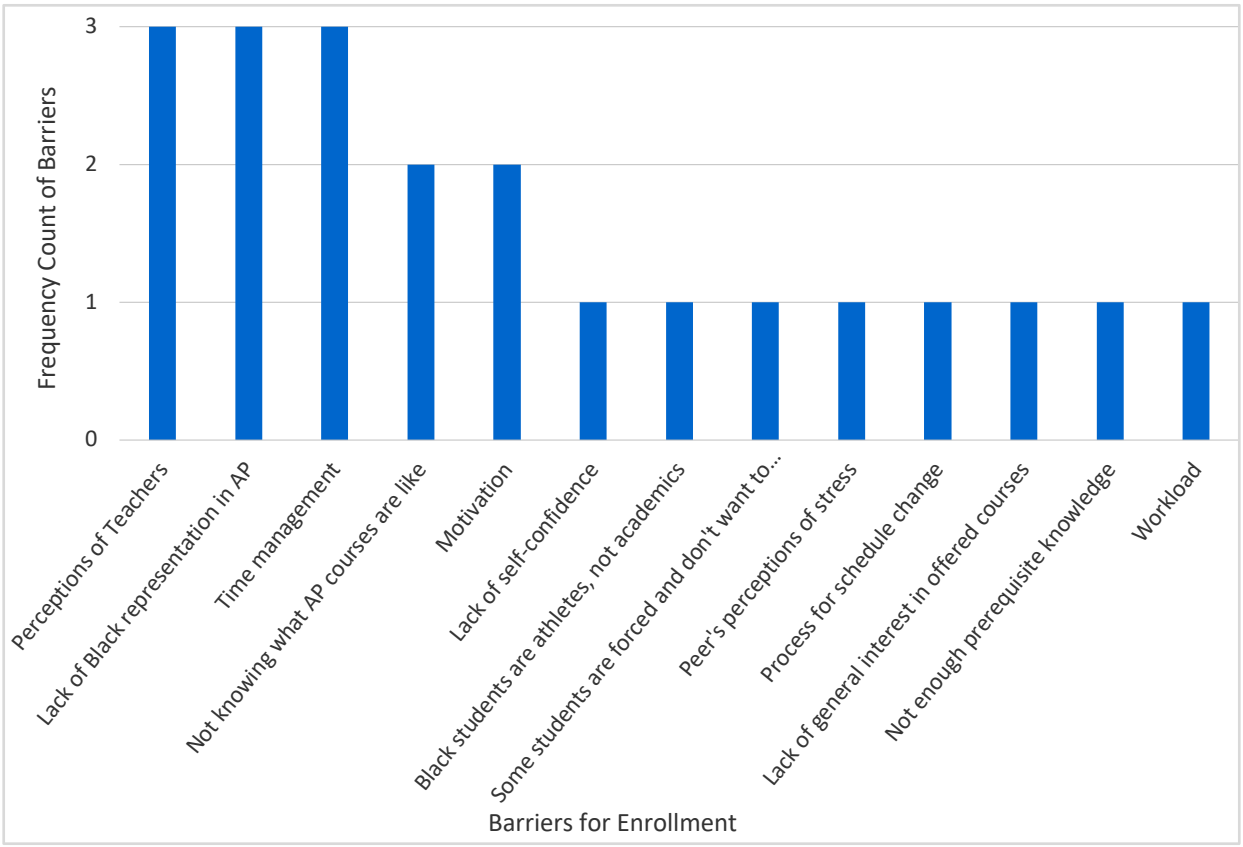

Figure 3. Barriers for AP Enrollment Perceived by Non-AP Enrolled Students.

Note. Frequency count reflects the number of students reporting the specific barrier.

It appears that Kiara's concern about a lack of teacher support is connected to teacher expectations. She stated that teachers "don't help" because they give tools for students to help themselves. However, the students do not take those tools seriously, and so the teacher is not providing support to help students match the teacher's expectations.

Other students commented on teachers being rude and making students feel dumb as the barrier that teachers present. These perceptions of teachers are based on experiences students have had with educators who teach standard or honors-level courses. Jada reported that,

> A lot of them are, just can be very rude and they kind of make you feel dumb for being confused or asking questions. So that kind of made me feel like I wouldn't be able to even handle those classes because I couldn't understand basic knowledge in regular classes…. But then when I have adults who've gone to college and all that stuff, making me feel like that, its like, it makes it like actually feel like there's a reason to that not believing in myself. Like, I don't know. It makes it feel more real. Like, oh, I'm actually not smart because I've got adults who making me feel like that and who don't think I'm smart (Jada, 2nd interview, 5:56 & 8:38).

Jada has had the experience of having a teacher reply rudely and sarcastically when she has asked for help or clarification in the past. Though Jada reported struggling with self-confidence, teacher responses like the one reported here have helped her further internalize her lack of confidence. Destiny commented that the teacher rudeness may be related to teachers not liking their job, "I don't know, some teachers are not, I've heard that they aren't really good teachers and it's kind of hard to like learn in a class when there's a teacher who doesn't like their job or doesn't want to do it" (Destiny, 2nd interview, 5:45).

Simone shared experiences of being racialized by teachers in middle school when they would give preferential treatment to White students while providing discipline for the Black students.

> I would notice that they would get on people of my color more. And if a White person would do something, they wouldn't really say anything or really care. But as soon as one of us talks, then they would be "Quiet! Go to the office." So, you guys are loud, and they'll call our parents. So, I noticed there was some stuff like that (Simone, 1st interview, 34:10).

She also commented on the impact those experiences have had on her willingness to engage in class discussions,

> I feel like it just prepared me to just not expect anything much of teachers going through school. Cause I'm like, I already know, and it just made me not want to talk at all in class. I'm like, I already know they're not going to support me the same as other students. So I'm just [Simone ended her comment] (Simone, 1st interview, 35:49).

The experiences that these students have had with teachers have demonstrably impacted their perceptions of themselves as students, their abilities, and their worth. Although these students may have some compassionate and caring teachers now, they have internalized messages they have received from previous teachers. This perception of teachers, and the impact they have had on their self-perception are a significant barrier for these students in excelling in school and in AP course enrollment.

Lack of Black Representation. The other highly significant barrier reported by multiple students who are not in AP courses was the lack of Black representation they see in AP courses. This perspective is one that I, as a White male, have a difficult time imagining. The social constructs in place perpetuate my identity as normal and standard, so I see myself represented in every room, every television show, and every magazine. Looking into a classroom, I see my identity represented widely. Because of the normalization of whiteness, I haven't experienced my identity not being widely represented. However, these students have had this experience. Jada commented about the low representation of Black students in AP courses:

> that's so weird. It threw me off for a second. But I don't know, it's, I don't know, it's discouraging because I feel like there's a logical reason for it and I, I actually like thought at one point and I, I was kind of like, it was ninth grade, I was like, maybe it's, they're just

> smarter [Jada laughed] and I felt so guilty for thinking that, but I don't know. And yeah, I just, it was a lot of confusion and I kind of found it funny because it was so weird to me once I noticed it, I don't know (Jada, 1st interview, 56:28).

Jada had internalized the idea that there was a logical reason Black students were not represented in AP courses and decided that it must be a difference in intelligence. Kiara arrived to a similar conclusion, "That's probably, probably more harder for colored people at a certain degree or maybe is just don't want to take the class" (Kiara, 1st interview, 2nd recording, 7:23).

This disparity of representation also reflects to students that there are lower standards for Black students. Kyrie noted that while educational achievement may not be related to color,

> …but I feel like it does sometimes. In a sense, I feel like they have higher standards for people that are, that may be White or something, rather than us, the Blacks, they are like, "Oh yeah, we don't really didn't really expect anything much from them," but until someone actually does do good and show out and actually stand down and put to show that we are forced to be reckoned with [capable of achieving] in those type of classes (Kyrie, 2nd interview, 5:13).

The lack of representation and the perception that teachers are not supportive can lead to students feeling like they don't belong in the school. Kyrie reflected on a recent conversation she had with a friend who said, "you're never going to fully fit into this school because you are a Black individual in a White school" (Kyrie, 2nd interview, 4:35). Aaliyah addressed her sense of belonging through a comment about her attendance and not wanting to spend 5:30am to 1:30pm on campus, "that's not personally what I want to do five times a week because of the environment and stuff" (Aaliyah, 1st interview, 34:23). This reflects the systemic isolation many of the participants in these interviews have experienced. Some have expressed being a "loner"

(Nevaeh, 1st interview, 32:37), having to code switch to, “be treated equally or be treated like I'm not dumb” (Destiny, 1st interview, 18:58), and when asked if they feel the need to prove teachers wrong before they make assumptions, Destiny responded, “Always. Every teacher” (Destiny, 1st interview, 21:26). Though not all of these participants explicitly reported that the limited number of Black students in AP courses was a barrier, their sense of belonging and interactions with teachers have impacted their internalized sense of self-ability and self-worth, which, in turn, confirmed to them the idea that Black students are underrepresented because they do not belong in AP courses.

Another aspect of the lack of Black representation is student experiences with teachers of color. Though students not in AP courses did not explicit list a lack of Black teachers as a barrier, multiple (4) students reported differences that a Black teacher could make on their decision whether or not to enroll in AP courses. Three students stated that having a Black teacher would make them feel more comfortable and more likely to engage in the course. Destiny stated, “I love having Black history teachers. They don't really like sugarcoat history, they just tell it how it is. I like that” (Destiny, 1st interview, 38:26), adding, “I definitely participate a lot more, a lot more than [in] my English class. I actually talk and answer the questions. I'm not like afraid that someone would judge me for what I say” (Destiny, 1st interview, 38:41). Simone made a similar comment about her interest in taking an AP course taught by a Black teacher compared to a White teacher, “It'd probably just be the same too, but I would probably want to join more than not wanting to join” (Simone, 1st interview, 42:30), When asked about her comfort level in the class, Simone added, “I think I would just feel more comfortable talking to the teacher and asking questions and getting help” (Simone, 1st interview, 42:45).

Jada also acknowledged increased comfort with a Black teacher, but added some context about her history with Black teachers:

> I think I'd feel more, even more, you know, just like that comfort. And, um, that's, sorry, I'm, I've nev, I've always had White teachers <Jada nervously laughs>. Yeah. I, I don't really ever, um, I don't know. I think, I think it definitely would affect it. I think it'd be like, I don't know how to like explain it, but I think it would definitely, um, influence me to take the class. I think I'd, um, I'm sorry. <Interviewer: no, you're fine> I don't know how to, like, I definitely think I'd, um, really think about it. Just cuz, I don't know. I dunno. I don't know why, but I definitely think I would consider taking it (Jada, 1st interview, 1:00:37).

She then added, "So I think if I had a teacher of color, it would be kind of like a breath of fresh air" (Jada, 1st interview, 1:03:59). This lack of experiences with Black teachers was reported by several students, Destiny stated that she had 2 Black history teachers, one in middle school and one as a current teacher, but "I don't really see any Black AP teachers. Right? I don't think, do we have any?" (Destiny, 1st interview, 37:45). Kyrie commented that, "I don't think I've had any Black teachers since I've moved to America" (Kyrie, 1st interview, 1:14:54).

Interestingly, when asked about how having a Black teacher would impact their desire to take an AP course, most of them initially reported that there would be no effect in their decision. However, after giving them a moment to think about it, they shared the comments displayed above. Not having teacher that reflects their identity may contribute to their perceptions of teachers, feelings of teacher support and understanding, lower levels of self-confidence, and an internalized sense that Black individuals do not belong in accelerated curricula. Lack of Black

representation goes beyond who is sitting in the classroom desks to include those who are imparting knowledge from the front of the classroom.

Time Management. Similar to some students in AP courses, several students not in AP courses were concerned about time management and stated that as a barrier to enrolling. As mentioned in the time management barrier for the students in AP courses, finding time for additional schoolwork can be challenging. Serenity expressed this sentiment,

> So, like, I have like siblings to take care of and stuff. And yeah, because my mom her schedule does change, but she works from 12 to nine at night, but she used to work from one to 10 because she got like a part-time job, kind of. And my stepdad, he like normally just stays in his room and stuff, so I just watch them. My siblings and I would need time to just focus on that (Serenity, 2nd interview, 3:34).

For students in similar situations, it can be incredible difficult to find additional time for advanced course work on top of regular classes and taking care of the family. This concern presents a significant barrier for minoritized students and students from low SES backgrounds. Students in these situations are systemically disadvantaged by being deprived time for extracurriculars or advanced coursework. As Nevaeh stated, “I really wanted to take AP Human Geography this year, but with those, with those barriers it was like maybe I should wait and like get into a routine first (Nevaeh, 2nd interview, 4:50). Procrastination was also a reported as concern regarding time management. Kyrie commented that she knew she had the ability to be successful in AP courses, “but I tend to put it to the side and focus on TikTok or social media or something. And then when it's due on the third, I'm doing it on the third. So, I definitely put procrastination down” (Kyrie, 2nd interview, 3:48). Though procrastination is viewed here as a barrier, procrastination for these students may present a space for respite due to exhaustion of

code switching and constant demands for resiliency from navigating a racialized system. A solution like the study hall idea presented previously may provide enough of a space for students who do not have time after school or need a supportive space where they can focus to complete advanced course work and not be denied the opportunity.

Not Knowing What AP Courses Are Like. Another barrier reported by several students not in AP courses is a lack of knowledge about AP courses. I can remember, when I was a high school counselor, it was easy to assume students know about honors, dual enrollment, and AP courses because we talked about it all the time. However, many students transitioning to high school do not come from backgrounds where parents or siblings have taken AP courses. Because of this, they don't know what they don't know, so they don't ask. Schools do not do a sufficient job at notifying families and students about opportunities. This lack of communication is evidenced by 10 of 16 participants reporting that they are unaware of any communication from the school to their home about AP courses. Because of this, AP courses maintain a mystification that serves as a barrier to students who are new to advanced courses.

I can relate to this in a limited way through my venture into graduate-level academics. I am a first-generation college student, and entering the school psychology graduate program was a novel experience for me. True, I had attending graduate school previously. However, that experience was at the same school I attended for undergraduate studies. All of the processes this time in graduate school were novel and mystified for me. Frankly, many of the processes still are. So, I can understand entering into a new setting and not knowing about the opportunities available. That being said, I do not have to contend with not being represented, as my identity is still well represented within the program and across the campus.

Nevaeh commented on wanting more information about AP courses:

> I feel like it was, it would be more so about the like just like I said, just like the amount of work into it and it would kind of show like the different topics like and just show like a little bit of background going into this, even if it's like stuff that's going on like in the class right now, it still would be background information to you. Because you've never seen something like that (Nevaeh, 2nd interview, 15:55).

As fast as high school moves, many times students who do not know about opportunities before their freshman year find out about those opportunities too late, and miss out on experiences that are valuable for post-secondary success. Aaliyah commented about this,

> But I feel like that might be a little too late for some people because I knew some people have been taking AP classes since freshman year and someone compared a freshman year to junior year, that's two years and that could have been multiple classes. So, I just feel like it would've been a lot better to really know what they were and they just left it up to like hearing around or looking it up and it's better to just like hear it from someone who knows it and you knows at the school and everything like that (Aaliyah, 2nd interview, 9:56).

This lack of detailed information sharing can lead to systemic disparities in students accessing opportunities and demonstrates how "color-blind" policies for students propagates continued disparate access. Requiring students to identify opportunities like AP courses on their own privileges those who know what to look for or have resources (e.g., family history, relationships with teachers), and discriminates against those who do not (i.e., first person in family to attend a school with AP courses). Aaliyah continued, "I really just wish someone was there to kinda like guide more from that big jump [transition from middle school to high school]" (Aaliyah, 2nd interview, 12:30). Many students (9) reported not knowing about AP course options until they

received course cards to select courses for the next year. When asked what recommendation she has for demystifying AP courses, Nevaeh said to give students the AP syllabi before they do course selections, “if they give it to you before you can read it over and kind of have an idea and then you could decide if you wanted to take it or not” (Nevaeh, 2nd interview, 16:47.)

Motivation. Two students commented on motivation as a barrier to AP courses. One student reflected on self-motivation. Nevaeh commented about how difficult it is to find motivation some days to do work, saying, “it's hard to find motivation on some days and it's kind of sometimes hard to just like want to do anything” (Nevaeh, 2nd interview, 3:36). She cited this as a barrier because she did not want to find herself in an AP course, lose motivation to work one day or another, and fall behind because of the pace of AP courses.

On the other hand, Simone commented on the perceived external motivation from teachers to encourage students to take AP courses. She said, “They weren't like, oh, you should probably take an AP. It was just like, if you want to, you can. Like it wasn’t, they wouldn't motivate me to take it” (Simone, 2nd interview, 4:11). She stated that she wanted teachers to be more intentional about pushing students towards AP courses if they thought the student would be successful. In her mind, they didn’t care too much whether or not she took the course. “If they really don't want me to take it, it's not like they cared too much about it, then I won't take it” (Simone, 2nd interview, 4:35).

Other Barriers. These are barriers that were reported by individual students and did not receive consensus from other participants. These barriers and related quotes are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Other Barriers Reported by Non-AP Students

Barrier	Participant	Quote
Lack of Self-Confidence	Jada	"Another one was just me not thinking that I could handle those classes."
Black Students Are Athletes, Not Academics	Kyrie	"And I feel like with sports, you're gon, they're going to be like, oh yeah, she's Black, she's good at her sport. I feel like that's such like also a like stereotypical thing at this school. They expect the Blacks to be like the dominant one in whatever sports it is that, because our star basketball player at this school, he's Black. You know what I'm saying? And the lead for the track team, Black, you know what I mean? But I'm pretty sure if we're supposed to look at grades, the highest person in school right now would not be a Black individual. And it's not because I want to bash the Black cause I'll never do that. But at the same time, it's like, I don't know. I don't want to say like teachers tend to turn to the Whites more. I would never say that. But I just feel like they kind of, I don't know. I don't want to say they have, I don't know. I just feel like they kind of have an advantage. Maybe, maybe not. I don't know. Probably. I'm just saying stuff. But yeah,"
Some Students Are Forced And Don't Want To Be There	Kiara	"And also some of them probably just enroll in AP classes just because there was, I guess, not forced in a way, but persuaded mostly for GPA, scholarships, colleges. And it's not really the thing they want to do, but just do it just to be noticed in a certain <inaudible> extent"
		"I said something about being persuaded or forced into the class <yes> being to be noticed in a way, but they don't really necessarily want to do it, but they're only doing it because someone higher in their or beyond their league is. Something that they can do because they succeed and they're trying to, I guess, show off, I guess. Yeah."

Table 5 (Continued)

Peer's Perceptions of Stress	Simone	"There are some of my friends that taken the class or are taking it, say that it's hard or stressful and it's a lot of work."
Process For Schedule Change	Serenity	"I said the office and, like, time management, like, basically. I wasn't rushing them. I feel like I, I'm try not to rush, but I feel like you should have it done in a reasonable, it shouldn't take three weeks for me to finally get into my class and then I'm behind. And that's just me. That's the main thing I put. I think."
Lack of General Interest In Offered Courses	Destiny	"And I don't really see any, like I see AP classes and I know I have to take them, but none of them really interest to me, like stick out to me."
		"The AP courses, like not me really taking any interest in that one is just, I don't, I feel like I would be more motivated to learn something if I actually like it or I can try to like it. But if it's something that's just, I don't know, just not good, I'm not gonna really wanna learn it and I'm gonna procrastinate and that's gonna bring my grade down, it's not gonna be good."
Not Enough Prerequisite Knowledge	Nevaeh	"So like, basically what I mean is just like prior knowledge cuz sometimes going into these things you have like no background on anything. Like you may have had like little like little clips of knowledge, but I feel like if you had a lot more knowledge about what you're getting yourself into, then you would be able to take it. Cuz like when you sign your course card, they don't even really give a description. They just tell you what it is and then you kind of have to figure it out for yourself like what it's about. But if you know it's something that you've done before and you've seen and you've heard a lot about before, then why not just start it?"
Workload	Kiara	"I mostly thinking about the amount of stress a kids get from the amount of work or the power [intensity] of work they get."

Note. This table presents quotes from participants regarding significant barriers that the individual participant found meaningful.

Facilitators

Facilitators are factors across ecological systems that Black high school students believe encouraged them to pursue and enroll in AP courses. Research question 2 asks, what factors do Black students perceive encourage them to pursue AP courses? Significant differences exist between the enrolled and not enrolled groups. Students enrolled in AP courses report that significant facilitating factors revolve around benefits of AP courses (e.g., college benefit, challenge self). Students not enrolled in AP courses cite encouragement by others as the most significant facilitating factor (e.g., parent, educator, and peer encouragement).

Facilitators Reported by Participants Enrolled in AP Courses

Facilitators that students in AP courses reported encouraged them to enroll are shown in Figure 4. It is interesting to note that the two factors tied for most significant are incentives (e.g., college benefits) and internal motivation (e.g., challenging myself). These two factors revolve around growth and future planning. The other top factors include being interested in the content, encouragement from peers, realizing that I can do the class, and encouragement from family. These encouraging factors are discussed in this section.

College Benefits. Tied for most significant, college benefits were discussed by 6 students and includes future planning, college admissions, scholarship, and GPA. Students who are planning on going to college find participation in at least one AP course to assist in getting accepted into colleges and make them more competitive for scholarships (The College Board,

2023b). The students who participated in these interviews are aware of these potential benefits. Jayden commented that, “what encouraged me to do AP was that I noticed that um, AP could have college benefits. So, colleges can look at you more as an applicant for, um, you know, from doing AP” and, “So you can have a strong GPA and all that stuff” (Jayden, 2nd interview, 6:33). Daisha’s statement agreed with Jayden, “it looks better on college applications, whether or not I do pass the exam because it's still boosts GPA and high school credit and stuff” (Daisha, 2nd interview, 6:16).

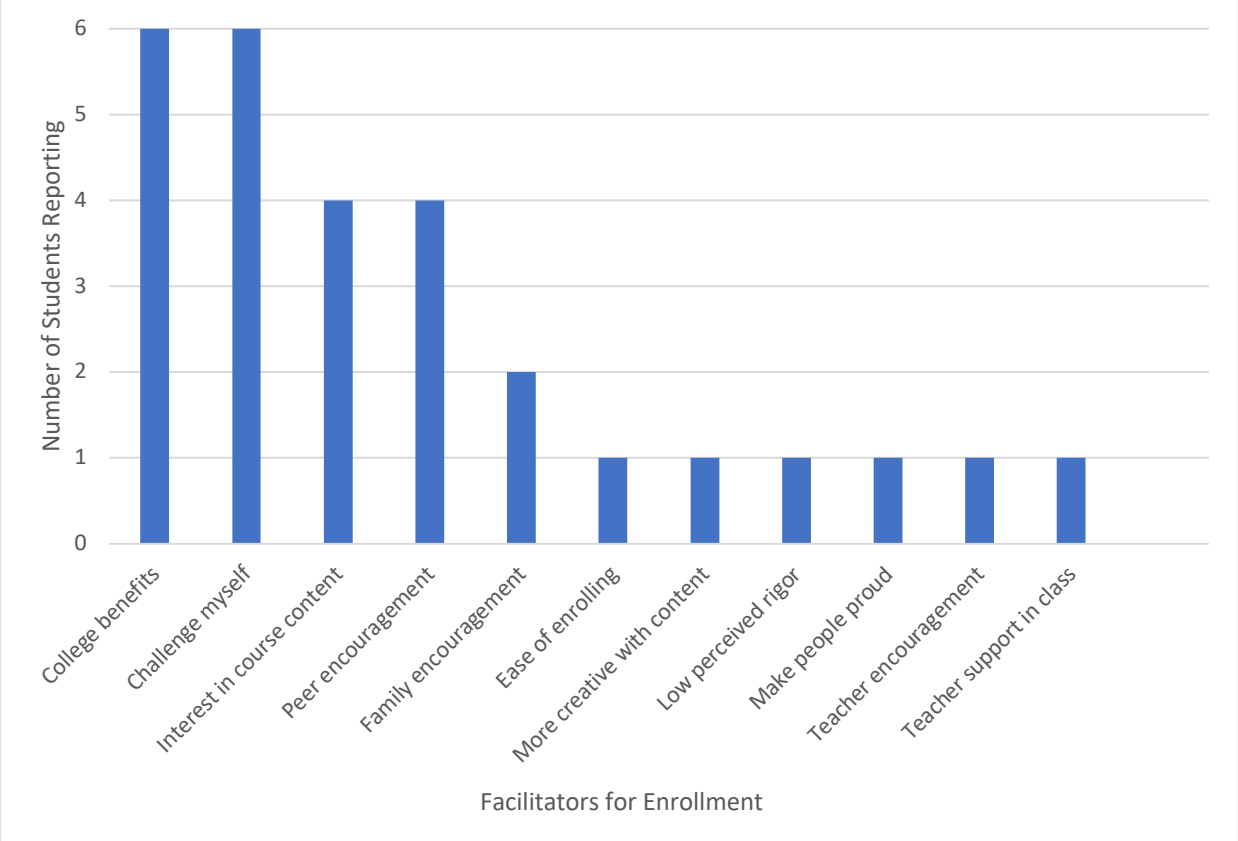

Figure 4. Facilitators for AP Enrollment Perceived by AP Enrolled Students.

Note. Frequency count reflects the number of students reporting the specific facilitator.

In addition to GPA benefits and college admissions, 3 students appreciated the potential for college credits when they pass the exam. Anthony said a major facilitator for enrolling in AP courses was, “The fact that it'll go to my college credits. That's really it” (Anthony, 2nd interview, 3:03). Jasmine and Imani expressed the same encouraging factor of AP courses, “I do know that if you pass the AP test that it will be counted as a college credit and a high school credit. So that was one,” (Jasmine, 2nd interview, 11:50) and, “maybe I should do AP because I like world history and I get to learn more about it and get college credit” (Imani, 2nd interview, 5:27).

College benefits were a significant facilitator in encouraging students to enroll in AP courses. College admissions are incredibly competitive. These students are taking advantage of an opportunity to boost their admissibility while earning high school credits for graduation. In addition, they are earning free college credits. This provides a significant financial benefit when they enroll in colleges or universities. An additional financial benefit was expressed by Caleb,

> And then also like my parents kind of pushed me because like growing up like they always said, like, guess I have a lot of siblings. So, they was like, oh, we're not going to be paying for college if you can go to school and get an education for free. And then the Florida Bright Future Stars thing came out and it was like, well now you really could go to college. You can go to college for free for just being smart. So after that kind of just like pushed me to get a standard so I could go there for free. There's no need to be paying if all this is the only thing you got in life really right now like, as kids, since you were four all the way to 18, you're going to be doing school so you might as well be good at it (Caleb, 2nd interview, 10:21).

These AP courses are seen as a potential gateway to a college education. Whether it is improving admissions prospects, earning free college credits, or working towards scholarships for high

scores on AP exams and high GPA's, these students see the benefit of taking these free and rigorous college-level courses.

Challenge Myself. The other top facilitator reported by students in AP courses comes from an internal motivation. High achieving students often seek greater challenges as they overcome smaller ones. I can speak to this from personal experience. Throughout my academic career, I have found myself constantly reaching for the next challenge and not being satisfied with being stagnant in an easy setting. I think it is safe to assume that my current graduate work is keeping me sufficiently challenged. However, the environments I have existed in typically assume I am capable of the challenges I seek out. For several of the students who reported this facilitator, they have had the experience of having to prove to themselves and others that they are capable and not a "statistic". When asked about being a Black student in AP courses, Caleb said that "They (Caleb and his friends) wanted to strive to be better, prove to the world that we're not just the statistics and we could be more than paper says or than what they expect us to be" (Caleb, 1st interview, 48:58), and Zuri stated, "And so I, I, it will also feel like to me that, that, that means that I need to show them that I, despite being the only Black student here, that I can do it no matter what" (Zuri, 1st interview, 51:03). While I seek out challenges for the challenge's sake, many of these students have the additional burden of proving themselves capable of the challenge. Along with that comes the worry about how others will view Black students if they fail.

In seeking the challenge of an AP course, Jayden stated that what encouraged him was, "that AP just felt like a class that I wanna be like a better student so I wanna see if I can take AP" (Jayden, 2nd interview, 6:50). Caleb wanted to see, "what I could do and what I am capable of" (Caleb, 2nd interview, 10:19). Zuri, Nicole, and Imani remarked that they wanted to challenge

themselves to see if they could do it and to, “challenge my brain. Cause I feel like it makes me my brain stronger” (Nicole, 2nd interview, 8:38). Jasmine stated that she took AP English Language because she wanted to push herself, “I thought pushing myself to do an AP course would be good and challenging for me, especially for the English courses, as I'm very strong in those areas or in that area as to why I chose AP Lang and AP literature” (Jasmine, 2nd interview, 3:24). These students reported being internally motivated to seek out challenges to prove to themselves and others that they can be successful in AP courses.

Interest in Course Content. Four students reported that interest in an offered AP course’s content encouraged them to enroll. As stated by Destiny, “The AP courses, like not me really taking any interest in that one is just, I don't, I feel like I would be more motivated to learn something if I actually like it or I can try to like it” (Destiny, 2nd interview, 8:30).

It is important to enroll in courses that either peak interest or are aligned to career goals. Jayden made a connection between interest and success in a course, “Cause if you're interested in the subject then I guess you want to take AP cuz you think you're good at it” (Jayden, 2nd interview, 7:35). Imani found AP World History to be interesting to her, “So it's like, okay, maybe I should do AP because I like world history and I get to learn more about it” (Imani, 2nd interview, 5:42). Daisha expressed that some AP courses are more interesting than others, “Like AP bio seemed more interesting than forensic science” (Daisha, 2nd interview, 6:16). Jasmine took AP Language and AP Literature because she would enjoy them better than AICE General Paper (11th grade English), “So I took AP and I'm so glad I did because I probably, like I excelled probably more than I would in AICE general, because I'm not, I mean, I'm good, of course, I would get an A, but I wouldn't be enjoying it” (Jasmine, 2nd interview, 9:45). Providing a broad offering of AP subject areas is essential for promoting student engagement with

advanced course work. These comments also underscore the importance of having courses like AP African American Studies that provide a sense of identity for students who are looking for meaningful courses to engage with. The more meaning a student identifies in a course offering, the more likely the student will take the course and engage with the content.

Peer Encouragement. Four students reported peer encouragement as a significant facilitator for enrolling in AP courses. Peer support and encouragement are critical, especially for students who do not often see representation in advanced courses. Seeing peers find success in AP courses or having peers comment that another student could be successful can be the encouragement needed to boost a student's confidence to enroll. Regarding peers in AP courses, Nevaeh, a student not enrolled in AP, stated,

> I feel almost, it's almost like proud, because it, like, it kind of shows that like, people like me can do anything like, just as good cuz I know like judging all like based off of like previous information or whatever, like they always, they like, Black people haven't always like, had the same rights, the same opportunities as other people. So, I feel like once a Black person achieves some, achieves something that they really want, then I feel like it kind of makes me proud to like see that like someone kind of, someone like me could do anything that they wanted to do (Nevaeh, 1st interview, 50:52).

Students in AP courses who endorsed this facilitator stated that their friends and peers were influential on their decision. Jayden stated that his friends, "started taking more of, and I was like, you know what, maybe I can actually do this" (Jayden, 2nd interview, 3:15). Imani stated that, "My friends, definitely" (Imani, 2nd interview, 5:27) when asked what encouraged her. Caleb, an athlete, looks at AP courses as a competition between him and his friends, "We all want to just, we're very competitive. I'm a very competitive person, so like I always want to be

better than the next man and like try to win and everything" (Caleb, 2nd interview, 12:30). Talking about indirect encouragement, Zuri commented on the impact of seeing friends register for AP courses,

> Cause I saw them and they were like, Oh yeah, I I'm going to probably take an AP course, you know, next year. And all that was like, Oh really? I, and I just saw them and they were going straight for it. And I was like, well, I mean it would be cool to take one. So, see how it goes (Zuri, 2nd interview, 10:28).

Having representation and encouragement from friends, seeing that they are successful in AP courses show other students that they can be successful in AP courses too.

Family Encouragement. Two students reported family encouragement as a significant facilitator for enrolling in AP courses. Additionally, 4 students reported that their parents are the main people they consult with when they are completing their course cards. Zuri commented that, "specifically my parents, they really encouraged me, too, cuz they've always been ones to push me to my best, knowing what my limits are. But then, you know, knowing that, um, whatever I put my mind to that I can do" (Zuri, 2nd interview, 5:50). A significant component of family encouragement is belief in a student's ability to be successful in challenging courses. Regarding her family, Daisha stated that they, "know I can handle AP courses, so it's expect, not expected, but, you know, I should take them at the same time" (Daisha, 2nd interview, 5:30).

Other Facilitators. Additional facilitators were discussed by individual students and did not receive consensus from other participants. These facilitators and related quotes are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Other Facilitators Reported by AP Students

Facilitator	Participant	Quote
Ease of Enrollment	Daisha	"Well, one, it was difficult to sign up for dual enrollment. I think that was part of just knowledge from my counselor. Cause I had asked her and she didn't really help me. AP seemed easier. You don't have to worry about off-campus classes. You don't have to worry about doing it online or anything. Like almost all AP courses are offered on campus compared to dual enrollment where some are just online."
More Creative With Content Than Standard Course	Jasmine	" So, she gives us a lot of freedom to think out of the box and enhance our creativity rather than just papers, and papers, and papers, and papers. Because I mean, honestly, we do get tired. I mean, it's tiring just doing that all over and over and over. … You may learn something from that, but that's really the difference between the AP course and the honors courses. Even last year, it was like we did a lot more content on what we're doing, but more creative, not as papers, papers, AICE general papers. I think it is for junior. I never took it, but you just got worksheets and book work, and it was never like that."
Low Perceived Rigor	Jasmine	"So, although the AP courses I enrolled in were not what I was expecting, they weren't as rigorous as I thought they were going to be. The AP course is 100% different than regular coursework from an honors English class. So, Okay. No, there's no rigor. Well, honestly, no, there's no rigor to it. Because if you want to compare, my friend is in Ms. <teacher> [English] honors class. She only has one honors class, and they're doing a quote journal for the literature they're reading, but they have to do three entries and all of that, just writing random. We don't do that."

Table 6 (Continued)

Make People Proud	Jayden	"So that's what also encouraged me to do it, you know, make people around me proud that, hey, guess what I did, I did AP."
Teacher Encouragement	Jasmine	"Ms. <teacher>, she was recommending me to definitely take AP Literature and that I should be fine, like, you'll be amazing. You'll be okay. And she was talking about Ms. <teacher>, and she's like, she's amazing. I was like, okay, I feel a little bit better."
Teacher Support in Class	Nicole	"I feel like if I needed help, those teachers would be able to help me and kind of like steer me in the right direction to be on the same level as everybody else. Because like I knew of teachers that would like tell students like, oh, you shouldn't be in advanced, or, oh, you shouldn't be in honors. Oof. And they'd also tell people like in the regular courses like, oh, I think you should be in this advanced class. So, I would say like with me, at least, the teachers did try to help me. I felt like they did a good job at making sure that I understood what I was learning and making sure that I got what I needed."

Note. This table presents quotes from participants regarding significant facilitators that the individual participant found meaningful.

Facilitators Reported by Participants Not Enrolled in AP Courses

Facilitators that students not enrolled in AP courses reported were encouraging or them to enroll in AP courses are displayed in Figure 5. Notably, and in contrast with the responses from the students in AP courses, the top two endorsed facilitators revolve around external encouragement to take AP courses. The top cited facilitators include encouragement from family,

encouragement from teachers, college benefits, peer encouragement, and pride regarding accomplishments. These facilitators are discussed in this section.

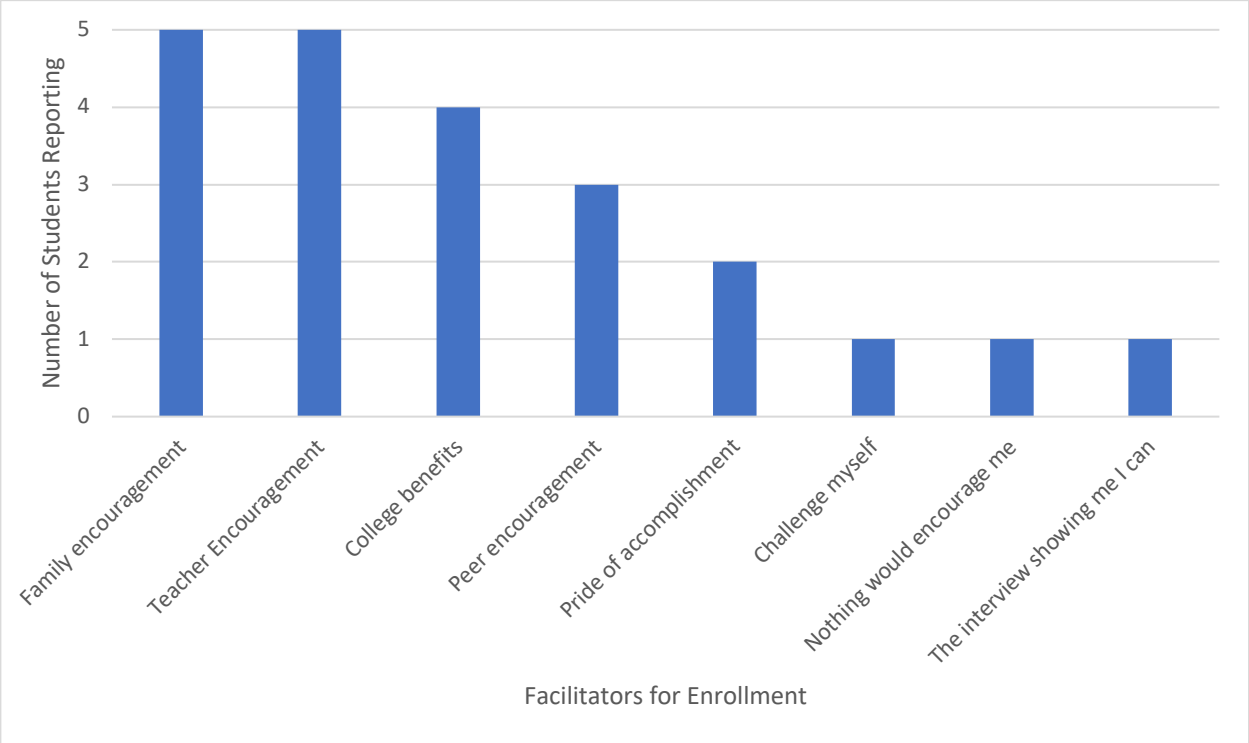

Figure 5. Facilitators for AP Enrollment Perceived by Non-AP Enrolled Students

Note. Frequency count reflects the number of students reporting the specific facilitator.

Family Encouragement. One of the most significant facilitators cited by students not in AP courses, family encouragement is essential to motivate students towards advanced coursework. When considering advanced course options, students of color may feel self-doubt and low confidence as a result of non-supportive school environments, peers, or educators, which was cited by students in AP courses as a barrier. Family encouragement can work to improve confidence and belief in self through affirming the student's abilities and skills. Influential family members can include parents, siblings, and extended family.

Destiny stated that her uncle, who is a junior, has encouraged her towards AP courses, "we've always been like together very practically like siblings. So, we are kind of like raised together in a way. And we've always looked forward to like going to colleges together. And it kind of like made me feel like I gotta step my game up, you know?" (Destiny, 2nd interview, 9:55). The other 4 students cited parents as being effective at encouraging them toward advanced courses. Kiara commented on the support from her parents, "I was actually encouraged to get honors classes because my parents actually supported me in a lot of ways because they seen that I'm very, very intellectual and intelligent and they knew I could pass honors classes" (Kiara, 2nd interview, 12:36). Serenity recounted the impact her mom's encouragement has on her, "Well, my mom says she like, she like, I know you can do it if you put the effort in and stuff. And then like I'm smart enough for it" (Serenity, 2nd interview, 6:43). Simone and Nevaeh suggested that if they had more encouragement from parents, they may consider taking AP courses.

> Just if my parents or teachers were like telling me they can believe in me doing it and that I should do it to help me with my future. It made me want to do it more because I knew there's people that believed I could do it, so it made me feel like I was able to keep up with the like the work and stuff (Simone, 2nd interview, 6:57).

And,

> I think if I had a little bit more, like, I don't know how to, I don't know how to say this, but it's almost like if I had a little bit more encouragement from other people. Like my parents do encourage me a lot, but I've also been like really independent my whole life so I kind of make decisions for myself and kind of don't do it. But like if I tell them that I really wanna do this and they encourage me so much more to do it, then I feel like I would've had so much more motivation to do it (Nevaeh, 2nd interview, 11:33).

Parental encouragement plays a significant role in facilitating student desire to and enrollment in advanced courses. Students rely on cues from family members that affirm their abilities and effort. This reliance on family encouragement may be necessary to counteract a non-affirming school environment where students of color feel the need to "prove" themselves.

Teacher Encouragement. Tied with family encouragement, students reported that teacher encouragement was a significant facilitator for their consideration of AP courses. However, the encouragement is most effective when it is genuine and comes from a teacher with whom the student has developed a relationship. Simone illustrated the impact that this genuine relationship has on her perception of teachers,

> And then my acting [drama] teacher, Mr. <teacher>, he always checks up on all the students if they have their head down. He's like, if you want to step outside, you can. He makes sure he puts us first before anything, even before the schoolwork, which is good (Simone, 1st interview, 25:36).

Kyrie commented on how her relationship with her science teacher transformed her achievement in science,

> And I can tell you one of my weakest subjects has definitely been science. And this year, I don't know if it's because her and I connect so good. But I can tell you science is one of my top three subjects right now. Definitely. But she's really good. I definitely think that's one teacher. She would be all ears no matter the time, the day, no matter the day she's having, she's always on (Kyrie, 1st interview, 45:13).

These comments stand in contrast with teachers that students feel "just do it for the money. Some are not as happy, they're just, some are rude for no reason and not really helpful" (Destiny, 1st interview, 24:22). Jada has noticed teachers who have favorite students,

> it can feel like that sometimes though, because a lot of teachers, um, they're so obvious on favoritism and so they'll be nice to these students and then they're being so rude to me and then making me feel dumb (Jada, 1st interview, 46:18).

Students are perceptive and can pick up on teachers who genuinely care about them. This increases the impact that teacher encouragement has on them. Nevaeh commented,

> I feel like as they get to know like my learning system, then they would encourage me a lot more to do things outside of my level. Because I've always been that way. I've always done things outside of my level and my teachers were like, my teachers like adored me for that because they like, they knew I was so smart and they knew that I did so well in these, in these certain areas and like they really encouraged my decisions (Nevaeh, 2nd interview, 13:12).

Jada expressed a desire to have a team of encouraging teachers, stating that if one teacher says she is capable, but no other teachers do, it feels like that teacher is delusional.

> But I feel like if I had multiple teachers like that, I would definitely really start to believe it. It's like not just one person, but it's multiple people telling me this and it would definitely feel more real, that sort of thing (Jada, 2nd interview, 12:13).

I have always experienced supportive and encouraging teachers, and I have never had the feeling that a teacher would not be supportive. However, I have been in schools established for students with my identity and have not had to contend with explicit and implicit biases and systems that ascribe negative attributes to me. For these students, they seek validation and encouragement from teachers who they perceive genuinely care about them. A recurring theme within the interviews was the value of genuine teacher-student relationships. Though not explicitly listed as a facilitator, all students expressed trust and fondness for teachers that they

felt cared about them. Students do not place the same value on encouragement from adults with whom they are not familiar or that they perceive to be ingenuine.

College Benefits. Four students endorsed college benefits as a facilitator for considering AP courses. Aaliyah expressed that AP courses not only allow students to earn college credits in high school, but that they give students an edge when they apply for college, "So see if it came down to it like me and another student because I took these AP classes cause I did these extra classes. That's my little extra edge, because we could both be great students" (Aaliyah, 2nd interview, 6:43). Because of the potential college benefits of taking AP courses, Aaliyah stated, "Maybe next year, if I want to take one or something, that it's worth it in the future, it's worth good credits" (Aaliyah, 2nd interview, 6:50). Destiny, in talking about her influential uncle discussed previously, said that his counselor, "told him that he needed to take seven AP courses to, in order to get into the, like, or try to get into the college, he wants to" (Destiny, 2nd interview, 9:45). This information shared with her has helped her recognize the potential college benefits of AP course and has caused her to consider enrolling in AP courses.

Another aspect of how AP course participation may benefit college enrollment is through GPA boosts. In this state, AP, DE, and IB courses carry an extra point in weighted GPA (e.g., A=5.0, B=4.0). By comparison, honors courses carry an extra 0.5-point weight (e.g., A=4.5, B=3.5). Three students reported this benefit as a facilitator for taking AP courses. Aaliyah and Kiara stated that they are encouraged by what it does to their grades, "but things that are like encouraging to it is what it does for like your grade and stuff" (Aaliyah, 2nd interview, 6:43), and "it's mostly to raise my GPA also" (Kiara, 2nd interview, 13:29). Serenity commented that there is social pressure to have a high GPA. Once a quarter, administrators hand out wrist bands to students with high grades and they call groups of students to a central table during lunch based

on their GPA (e.g., “Students with a 4.0 GPA, come to the table”). Serenity said, “I just want to make sure like when everyone hears what my GPA is, it's not like a one point, I don't know two and it's like a four point something or a three point something” saying that she wants the high GPA, “so I'm not getting embarrassed or something” (Serenity, 2nd interview, 5:58 & 6:31).

The relatively lower number of students (4 students, compared to 6 in the AP enrolled group) reporting college benefits as a facilitator may be related to the expressed barrier of not know what AP courses are about. As mentioned, students expressed frustration that the school was not communicating well about AP courses. This poor communication privileges those who know about AP from either family or friends and discriminates against those who do not have historical knowledge about AP courses. Only 2 of the 4 students who endorsed college benefits explicitly mentioned college admissions, and, in comparison with students currently enrolled in AP courses, none of them commented on scholarship opportunities, though students not enrolled in AP courses expressed college goals at the same rate as students in AP courses (6 of 8 students mentioned college goals).

Peer Encouragement. Three students reported that peer encouragement was a significant facilitator for taking AP courses. Though not as many students reported peer encouragement as teacher or parent encouragement, students reported having a “hype” team helped them feel encouraged and affirmed. Nevaeh stated, “Um, my friends, like they, they already know like I'm really, really smart. So like they would, they would like, they would hype me up” (Nevaeh, 2nd interview, 12:40). Serenity expressed similar sentiments about her friends, “my kind of like verbal affirmations and stuff like from others and stuff and them saying like they think I can do it" (Serenity, 2nd interview, 5:18).

Other comments about peer encouragement revolved around feeling that peers can provide support in challenging courses. Destiny stated that this is why her friend was encouraging her to take the course, “she wants me to be in like the classes with her so we can like be together and help each other” (Destiny, 2nd interview, 11:37). Peer support was a common response when students were asked about the influence peers have on their course selection. Nevaeh commented about how she helps her friends,

> My friends kind of look at the really smart side of me because I feel like when they ask me for help, I feel like it's, it makes me somewhat happy because they know that like, I'm there if they need help and I feel like they know that (Nevaeh, 1st interview, 45:41).

Peer support and encouragement is a significant facilitator in taking course. Destiny reported her friend leaving is why she did not enroll in an AP course, “Um, well my friend was gonna enroll in it, but then she went to <other school> and I was like, I don't think I can do this on my own. So I kind of opted out” (Destiny, 1st interview, 18:34). In addition to seeking affirmation and encouragement from family and teachers, students look for the same affirmation from their peers. They are seeking “hype” friends who will provide support to and seek support from them.

Pride of Accomplishment. Two students reported having a sense of pride of accomplishing AP courses as a facilitator for considering AP enrollment. In addition to a sense of personal satisfaction, Nevaeh commented on the feeling of making parents proud for doing what they may not have been able to complete.

> And I also put, I think it was just like the, just the fact that like I would feel really good about myself if I did it. Like it would make me feel proud that I was able to like, take such high-level classes at like such a young age too because I know my parents weren’t able to, but I feel like they, I don't, I don't, they never really tell me any stories but from

> what I heard they couldn't really keep up with it. So, if I was able to do it, I would feel like I would kind of outweigh my parents a little bit (Nevaeh, 2nd interview, 5:43).

Kyrie discussed the distinction and recognition of accomplishing AP courses, noting that the recognition is a display of the hard work that went into AP courses.

> I mean, when you're graduating, I heard that the AP students wear like a cord for AP class. I don't know how accurate that was, but it was an AP capstone type thing I heard. So, I mean, not to put any discredit on the students who don't have it, but I mean, it's definitely going to be something that you're like, "Hey, I got," you know what I mean? I mean, I'm not, it is not to take away credit from those who don't. But we're also going to give credit where it's due because they work, their, they worked. You know what I mean? So, we're going to give that. So, it does, it will feel like a lot better when you see the accomplishment coming in for AP class. (Kyrie, 2nd interview, 12:51).

This sense of pride of accomplishment is something I can relate to as well. I am driven, in large part, by a sense of pride in my accomplishments. It is even more meaningful when I can make my parents proud. Much like Nevaeh, I have been able to academically accomplish things my parents did not have the opportunity to do, and I see their pride in my successes. Conversely, this same sense of accomplishment can come with a high level of pressure to succeed. Destiny commented, "a little overwhelmed because I feel like I have other family and cousins and I feel like they all just look at me for being, to be successful" (Destiny, 1st interview, 11:54).

Other Facilitators. Students reported other significant facilitators that were not endorsed by other students. These facilitators and related quotes are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Other Facilitators Reported by Non-AP Students

Facilitator	Participant	Quote
Challenging Myself	Nevaeh	"Um, just the, just the challenge. Like, I love challenging myself but there's also like, there's also sometimes that I don't like challenge, but I feel like challenging myself to like a certain extent can kind of see what I'm capable of and help me understand myself better and like what my limits are."
This interview Showing Me I Can	Kyrie	"I would definitely say this interview. Because not only did you show a side where it's like I'm capable of doing it regardless of how I might think or talk with myself. Within like the couple days or what, two or three times that I've seen you, you've definitely shown me like I can do this. I just have to. So I'll definitely say this interview."
Nothing Would Encourage Me	Kiara	"I don't necessarily think anything would encourage me to take in an AP course per se. Cause I haven't really thought of AP courses because I seen what it does and I'm like, I don't feel like I should deal with all of that. I'm not going to lie. Especially when I'm, I'm already in the good mindset, so that's going to kill my mental (health) really badly. So especially when I'm, I'm procrastinating a lot and that is going to kill me."

Note. This table presents quotes from participants regarding significant facilitators that the individual participant found meaningful.

Effects on AP Enrollment

Following the discussion on the reported barriers and facilitators that students perceive inhibit or encourage taking AP courses, this section discusses their perception of how the

reported factors affected their ultimate decision. Specifically, this section discusses the factors that each group reported led them to make their final enrollment final decision.

Comments From Participants Enrolled in AP Courses

For students enrolled in AP courses, significant factors that affected their ultimate decision to enroll. Research question 2a asks, how do these facilitators affect their decision to enroll in AP courses? These factors included: (1) wanting a challenge, (2) college benefits, (3) peer encouragement, and (4) success in an honors class. Zuri commented about seeking a challenge, "I was like, I, I gotta take the challenge, you know, I've gotta at least try. And so that's what I did" (Zuri, 2nd interview, 14:01).

Citing college benefits as the ultimate deciding factor, Caleb stated,

> Like after I knew I could, if I could just keep good grades and I can go to college for free and get education, that's when I really just decided to just attack it and <nice> take AP courses. Cause it looks better on like resumes and everything and it just helps out later because if I can get more college stuff over with now, even when I go to college, it'll be easier up there (Caleb, 2nd interview, 17:16).

Zuri also reported college benefits as a contributor to her final decision, "Well, I, I knew I wanted to do well in high school and like get a head start on, you know, college you could say" (Zuri, 2nd interview, 13:21).

Peer encouragement was the final deciding factor for Imani,

> My friend sitting right next to me doing course cards. It's like, come on, do it. You got to do it. Come on. It's like you have to. It's like, I'm going to be in my class, so you're going to do it too. I'm like, okay, fine (Imani, 2nd interview, 10:46).

Jayden took honors courses for the first two years of high school. He noticed he was successful in those courses and that his friends in AP courses did not seem to have more work than he did.

> I felt like because I handled my other classes well then I could probably handle AP well. So, cause all cuz like the first two years of high school was only taking like, honor classes because I didn't want to like have a workload from AP. And so, then when I realized that, I realized like I noticed like some AP students were getting less work than my honor classes. So, I was like, okay, I'm just gonna take AP (Jayden, 2nd interview, 21:05).

Interestingly, these decisional factors mirror the significant facilitating factors reported previously except for general interest in the content. While students find interest in the course content to be an encouraging factor, it was not included in the final decision-making factors. Additionally, family encouragement was not mentioned as an ultimately impactful factor, though it was reported as a facilitating factor. For students in AP courses, the ultimate decision to enroll relied on the college benefits, challenging courses, friends, and the encouragement of finding success in lower-level advanced courses, again reflecting the high impact of incentives and internal motivation factors.

Comments From Participants Not Enrolled in AP courses

Students who are not in AP courses cited several factors that affected their ultimate decision to not enroll in AP courses. Research question 1a asks, how do these barriers affect their decision to enroll in AP courses? These factors included: (1) fear of failing, (2) feeling out of place, (3) peer influence, (4) time commitment, (5) and one student reported that she felt her senior year was too late to start AP classes. Destiny and Kiara commented that fear of failing was

the deciding factor for them, which was not one of the top barriers reported by students not enrolled in AP courses, however, Destiny is still considering taking an AP course at some point,

> So when she kept mentioning it, it just like kept thinking in my mind like, maybe I'm not gonna be successful and I do have a fear of like failing. Sure. So, I didn't, I messed up on that one, but I do wanna take AP classes (Destiny, 2nd interview, 16:29).

Kiara also noted that failing an AP course could have negative consequences, "But I feel like because AP courses do drop your, your GPA badly and failing AP courses can really mess you up in college. I was like, I don't think I should take that big risk" (Kiara, 2nd interview, 17:31).

Similar to the barrier of not seeing many Black students in AP courses, Destiny also reported, "I just felt like I would be outta place and uncomfortable and it would just bring up like past memories that I tried to like bury" (Destiny, 2nd interview, 16:03). Destiny reported past experiences of being singled out and made to feel dumb by her teachers.

Peer influence was reported as a deciding factor for Simone, who had friends, "saying it was like stressful and hard because they are in the classes" (Simone, 2nd interview, 7:56).

Nevaeh cited the time commitment as the determining factor to not enroll, stating she was concerned it would take time away from family,

> Like if I wouldn't have enough time, it would kind of lower my motivation kind of not make me wanna do it if I wouldn't have enough time to, because then I wouldn't be able to finish it in time and then it would kind of just make me feel like I couldn't really do it in that moment. Um, and then just thinking about like the quality time that I can spend with my family. Like I would, I don't wanna remove just that time like right now to be able to just spend time with my family before I start a more complex schedule (Nevaeh, 2nd interview, 18:46).

Finally, Kyrie stated that she felt senior year was too late to start AP classes. Since she had not enrolled in any AP courses previously,

> She [teacher] was like, I think you have to do two or three years in an AP class, and you can't just do it the last year and expect to get it like that. So I was like, listen, I'm not trying to be my, my senior year busting myself to try to get a A, like, no. So I just took the easy route and I mean, I still respect this interview and everything, but I just feel like I won't do it (Kyrie, 2nd interview, 22:30).

She added that if she had this interview her sophomore year, "I would've definitely took an AP class, but I just feel like it was just a matter of timing for you (the interview)" (Kyrie, 2nd interview, 23:10).

Interestingly, the only deciding factor that mirrored reported barriers was time commitment. Though there was some relationship between feeling out of place and the lack of Black representation in AP, the nuances expressed in the comments provided distinction. For these students, the significant decision-making factors revolved around the difficulty of the course (e.g., fear of failing, time commitment, peer influence, and feeling like it is too late to jump in) and feeling out of place in AP courses.

Interview Context

It is a trepidatious task for a White male socialized in the deep south to engage in critical discussion about racialized experiences with high school students of color. I entered each interview with feelings of nervousness and fear of opening my mouth and saying the wrong thing or causing offense. Further, I feared that the participants would see me as "another White person" acting like they are going to fix things for the Black students. These feelings are evidenced in my observational field notes:

> I have the interview protocol in front of me. I have reviewed the questions and the introduction multiple times. I pick up the phone and call the student to the office. I can feel my heart rate increasing. I am nervous about this interview. I am afraid of how the student might react to some of the questions. My thoughts start racing about will I sound confident enough when I say that this interview is to get the student's perspective on accessing advanced courses as a Black student. I am nervous how the student will respond to the part of the introduction when I say that it can be difficult discussing race with me as a White, male, educator. I am also afraid of possible ramifications of doing this interview within the current political climate of the STOP WOKE act, as the interview asks questions directly related to racialized experiences (Field notes, 1st interview with Destiny, a non-AP student).

I noticed throughout the interviews, this fear and concern caused me to perhaps "water-down," or minimize the effect that race may have had on their experiences. This effect is apparent in some of my reflections and summaries following a participant comment when I would deflect or not comment on a racialized component of their statement. My avoidance of racialized experiences further demonstrates socialized biases (e.g., remnants of color-blindness, perceptions of Whiteness) within me that cause discomfort. While this was present throughout the interview process, I noticed I grew more comfortable with discussing racialized experiences.

However, in spite of my discomfort, the responses from the participants suggest that they desired a safe and trusting environment to explore their perceptions of life and the systems in which they live. As shown in some of the statements about relationships with educators to be shared, these students look for adults whom they trust enough and whom they perceive genuinely care about them to have a meaningful dialogue about their experiences. Throughout participant

responses, a genuine relationship outweighed the impact of the trusted adult's racial identity. Particularly, considering current societal and political movements, these students desired open conversation about their lived experiences. One participant, Jasmine, waited until the end of the 2nd interview to express herself:

> Interviewer: So, I just want to give you a moment to see if there was anything you felt you wanted to add that I might not have asked about.
>
> Jasmine: Not necessarily. This is more so political, so I don't know if I'm allowed to. <Interviewer: Sure.> I can. Okay. <Interviewer: Absolutely.> So
>
> Interviewer: I might not be able to respond to it or talk about it, but you're more than welcome to share.
>
> Jasmine: Okay. Well, I do not agree with… (Jasmine, AP student, 2nd interview, 20:00).

Participants expressed happiness that they were able to participate in the study and contemplate topics about race that many people tend to avoid discussing. Several reported that the interview provided a safe space for them to acknowledge and process many feelings that they have been pushing aside.

> Um, I really, I really kind of enjoyed opening up about certain things, cuz there's certain things that like, you kind of like keep to yourself and then like when you actually like, talk about what influences you in certain ways, then it makes you feel like a lot more open (Nevaeh, non-AP student, 2nd interview, 20:46).

And,

> It made me feel kind of, in a way kind of relieved to like finally start thinking about things and like, like having an actual thought process instead of just like pushing everything down. It made me realize that there's not a lot of Black teachers or Black

students in that environment, so [Destiny ended thought] (Destiny, non-AP student, 2nd interview, 6:27).

Though students expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to engage in difficult conversations about racialized experiences, and many stated that my racial identity did not affect their level of comfort, two students did comment about the difference my racial identity may have on their responses. Simone, a non-AP student commented that my racial identity would have an effect, “I would say yes because they would understand where I'm coming from for a lot of different things” (Simone, 2nd interview, 15:04). Anthony, an AP student, also commented on the relatability of an interviewer of color, “They could probably relate more to the interview than anybody else would” (Anthony, 2nd interview, 7:05). The other participants stated that my racial identity did not affect their interview responses. They commented that trustworthiness and genuineness were more important to them. Aaliyah, a non-AP student commented, "Even though you're from a different race, even though you're a male, it, I was totally comfortable. You're very relaxed and chilled and it was just a very good, you're a very good interviewer overall…” (Alliyah, 2nd interview, 26:43). She also added “…once I started talking to you, you started reassuring me. It was automatic comfort and relaxed and just an open conversation” (Aaliyah, 2nd interview, 27:13). Nicole, an AP student, reported that personality was more important to her, “I would say it has a lot to do with your personality. And I can say that anybody could be nice and calm when speaking and not putting pressure on people. And I feel like you did a good job” (Nicole, 2nd interview, 23:23). This reported level of comfort with me as an interviewer may be related to many of them experiencing mostly White teachers throughout their academic careers and identifying with a level of familiarity to the situation. For others, they may have socialized to the presence of White adult authority figures, and this seemed to be “business as usual”. Finally,

having an adult discuss personal racialized experiences in a genuine and honest way with gentle curiosity may have provided a level of comfort to share their harbored experiences.

Sharing the context of these interviews provides insight into the information shared and the lens through which the information was analyzed. The interview process when discussing significant personal experiences is an intimate journey that the interviewee and interviewer take to better understand each other. Because of this, my reflexivity and position within each interview is apparent.

Summary

Students in AP courses and not in AP courses reported significant facilitators and barriers in accessing AP courses. While there was some overlap between the two groups (i.e., time management as a barrier, family and peer encouragement and college benefits as facilitators), the top barrier and facilitators differed. Students in AP courses cited more college-related incentives, including college admissions and scholarships, and internally motivated facilitators of seeking a personal challenge, while students not in AP courses reported external motivators of family and teacher encouragement and college benefit as the top facilitators. Additionally, students in AP courses cited low self-confidence as the top barrier, while students not in AP courses reported negative perceptions of teachers, lack of Black representation in AP courses, and not knowing what AP courses are about as their top barriers. Notably, the most impactful factors mentioned by both groups revolved around internal perceptions and motivations. Students in AP courses reported that internal motivators of seeking a challenge, college benefits, and finding encouragement from success in an honors class, along with external motivation of peer encouragement, were the most impactful factors leading to their ultimate decision to enroll in

courses. Students not in AP courses reported fear of failing, feeling out of place, peer influence, concerns about time management, and a desire to have a non-stressful senior year.

The findings in this chapter suggest that both AP enrolled students and non-AP students recognize that there are experiences they have had that encourage or discourage their participation in AP courses. Comparing the two groups' experiences seems to suggest that while there are overlaps in some of the themes, students within AP courses may have channeled their internal drive for a challenge and college benefits to overcome the barriers mentioned by both groups. These findings have implications for school practices that are discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSSION

Bringing this study together, this chapter provides a review of the study and research questions, a summary of the findings from Chapter 4, and discusses how these findings connect to previous research and the theoretical frameworks of ecological theory and critical race theory (CRT). Following this synthesis, this chapter shares a validity framework (Tracy, 2010) to evaluate the quality of qualitative research. Finally, implications, limitations, and directions for future research are discussed.

Advanced Placement (AP) classes can provide many benefits to students. The rigorous curriculum gives students an academic challenge to expand their educational abilities and opportunities (Phillips & Lane, 2021; The College Board, 2014). However, students of color are significantly underrepresented in AP participation (The College Board, 2014). Research has investigated factors among students of color that predict participation and success in AP courses, suggesting that family SES and prior academic achievement (Dixson et al., 2017; Ndura et al., 2003), and racial barriers (i.e., residential segregation, culturally insensitive school policies, institutional biases) impact students' ability to access and choose to take AP courses (Greer et al., 2018; Jeffries & Silvernail, 2017; Shores et al., 2020; Walker & Pearsall, 2012).

This study addressed a gap in the research using qualitative interviews developed from a foundation of ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and Critical Race Theory (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017) to investigate Black students' perceived experiences regarding the accessibility

of AP courses (Kolluri, 2018; Ricciardi & Winsler, 2021). The research questions asked in this study were:

1) What factors do Black students perceive inhibit them from pursuing AP courses?

1a) How do these barriers affect their decision to enroll in AP courses?

2) What factors do Black students perceive encourage them to pursue AP courses?

2a) How do these facilitating factors affect their decision to enroll in AP courses?

To answer these questions, 16 Black and African American high school students (8 enrolled in AP courses and 8 not enrolled) were identified as eligible for AP courses based on a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Participants (46% of invited students) who returned parental permission forms and gave assent completed two interviews and a writing prompt to provide their perceptions of barriers and facilitators to AP course enrollment.

Discussion of Findings

Interview responses were inductively coded and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Findings represent the perceptions that Black and African American students have about barriers and facilitators for enrolling in AP courses. A presentation of these themes can be found in Chapter 4.

Barriers

The first research questions asked about the barriers Black high school students perceive impact their ability to enroll in AP courses. There was some overlap between the groups in reported barriers, specifically with regard to feelings of low self-confidence, and challenges with time management. Top barriers reported by students in AP were related to internal abilities (e.g., low self-confidence, time management, and academic workload). Students who were not enrolled in AP courses reported environmental context factors as the most significant barriers

(e.g., perceptions of teachers, limited number of Black students in AP courses, not knowing what AP courses are like).

Though these barriers may seem to be different, there could common underlying factors that connect these top barriers. Students within this study reported experiences situations where they have been made to feel dumb or stupid when asking a teacher for clarification and situations where their race has played into discipline (Simone, 1st interview, 35:49). These experiences with teachers can have a detrimental impact on a student's perceived self-confidence. Further, students reported deleterious effects of observing the dearth of Black representation in advanced courses, commenting that they struggle with the impression that there may be an intelligence explanation for the underrepresentation (Jada, 1st interview, 56:28). Additionally, some students reported having responsibilities outside of school to support their families (Serenity, 2nd interview, 3:34). Finally, without historical familial experiences with AP courses or advanced curricula, many students are unsure of what AP courses entail (Aaliyah, 2nd interview, 9:56). Thus, recalling their racialized experiences with teachers and recognizing the lack of Black students in AP courses, they assume that AP courses are not designed for people who share their identity.

The most impactful barriers that students who are not in AP courses report as leading them to their ultimate decision to not enroll AP courses revolved around feelings of incapability. These factors included fear of failing, feeling out of place, peer statements of stress, time commitment, and one student's perception that it was too late to enroll. However, the student who reported that it was too late to enroll in AP courses stated that if she had been encouraged to take an AP course in her sophomore year, she probably would have (Kyrie, 2nd interview, 23:10).

Facilitators

The second research question asked about what factors to Black students perceive encourage or facilitate enrollment into AP course. Though there was some overlap between the two groups of students with respect to the importance of college benefits and peer encouragement, findings in this study show that the top factors students in AP courses reported were incentives for enrollment (e.g., college benefits) and internal motivators (e.g., personal challenge, interest in content) whereas students outside of AP courses reported external encouragement and validation (e.g., parent and teacher encouragement) and then incentives (e.g., college benefits) as top factors. Notably, the effectiveness of encouragement from adults depended upon the relationship the student reported with the adult. Encouragement from teachers who were perceived as genuinely caring and empathetic carried more weight for students than from teachers who were perceived to not like their job, rude, or discriminatory in their practice.

The most impactful factors that students who enrolled in AP reported led them to their ultimate enrollment decision revolved around internal motivation and incentives. Students reported that personal challenge, college benefits, peer encouragement, and finding success in honors-level courses were the impactful factors that led the students to make the decision to enroll.

These findings suggest that students who are AP course and who are not both recognize that there are factors that encourage and factors that discourage them from access AP courses. For students who overcame their perceived barriers, it seems that there is a strong sense of internal motivation and drive to persevere despite barriers. For those who are not in AP courses, there seems to be a significant need for external validation, encouragement, and information about AP courses. This encouragement is rooted in genuine and meaningful relationships that

validate the students' abilities and ensures a supportive environment for attempting challenging courses.

Connection to Previous Research

Historically, AP courses offered high-achieving White students from elite families access to advanced college-level work prior to entering post-secondary institutions (Schneider, 2009). In the 1960s and 1970s, calls for AP courses to democratized (Rothschild, 1999) led the College Board to expand access to minoritized students (Finn, Jr. & Scanlan, 2019). Further, many states began paying the exam fees for students (Finn, Jr. & Scanlan, 2019). This opened the doors for students from low SES backgrounds to access AP courses. However, while the College Board was democratizing advanced curricula, White families were moving away from integrated schools and began seeking for other advanced curricula (Reardon & Owens, 2014) in a process termed, "white flight" (Ladson-billings & Tate IV, 1995).

This expansion of AP courses to students of color and the subsequent "white flight" has had deleterious effects on access, sense of belonging, and internalized beliefs of inadequacy. This is evident in many of the barriers cited by the students in this study. Significant barriers (e.g., low self-confidence, not knowing what AP courses are about, perceptions of teachers, feeling out of place) are related to the historical discrimination, denial of access, and current school environments that place Black students on the "outside" of advanced student consideration.

Previous research has identified causes for the disproportionate representation of Black students in AP courses finding connections with SES levels and academic preparedness that describe a significant amount of variance in participation (Dixson et al., 2017; Klopfenstein, 2004; Ndura et al., 2003; Ricciardi & Winslar, 2021). Other studies have found institutional

policies (e.g., tracking, discipline), teacher training (e.g., biases, cultural responsiveness), environment (e.g., sense of belonging, acceptance), relationships (teachers, parents, peers), and racial identity (only student of color in class, perceptions of Black students in AP courses) play a significant role in AP access (Greer et al., 2018; Jeffries & Silvernail, 2017; Shores et al., 2020; Walker & Pearsall, 2012; Whiting & Ford, 2009)

This study adds to the existing literature in several ways. First, findings in this study further confirm the significant impact that the school environment, relationships, racial identity, and teacher training have on the perceived accessibility of AP courses for Black students. Several of the top cited barriers reflect these factors.

Second, this study goes deeper into what some of these factors mean to the students. Encouragement from family and teachers was cited as a significant facilitator. However, the value of the encouragement was contingent on the quality of the relationship with the teacher. If the student perceived the teacher to be genuinely caring, the encouragement was meaningful and impactful. However, teacher training around cultural responsiveness may impact the ability and willingness of teachers to develop meaningful relationships with students from diverse backgrounds. This study also adds more meaning to the internalized beliefs Black students have and develop as they realize the underrepresentation of Black students in AP courses, including beliefs about racial differences in cognitive abilities.

Finally, this study adds to the literature by demonstrating the difficulty and nuances of discussing race with Black students as a White male adult. Throughout the interviews and shown in some of the quotes in chapter 4, students repeatedly stated that they do not want to say it is about race, or that it is a racialized experience. This hesitancy may be related to my presence in the room as a White male adult. The current political climate also makes discussions around

racialization difficult, and many people engage in these discussions with trepidation. This hesitancy may also reflect the student's fatigue of living in a racialized society (Allen et al., 2022) and acceptance of racialization as the norm (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). As a White adult male who has benefited from systems that exist to minimize my whiteness, I enter these racialized conversations with vigor and energy towards change. I am like an ice hockey player fresh off the bench skating with players who have been on the ice the whole game. I am eager to discuss these topics due to my privileged experiences and the students I interviewed are tired from living in a society that consistently reminds them of their racialization.

Connection to Theoretical Frameworks

The interview questions for this study were developed from the theoretical frameworks of ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and Critical Race Theory (CRT; Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). The interview questions (see Appendices E and F) recognize that students live within multiple interacting spheres that impact their lived experiences and the decisions they make. The questions also frame their racialized experiences as a socially constructed concept that directly impacts their life and perception of self. The introduction of each interview was carefully worded to navigate the tension of anti-essentialism (there is more differences within racial groups than between) and the unique voice of color (Black individuals can speak with authority about Black lived experiences; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

The responses show connections to these theoretical frameworks. Barret (2023) discuss the student's mesosystem as the connections and interactions between the major settings that students exist in. These settings include parents at home, teachers at school, and peers at school. The mesosystem recognizes that these settings do not exist in isolation and are in constant interaction. The students in the study commented on the interactions between them and their

teachers, their teachers and their peers, and between them and their peers. They discussed how the interactions the observe between their teachers and peers impacts their relationship with those groups. Further, students discussed the interactions between home and school, demonstrating there may be a disconnect within that interaction. Students also commented on their exosystem, which Barret (2023) explains as the neighborhood, social media, institutional policies, and local, state, and national politics. This concern was evident when Jasmine took the last few minutes of the second interview to discuss her perceptions of the impact recent legislation has had.

Several tenets of CRT were evident within the interview context and in the student responses. Throughout students' responses, the ordinariness of racism was apparent. Students commented multiple times about it is normal for White students to be in AP courses, but it is notable when a Black student takes and AP course. Society expects White students to succeed. When a Black student finds success, it is seen as abnormal and the students in this study were perceptive of that. Though race is a social construct with no differences between race rooted in biology, several students have questioned if this is true. Through observing the AP courses and other advanced curricula, they have questioned if there are real intelligence and moral differences and expressed guilt for having these questions.

Using a lens of CRT to investigate the societal and educational systems within which these students exist allows for a critical analysis of the racial impact that seemingly "color-blind" policies and practices may have on students of color. From a broad perspective, institutions (e.g., The College Board/ Advanced Placement courses, educational organizations) can be perceived as not racist. Further, these institutions have made significant changes over the past 70 years to counteract the harm that de jure racism has caused students of color and all students in general.

However, though explicitly racist policies and practices may no longer be codified, there continue to be practices and policies that led to disparate and disproportionate access, opportunities, and outcomes. Though the institutions do not explicitly espouse racist ideology, complacency with policies and practices that have been identified as having a negative racial impact implicate these institutions in racism. Some policies and practices that have been identified as having a racial impact include academic program tracking, gifted eligibility, discipline, home-school communication, teacher biases, dress codes, and invitations to participate in accelerated curricula. Institutions complacent in, and not critically evaluative of, such policies and practices are implicated in racism that directly harms individual students, as shared in some of the findings in this study.

Validity of Qualitative Research

A concern many researchers express about qualitative research is the validity of the data. Much of social qualitative data is found within the lived experiences of individuals, and racialized research is influenced by the biases, knowledge, and beliefs of the researcher and participants. Further, qualitative research, by its nature, is limited in generalizability. To provide a framework for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative data, Tracy (2010) put forth the "Big-Tent" criteria for excellent qualitative data. These eight criteria include: (1) worthy topic, (2) rich rigor, (3) sincerity, (4) credibility, (5) resonance, (6) significant contribution, (7) ethical, and (8) meaning coherence (Tracy, 2010).

Though it will be in the eyes of the reader to determine if this research study has met the quality benchmarks set forth by Tracy (2010), these criteria have been considered in the investigation and analysis of this study. This study is rooted in a worthy topic of underrepresentation of Black students in AP courses. There is a significant push to reduce

disparity, and this study adds to the literature in understanding what students perceive are the barriers. Rich rigor is met through the use of established theoretical constructs, months spent meeting with each participant twice in the high school setting. My experience as a high school counselor and AP coordinator for 6 years adds to my time spent with high-achieving high school students during this study. The analysis used a rigorous reflexive thematic analysis method. The approach to this study was sincere, marked by self-reflexivity and transparency. Credibility was met through showing rather than telling. Student quotes were used extensively, and thick descriptions provided cultural and environmental context to the reported barriers and facilitators.

Resonance will be determined by the readers and evaluators. However, the intent of this study was to move educational decision-makers, leaders, and instructors to evaluate practices that impact Black students' perceptions of AP course accessibility. The reported facilitators and barriers also have an amount of generalizability. Teacher and parent encouragement and relationships improve the sense of belonging and self-perception across student populations and settings. This study also makes a significant contribution through practical and heuristically significant findings by providing practical applications that educators can use to further improve disparate participation and fodder for future research into the significance of and ways to address reported barriers. Contribution is also made through methodological significance by expanding the qualitative research base in underrepresented students perceived barriers and facilitators to AP access.

Ethical considerations were met through anonymity within the research study and on the school campus. School personnel were not aware of which students were selected for participation. Further, the interviews were conducted in private spaces so that responses were confidential. I was also transparent with participants about my identities, my previous

experience, and the purpose of the study, ensuring they had autonomy in participation and choosing what they share. Finally, meaningful coherence was met by maintaining continuity through the research study through theoretical orientation, goals, research questions, analysis, and reporting.

Implications

The findings in this study have some significant implications for improving the accessibility of AP courses for students of color. Though many states and the College Board have taken steps to remove barriers (e.g., availability, cost), disparate participation in AP courses suggests that barriers continue to exist for students of color. Research confirms that such barriers can negatively impact Black students' perceptions of AP course accessibility. The findings of this study confirm and expand on these perceived barriers and presents implications regarding the role of the school to reduce the impact of the perceived barriers.

Relationships

A highly cited facilitator for enrolling in AP courses by students who are not enrolled in AP courses is encouragement from adults with home they have genuine and meaningful relationships. Barriers cited by both groups include low self-confidence and negative perceptions of teachers. This finding is interesting in light of current legal and cultural pushes against social-emotional learning and culturally-responsive practices (Will & Najarro, 2022). However, outcomes for schools that foster deep and meaningful connections with minoritized students show success in academic outcomes (Leverett et al., 2022).

Though the effects of teacher-student relationships on academic and behavioral outcomes have been examined (e.g., Decker et al., 2007), high school students in this study reported that teachers with whom they feel like colleagues and who they believe respect them as whole beings

rather than just students had the most significant impact on their feelings of belongingness, self-confidence, and likelihood to take AP courses. These findings underscore the necessity of teachers and educators to promote system-wide practices that encourage and promote deep and meaningful relationships with students.

Communication

Communication was cited by students within AP courses and outside of AP courses as an area of concern. Though explicitly reported as a barrier for students not in AP courses, the majority of students reported that the school did not adequately share information about AP course availability, benefits, or content. While I was a school counselor, we delivered an annual presentation to 8th grade students about transitioning to high school and an additional presentation to students in advanced middle school courses about the possibility of taking AP courses. These quick didactic presentations for 8th grade students are seemingly ineffective at promoting information retention. Similar presentations are delivered annually to high school students. These presentations are reflected in some of the participants' reports of people talking to them but not encouraging them to take AP courses. Additionally, though students may not be aware every time communication is sent home, nearly all participants reported that their parents did not hear about AP courses from the school. Given that parental encouragement was reported as the top facilitator for students not enrolled in AP courses, this seems to be a significant area schools can target to promote AP course enrollment.

Schools might prioritize communicating about AP courses to students through their core classes beginning as early as 6th grade, so that they are aware of AP courses and are better prepared to enroll in 9th grade AP courses if they choose. Schools also might create a culture throughout classes and across campus that promotes information and excitement for accelerated

curricula, including AP courses. Additionally, parental communication should be highlighted and conducted through multiple methods to maximize the likelihood of parental awareness. Finally, one participant (Nevaeh) recommended providing prospective AP students with the syllabi for AP courses to demystify and inform the students what to expect in the AP courses, "if they give it to you before you can read it over and kind of have an idea and then you could decide if you wanted to take it or not" (Nevaeh, 2nd interview, 16:47). This may be one option to explore further demystifying the course options for all youth and families.

Black Representation

Representation was widely reported as a barrier for AP enrollment. Students report that seeing AP classrooms with only one or two Black students makes them less likely to feel like they belong in that class. As mentioned previously, many Black students, through historical discrimination and current observations, have internalized the belief that real differences between Black students and White students (e.g., intelligence) are the reason for the disparity. When students see a representative number of Black students in an AP course, they reported feeling proud, encouraged, and motivated to take rigorous courses. Nevaeh expressed this sentiment, "I feel almost, it's almost like proud because it, like, it kind of shows that like, people like me can do anything" (Nevaeh, 1st interview, 50:52), as did Kiara, "So I will honestly look up on them cause they're actually trying to do or trying to get to what they want to be" (Kiara, 1st interview, 8:48). Further, students reported being more likely to engage in the course content and discussion when there is a better representation of Black students in the course.

Though not mentioned as a barrier, another cited concern with AP courses is the lack of Black teachers. Several students reported not having an academic experience with a Black teacher. One participant expressed sadness when she came to this realization,

> That's, it's kind of making me sad. I've never, um, even in elementary school, there was only ever one Black teacher. Um, but I don't know how it would be. I, I think, I don't know, I think there's just always that comfort of seeing someone of color (Jada, 1st interview, 1:02:37).

Representation goes beyond the students in the seat. It includes seeing people who identify with them in positions of success. In my experience as a high school counselor, I can recall three Black teachers, two of whom taught remedial math and reading, and one who was an exceptional student education (ESE) case manager. We also had a Black counselor and a Black administrator. The population of the remedial classes also had an overrepresentation of Black students. It seems, related to responses in this study, this representation tells students that they are either in the remedial courses or they are teaching the remedial courses.

Though there is a current dearth of teacher applicants (53% increase in open positions between 2021 and 2022; Edlund & Poulisse, 2022) and the need for teachers of color have been discussed (Heubeck, 2020), schools should continue prioritizing recruitment of teachers of color and mindfully consider the ramifications of the position for which they are hired.

Implications for School Psychologists

Domains 5 and 8 of the NASP (2020) practice model require school psychologists to engage in "school-wide practices that promote learning" (p. 6) that use "equitable practices for diverse student populations" (p. 8). A core component of the school psychologist's role is consultation with school leaders and teacher regarding the implementation of evidence-based practices that fulfill these domains. By understanding the factors that Black students perceived to be important in pursing enrollment in accelerated courses, school psychologists can coordinate with leadership and teachers to bolster communication practices, involve families in information-

sharing and decision-making, and problem-solve around improving teacher-student relationships, and recruiting and retaining teachers of color. School psychologists have a broad range of skills regarding systems-change. Equipped with knowledge about student perceptions, school psychologists can utilize their skills to change the school building policies and practices to promote the academic achievement of underrepresented students.

These implications are not being shared as a guaranteed strategy to remediate the underrepresentation in AP courses. These implications are shared as a starting point for schools whose practitioners and leaders want to begin addressing the disparity in their schools and as additional considerations for schools that have been working to address the underrepresentation. Some of the recommendations are easier and quicker to implement (e.g., providing AP syllabi, parent communication strategies) while others will take more systemic work and effort (e.g., recruitment of teachers of color, promoting genuine and meaningful teacher-student relationships). The purpose is for schools to recognize the need for adjustments and have some strategies to begin the hard work of change.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Considerations

This study is not without limitations. Qualitative research, by nature of the methodology, has limitations with generalization. However, as expressed in chapter 1 and chapter 3, the purpose of qualitative research is not generalizability, though there are aspects that can be logical generalized to other students and settings (e.g., impact of teacher relationships). The purpose is to understand a particular experience expressed by a particular subject. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to identify patterns of meaning and shared experiences among Black high school students that generates transferable knowledge.

A limitation to this study is the underrepresentation of male students in the sample. Due to the low number of male students in the eligible population, pure random selection reduces the odds of a representational number of male participants being selected for participation. In this study, eligible male students comprised 33% of the eligible students, but only 21% of students invited to participate and 19% of the sample. Thus, oversampling male students would have provided more proportionate representation in the sample. Future research should consider adjusting the recruitment strategy after identifying which groups are underrepresented in the population to promote proportionate recruitment and stratify the selection process to be mindful of proportionality in the resulting sample.

An additional limitation to this study is the variable nature of student course schedules. The distinction between "enrolled in AP" or "not enrolled in AP" may have been more fluid than this researcher realized, and students may have enrolled in another type of college-level coursework such as dual enrollment (DE) courses following eligibility determination. Case in point, at the time of eligibility determination, Nicole, an AP-enrolled student, had taken an AP course during her 9th grade year and, at the time of eligibility determination, was enrolled in regular and honors courses for her 11th grade year, which made her eligible for participation in this study. However, following parental permission and student assent, Nicole revealed during the course of the interview that she had received a schedule change from honors level courses into DE courses for the current year. Because she had previously taken an AP course and was early in her DE courses, she remained in the study as a valuable source of perspective regarding the AP course she had taken and her decisions not to reenroll in AP courses. It is unclear if other participants, including those in the non-enrolled in AP group, had also enrolled into DE courses at the time of the interviews.

One delimitation to this study is a lack of classroom-based observational data. Observational data might provide a richer description of teacher-student relationships and negative student-peer interactions that have been cited as barriers and facilitators to AP course enrollment. Future research could include classroom observations to triangulate interview data.

A consideration in this study is the tension that exists between different racial backgrounds when discussing racialized experiences. The findings shared in this study were elicited within an interview context that involved a White interviewer and Black youth. As such, this racial tension may have impacted the comfort and trust the students placed in me as an interviewer. Historically, White researchers have betrayed the trust from people of color. Thus, presenting myself as a White researcher interviewing Black youth on their experiences, it is possible that there was an inherent distrust in my intentions with assumptions of ulterior motives, that I am using their experiences for personal gain (i.e., interest convergence [Delgado & Stefancic, 2017]). Though most students commented that they felt safe and found me trustworthy as an interviewer, two students commented that they would have felt more comfortable and understood if I was a Black researcher. These perceptions are understandable and valid. I have had different interactions with societal structures than they have, and my lived experiences do not mirror theirs. While students expressed comfort with me as an interviewer, richer experiential information may have been collected by a Black researcher. Thus, the inherit racial tension is a limitation of this study.

Future Research

Recommendations for future research include using observational data within a similar study to triangulate data gathered from interviews. Additionally, including teacher interviews

and perspectives would provide a broader perspective to add into the lived experiences of Black high school students.

I also recommend using a writing prompt procedure as done in this study with youth participating in research on racialized experiences. Though Black youth are living within a racialized environment, they may not formally consider the insidious effects of their racialized experiences. Once the youth are primed to consider their racialized experiences, they may find having time and space to process before further questions to be beneficial to grapple with their perceptions.

A research study could consider a teacher coaching intervention to improve teacher-student relationships and its effect on student perceptions of the teacher-student relationship and their abilities. In this study, classrooms could be placed into intervention groups and control groups. Student perceptions could be collected prior to intervention, during intervention, and after intervention. Changes in student perceptions between the groups could be compared to see if the coaching intervention had an impact on student perceptions of the teacher-student relationship and their academic abilities. These recommendations for future research build on the literature and the findings in this study to move beyond recording experiences to affecting change for students.

An additional investigation for future research would be to conduct a similar study with non-minoritized students. This investigation would see to what extent the themes in this study are similar or different from that which non-minoritized students report. Information from such a study would inform whether there are similar needs that could be addressed with universal strategies for all students or if students would benefit from strategies more tailored to their unique barriers and facilitators.

Conclusion

Black high school students are historically and currently underrepresented in AP courses. While there are a number of explanations for this underrepresentation, few studies have allowed Black high school students to share their perspectives on the facilitators and barriers to AP course enrollment. This study used a qualitative interview method to understand what students perceive encourage or discourage them from taking AP courses and how the perceptions may be different for students in AP courses and for student not in AP courses. For students who are in AP courses, they cited facilitators and barriers related to incentives, internal perceptions, and time management concerns. Students not enrolled in AP courses cite facilitators and barriers related to external encouragement and relationships, lack of representation in AP courses, and lack of information about AP courses. Limitations to this study include a lack of generalizability, lack of observational data, and inherit tension between the racial identities of the researcher and participants. Recommendations provided encourage schools to promote meaningful teacher-student relationships, improve school-home communication practices, and prioritize recruiting teachers of color.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval

APPROVAL

July 13, 2022

Austin Cole

Dear Austin Cole:

On 7/13/2022, the IRB reviewed and approved the following protocol:

Application Type:	Initial Study
IRB ID:	STUDY004298
Review Type:	Expedited 6,7
Title:	A Qualitative Study of Facilitators and Barriers Perceived by Black Students and Their Effect on Advanced Placement Course Enrollment in High School
Funding:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Approved Protocol and Consent(s)/Assent(s):	• A. Cole Protocol; • Adult Consent; • Parental Permission; • Student Assent Approved study documents can be found under the 'Documents' tab in the main study workspace. Use the stamped consent found under the 'Last Finalized' column under the 'Documents' tab.

Within 30 days of the anniversary date of study approval, confirm your research is ongoing by clicking Confirm Ongoing Research in BullsIRB, or if your research is complete, submit a study closure request in BullsIRB by clicking Create Modification/CR.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Research Involving Children as Subjects: 45 CFR 46.404

This research involving children as participants was approved under 45 CFR 46.404: Research not involving greater than minimal risk to children is presented.

Requirements for Assent and/or Permission by Parents or Guardians: 45 CFR 46.408

Permission of one parent is sufficient. Assent is required of all children as outlined in the IRB application.

Sincerely,

Myah Luna
IRB Research Compliance Administrator

Appendix B: Parental Permission Form

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

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Parental Permission for a Child to Participate in Research

Information for parents to consider before allowing your child to take part in this research study

Title: *A Qualitative Study of Facilitators and Barriers Perceived by Black Students and Their Effect on Advanced Placement Course Enrollment in High School*

Study #_004298_____

Overview: We are asking you to allow your child to take part in a research study. The following information is being presented to help you and your child decide whether or not your child should participate in a research study. The sections in this Overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information is provided in the remainder of the document.

When we use the term "you" in this document, we are referring to your child.

Study Staff: This study is being led by Austin Cole who is a graduate student at the University of South Florida. This person is called the Principal Investigator. He is being guided in this research by Professor Shannon Suldo, PhD. Other approved research staff may act on behalf of the Principal Investigator.

Study Details: This study is being conducted Wesley Chapel High School. A total of 15-20 students will participate in this study. The purpose of the study is to understand how factors that Black and African American students feel encourage or discourage them from taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses impact their decision to enroll in AP courses. Information from this study will help schools improve access to AP courses for Black and African American students. Participation in this study include two 45-60 interviews with a writing prompt between the interviews. In the interviews, you will be asked about your educational experiences, including interactions with teachers and classmates, home experiences, and your perspective of navigating through the school environment as a Black/African American student. The writing prompt will ask you to reflect on factors that may have encouraged and discouraged you from enrolling in AP courses and write about how those factors impacted your enrollment decision. Both interviews will be audiotaped for later transcription.

Participants: You are being asked to take part because your school records have identified you as a Black or African American student, you are in 9th, 10th, 11th, or 12th grade, and you have demonstrated academic success based on your GPA (3.00 or higher). It is important to understand the perspectives of Black students, the factors they feel either encourage or discourage AP enrollment, and how these factors impact their enrollment decision. The unique perspectives and information that you share through these interviews will help schools improve access to AP courses for all students.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you start. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your student status, relationship with your school, course grade, recommendations, or access to future courses.

Benefits, Compensation, and Risk: I am unsure if you will receive any direct benefits your participation. You will be compensated $30 in store gift cards for your participation. If you choose to withdraw from the study, you will be compensated a $15 store gift card for each interview you completed. This research is considered minimal risk, meaning that risks involved in participating in this study are the same as the risks that you may face in daily life. Additionally, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, there is a risk of transmission of the novel coronavirus from these procedures, and the I cannot guarantee that you will not be exposed to the virus. To reduce the risk of exposure and transmission, I will adhere to the COVID-19 safety protocols recommended and mandated by the school and school district.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

Study Procedures:

This study will include the following activities:

- *A 45-60 minute one-on-one interview:* During this interview, I will ask questions about your experiences of academic support at home and school, and your relationships with your parents/caregivers, teachers, and peers.
- *A writing prompt to be completed before the next meeting:* This writing prompt will ask you to reflect on your academic experiences and write about factors that you feel encouraged or discouraged you from taking AP courses, and how those factors impacted your decision to enroll or not.
- *A second 45-60 minute one-on-one interview:* This interview will occur about 2-3 weeks after the first interview. In this interview, I will ask questions about your writing prompt response and about the interview experience.
- All of the interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes. Before we begin each interview, I will ask if you consent to being recorded. Only myself and my supervising professor will have access to these recordings. Recordings without any identifying information may be given to a research assistant to help transcribe the interview. However, no identifying information will be provided. These recordings will be kept in a secure digital folder for at least 5 years after the research is completed and reported. At that time, the files will be deleted and destroyed.

Total Number of Participants

About 15-20 students will take part in this study.

Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You do not have to participate in this research study. You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to

participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate, not to participate, or to withdraw will not affect your student status, relationship with your school, course grade, recommendations, or access to future courses.

Benefits

I am unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. However, you may find some questions I ask may upset you. If so, I will tell you and your parents or guardian about other people who may be able to help you with these feelings. Also, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, there is a risk of transmission of the novel coronavirus from these procedures, and I cannot guarantee that you will not be exposed to the virus. To reduce the risk of exposure and transmission, I will adhere to the COVID-19 safety protocols recommended and mandated by the school and school district. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation

You will be compensated $30 in store gift cards if you complete all the scheduled study visits. If you withdraw for any reason from the study before completion you will be compensated $15 in store gift cards for each interview you complete.

Costs

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

I will do my best to keep your records private and confidential. I cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator and the supervising professor.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research. This includes: District Schoolboard of Pasco County (DSPC), the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP).
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, and staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

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Your information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will NOT be used or distributed for future research studies.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Austin Cole at or email at . If you have questions about your rights, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at or contact by email at .

Consent for My Child to Participate in this Research Study

I freely give my permission to let my child take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to let my child take part in research. I have received a signed copy of this form to take with me.

_____ _____
Signature of **Parent** of Child Taking Part in Study Date

_____
Printed Name of **Parent** of Child Taking Part in Study

_____
Printed Name of the **Child** Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent and Research Authorization

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

_____ _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent Date

_____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix C: Student Assent Form

Assent of Children to Participate in Research

Study # _004298_____

Title of study*: A Qualitative Study of Facilitators and Barriers Perceived by Black Students and Their Effect on Advanced Placement Course Enrollment in High School*

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

You are being asked to take part in a research study about factors that Black and African American students feel encourage or discourage them from taking Advanced Placement courses. You are being asked to take part in this research study because your school records have identified you as a Black or African American student, you are in 9th, 10th, 11th, or 12th grade, and you have demonstrated academic success based on your GPA (3.00 or higher). If you take part in this study, you will be one of about 20 people at this site.

Who is doing this study?

The person in charge of this study is Austin Cole. He is being guided in this research by Professor Shannon Suldo, PhD. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge.

What is the purpose of this study?

By doing this study, I hope to understand how factors that Black and African American students feel encourage or discourage them from taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses impact their decision to enroll in AP courses. Information from this study will help schools improve access to AP courses for Black and African American students.

Where is the study going to take place and how long will it last?

The study will take place at Wesley Chapel High School. You will be asked to participate in 2 visits which will take about 45-60 minutes each. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 2.5 hours over the next month.

What will you be asked to do?

- *A 45-60 minute one-on-one interview:* During this interview, I will ask questions about your experiences of academic support at home and school, and your relationships with parents/caregivers, teachers, and peers.
- *A writing prompt to be completed before the next meeting:* This writing prompt will ask you to reflect on your academic experiences and write about factors that you feel encouraged or discouraged you from taking AP courses, and how those factors impacted your decision to enroll or not.
- *A second 45-60 minute one-on-one interview:* This interview will occur about 2-3 weeks after the first interview. In this interview, I will ask questions about your writing prompt response and about the interview experience.
- All of the interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes. Before we begin each interview, I will ask if you consent to being recorded. Only myself and my supervising professor

will have access to these recordings. Recordings without any identifying information may be given to a research assistant to help transcribe the interview. However, no identifying information will be provided. These recordings will be kept in a secure digital folder for at least 5 years after the research is completed and reported. At that time, the files will be deleted and destroyed.

What things might happen if you participate?

To the best of my knowledge, your participation in this study will not harm you. However, you may find some questions I ask may upset you. If so, I will tell you and your parents or guardian about other people who may be able to help you with these feelings. Also, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, there is a risk of transmission of the novel coronavirus from these procedures, and I cannot guarantee that you will not be exposed to the virus. To reduce the risk of exposure and transmission, I will adhere to the COVID-19 safety protocols recommended and mandated by the school and school district.

Is there benefit to me for participating?

We cannot promise that you will receive benefit from taking part in this research study.

What other choices do I have if I do not participate?

You do not have to participate in this research study.

Do I have to take part in this study?

You should talk with your parents or guardian and others about taking part in this research study. If you do not want to take part in the study, that is your decision. You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer.

Will I receive any compensation for taking part in this study?

You will receive $30 in store gift cards for taking part in this study. If you stop participating before the study is over, the payment you receive will be based on the amount of time you were in the study.

Who will see the information about me?

Your information will be added to the information from other people taking part in the study so no one will know who you are.

Can I change my mind and quit?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to change your mind later. No one will think badly of you if you decide to stop participating. Also, the people who are running this study may need for you to stop. If this happens, they will tell you when to stop and why.

What if I have questions?

You can ask questions about this study at any time. You can talk with your parents, guardian or other adults about this study. You can talk with the person who is asking you to volunteer by calling Austin Cole at or emailing at . If you think of other questions later, you can ask them. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant you can also call the USF IRB at or contact the IRB by email at

Assent to Participate

I understand what the person conducting this study is asking me to do. I have thought about this and agree to take part in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____	_____
Name of person agreeing to take part in the study	Date

Signature of child agreeing to take part in the study: _____

_____	_____
Printed name & Signature of person providing Information (assent) to subject	Date

Appendix D: Demographics Survey

Student ID: _____
Date: _____
School: _____

Q1. What grade are you in?

- 9th
- 10th
- 11th
- 12th

Q2. How do you identify your gender?

_____

Q3. How do you describe your ethnicity?

_____

Q4. How old are you?

_____

Q5. What grade did you start at this high school?

- 9th
- 10th
- 11th

Q6. What grade were you in when you first came to this district/county?

_____

Q7. What schools did you attend before coming to this school?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q8. If you were to buy lunch, would you pay full price or would you receive free or reduced lunch price?

- Full Price
- Free/Reduced Price

Q9. Who lives at home with you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix E: Interview #1 Protocol

Interviewer: _____
Student ID: _____
Date: _____
School: _____

Procedures and Questions for Individual Interview #1:
Family, School, and Peer Impact on AP Course Selection

Instructions

- Introduction to Interviewer and purpose of interviews:
  - *Hi! My name is Austin Cole, and I am a graduate student in School Psychology at USF. I am conducting a study to better understand the perspectives of Black students regarding enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP). I was a high school counselor for 6 years and the AP coordinator for 5 of those years. During this time, I noticed that while there were many highly successful Black students, only a few of them were signing up for AP courses. This underrepresentation of Black students in AP courses does not reflect an inability to be successful on the student's part, but rather that other factors impact students' invitations and decisions to enroll in AP courses or not. Because of this experience, I am passionate about improving AP course accessibility for Black students and all students of color. To work towards this goal, it is important to hear the perspectives of Black students and their lived experiences within the educational system.*
  - *Specifically, I am interested in hearing about your experiences in school, from elementary grades until now, your relationships with classmates, educators, and families, and what led you to decide whether to take AP courses or not.*
- Interview Overview
  - *For the next hour or so, I will ask you questions about different experiences you have had at home and school. This first interview will be a kind of "getting to know you" type of conversation. I would like to hear your perspective as you think about and answer the questions. Remember, throughout these interviews, I am here to listen to your experiences and perspectives. I won't judge your responses, tell you how you should feel, think, or act, or give advice. Further, everything discussed today will be kept confidential (private) to the extent of the law. Your specific responses will not be shared with your teachers, parents, or any other adult. However, if you report plans to hurt yourself or someone else, or report that someone is hurting you, I will have to let your school counselor know in order to make sure you stay safe. Additionally, I will be recording this conversation and future interviews so that I can be present in our conversation rather than writing in a notepad the whole time you are*

talking. Once I have typed out our conversation, you will not be identified by name.

- *Finally, I understand that it may be difficult having a conversation about race and education with me. I identify as a White Male adult who was an educator for several years. I also identify as an advocate for students and a passionate ally for racial justice. Even so, it can still be challenging discussing race with someone from a different racial background. I understand that, and that is ok and normal. All I ask is that you do your best to be open and honest with me about your experiences. My commitment to you in this discussion is that I will not judge, criticize, or question the validity of your experiences and perspectives. Rather, I will treat your experiences with compassion, care, and the highest respect. Before we get started, do you have any concerns or questions about discussing race with me or about the interview process?*

Questions

To begin, tell me a little about your family:

Family Life

Q1. Who lives in your home?

Q2. What do the adults in your home do for work?

Q3. Who in your home went the furthest in school? How far did they go?
How much school did everyone else complete?

Q4. Tell me a little about what you would like to do after high school.

Q4A. (if College) Tell me what your thoughts have been (where you would like to attend, what major you would like to pursue, what you want to do after college):

Q4B. (if not college) Tell me you've thought about college and what career paths you have considered.

Q5. What have those at home encouraged you to do after high school?

Q5. How important do you feel education is to those at home? How encouraging do you feel they are for you to do well in school and take challenging courses?

Q6. How do you believe those at home feel about your ability to take challenging courses?

Q7. Who at home, would you say, is most influential in what course you take?

Q8. Tell me how those at home have encouraged you to take AP courses.

Q9. How has the school shared information about AP courses with those at home?

Thanks for sharing information about your home life with me. In the next section of today's interview, I am going to ask you some questions about your academic life, adults at your school, and classmates/peers. Remember, anything you specifically say in these interviews will not be shared with the adults at your school, your parents, or other students.

Academic Life (Self)

Q10. Tell me about how you would describe yourself as a student. What kind of student would you say you are?

Q11. How would you describe your current grades? How do you feel about the grades you have?

Q12. What advanced courses have you taken in (middle school; 9th & 10th only) and high school, and what advanced courses are you currently taking?

- M/S Advanced _____
- H/S class in M/S _____
- Honors _____
- AP courses _____

Q12A. (If taken advanced courses) What led you to enroll in those courses?

How do you feel about the rigor (too easy, too hard, or just right) of the advanced classes you mentioned?

Q12B. (If no advanced courses) Tell me how you feel about the rigor (too easy, too hard, or just right) of the courses you are in now?

Q13. (If no to Q13) Which AP classes did you contemplate taking in 9th grade? And 10th grade? And 11th grade?

Q13A. What would you say kept you from enrolling in any of those courses?

Q14. How would you describe your sense of belonging in this school's environment?
How valued do you feel by the faculty?
How supported do you feel by the faculty?
How valued do you feel by other students?

Impact of Adults and Peers in course selection

Q15. Tell me about your perception of the adults at this school?

- Teachers
- Administrators
- Counselors

Q16. In what ways do you feel the adults (teachers, administrators, counselors) at this school encourage students to take challenging classes?

Q17. Tell me about relationships you have had with teachers throughout your school experiences:

Tell me about some teachers who you feel believed in you and encouraged you.
Tell me about some teachers who you feel were discouraging to you.

Q18. Tell me how adults in middle school or high school talked to you about taking AP courses?

How did that impact your decision?

Q19. How do peers—your classmates and friends—influence your decisions about what classes to take?

How does having a friend in a class impact your decision to take the class?

The final questions in this interview may be a little difficult to answer, so I want to remind you of my commitment to you, that I will not judge or criticize your experiences and perspectives. Rather, I will treat your experiences with compassion, care, and the highest respect.

Q21A. (if in AP) Tell me about your experience of being a Black student in AP courses.

How many other Black students are in the class(es)?
How does having other Black students in the class impact your decision to take an AP course?
How do your peers feel about you being in AP courses? Are they supportive?
How do you feel the teacher supports you in the class?

Q21B. (if not in AP) How influential are peers in your decision not to enroll in AP courses?

If there were more Black students in AP courses, how would that impact your decision?
How do other students perceive Black students in AP courses?
What is your perception of Black friends who are taking AP courses?
How does the teacher teaching the class impact your decision?

Wrap-up

To wrap-up today's interview, I want to thank you for hanging in with me and answering my questions thoughtfully. I know these questions can be difficult to answer, and you've done a great job at thinking them through. Before you go, I want to give you a homework assignment. Before our next meeting, I want you to think about all your educational experiences, from pre-K or Kindergarten until now. Then, I want you to write about what things you think encouraged you to enroll in AP courses and things you think discouraged you from enrolling in AP courses. In other words, what do think pushed you towards enrolling in AP and what do you think were barriers to enrolling in AP (See Appendix E for writing prompt).

(if enrolled): Once you do that, I want you to think and write about why you enrolled in AP courses.

(if not enrolled): Once you do that, I want you to think and write about why you did not enroll in AP courses.

At our next interview, we will spend some time talking about what you wrote.

Appendix F: Interview #2 Protocol

Interviewer: _____
Student ID: _____
Date: _____
School: _____

Procedures and Questions for Individual Interview #2:
Review of Writing Prompt and Debrief

Instructions

- Introduction to the third interview
  - *Hi! Thanks for coming to the final interview and for hanging in with me through all of my questions. Quick reminder—my name is Austin Cole, and I am a graduate student in School Psychology at USF. I am conducting a study to better understand the perspectives of Black students regarding AP enrollment. In the last interview, we talked about your academic history, your perspectives and experiences at school, at home, and with classmates and friends (peers), and how all of those things have impacted your AP enrollment decision.*
  - *In today's interview, we will spend some time talking about your responses to the writing prompt I gave you at the end of our first meeting, the different factors that encouraged and discouraged you from taking AP courses and how those factors impacted your enrollment decision. After that, I will ask you some questions about your experience doing these interviews with me as the interviewer. As a reminder, I am here to listen to your experiences and perspectives. I won't judge your responses, tell you how you should feel, think, or act, or give advice. Further, everything discussed today will be kept confidential (private) to the extent of the law. Your specific responses will not be shared with your teachers, parents, or any other adult. However, if you report plans to hurt yourself or someone else, or report that someone is hurting you, I will have to let your school counselor know in order to make sure you stay safe. Additionally, I will be recording this conversation and future interviews so that I can be present in our conversation rather than writing in a notepad the whole time you are talking. Once I have typed out our conversation, you will not be identified by name.*
  - *Finally, to remind you of the commitment I made to you for these interviews, I will not judge, criticize, or question the validity of your experiences and perspectives. Rather, I will treat your experiences with compassion, care, and the highest respect. Now, before we get started, do you have any questions or concerns you would like to share with me?*

Questions

To begin, I would like to talk about your response to the writing prompt (Appendix E). *Did you get a chance to write any thoughts down, think about the question, and/or discuss it with anyone at home? (if not completed, allow some time for the student to reflect and respond to prompt)*

Q1. What factors did you write down that you feel were barriers to enrolling in AP courses?

> Q1A. Tell me a little more about the barriers you wrote. What about _____ do you feel discouraged you from enrolling in any/additional AP classes?

Q2. Now tell me what factors you wrote down that you feel encouraged you to enroll in AP courses?

> Q2A. Tell me a little more about the facilitators you wrote. What about _____ do you feel encouraged you to enroll?

Q5. What about these factors do you feel was most impactful in your enrollment decision?

Q6. (if not enrolled) If you could change any of these factors, which ones would you change for you to feel comfortable enrolling in AP courses?

Q7. Thinking about the factors that we have just discussed, how did you come to your enrollment decision?

Thanks for completing the writing prompt and for answering these questions about it. The last few questions I have are about the interview process itself. As I have mentioned at the beginning of the first interview, I understand that it can be difficult talking about race with a White interviewer. I would like to get your perspective on this interview and receive any feedback that you may have on the interview process, the questions asked, and my techniques as an interviewer. As always, my commitment remains that I will not judge or criticize your experiences and perspectives. Rather, I will treat your experiences with compassion, care, and the highest respect. Do you have any questions?

Q9. What is your overall impression of these interviews?

Q10. Which questions, if any, were the most uncomfortable to answer?

Q11. How comfortable were you with me as an interviewer? Would you have been more comfortable if the interviewer was Black?

Q12. What could I have done to make these interviews more comfortable for you?

Q13. Do you have any questions for me or anything to add that you feel would be important for me to know?

Q14. What questions do you feel should be changed or taken out of this interview? Are there any questions you feel should be asked? (Just for pilot)

Appendix G: Writing Prompt

Student ID: _____
Date: _____
School: _____

Think about all your educational experiences, from pre-school or Kindergarten until now. Then, write about what things you think encouraged you to enroll in Advanced Placement (AP) courses during high school, and things you think discouraged you from enrolling in any or additional AP courses during high school. In other words, what do think pushed you towards enrolling in AP and what do you think were barriers to enrolling in AP.

(if enrolled): Please think and write about why you decided to enroll in at least one AP course.

(if not enrolled): Please think and write about why you did not, or have not yet, enrolled in any AP courses.