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EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP ON SHAME AND RESILIENCE IN AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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By

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ABSTRACT

The achievement gap refers to the stark difference that occurs between racial or gender groups, as one group performs significantly higher than the other. An achievement gap has the propensity to produce psychological distress, as well as buffering techniques that are necessary for survival and success. Growing research shows that African American college students experience unique levels of trauma, shame, hardship, macro, and micro aggressions, suggesting that these students learn to self-preserve as early as 10 years old. This study used a Pearson correlation, Independent T-Test, and a Moderated Multiple Regression to explore the impact of the achievement gap on shame and resilience in African American college students. There was a total of 274 participants in this study. The current study consisted of four hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 stated that there would be a statistically significant relationship between the achievement gap and shame in college students. This hypothesis was confirmed, as there was a significant relationship between academic achievement and shame. Hypothesis 2 stated that there would be a relationship between shame, resilience, and achievement (the lower the shame, the higher the resilience, and the higher the achievement); (the higher the shame, the lower the resilience, the lower the achievement). Hypothesis 2 was rejected as the higher the shame levels were, the lower the resilience, and the higher the achievement. Hypothesis 3 stated that African American college students would experience higher levels of shame than White college students. This hypothesis was rejected as there was no significant

difference in the amount of shame that each group experienced. Lastly, hypothesis 4 stated that resilience would act as a buffer against shame for African American college students. Hypothesis 4 was rejected, as the results indicate that resilience does not lessen the amount of shame that an African American college student experiences. However, the researcher discusses the many reasons why the results of this study point in this direction.

Keywords: achievement gap, achievement, African American, Black, shame, resilience

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Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee: and the light shall shine upon thy ways. Job 22:28.

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Lastly, I dedicate this body of work to every Black boy and girl that has ever felt reduced, fragile, and overlooked—You were born worthy, and that worth is unquantifiable. I love you all fiercely.

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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of the achievement gap in relation to shame and resilience in African American college students. This study also explored the disproportionate psychological impact the achievement gap has had on African American college students by exploring the constructs of psychological distress and academic-related shame. A deeper understanding of these psychological constraints better informs educators and clinicians that serve and advise African American college students, helping to create strategies that better support the development of resilience. In other words, the achievement gap is a complex phenomenon that warrants a great deal of attention, and any goal associated with addressing the achievement gap is deemed monumental.

Definition of Key Terms

Achievement Gap- According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), achievement gaps occur when a racial or gender group performs better than another group resulting in a statistically significant difference (NAEP,2019)

Shame- An uncomfortable internal or self-conscious feeling typically associated with a negative evaluation of the self, often linked to feelings of distress, exposure, mistrust, powerlessness, and worthlessness. (Szentágotai-Tătar, Nechita, & Miu, 2020)

Resilience- An ability to recover from or adjust easily to adversity or change (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

African American- an American of African and especially of black African descent

Critical Race Theory- a theory that was developed to produce racial reform in order to change the partial privileges of minorities within western education (Fernandez, 2002).

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Segregation in public schools ended in 1964, nearly 56 years ago. However, public school systems are just as segregated as they were prior to 1964 (Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2019). James Coleman (1966) penned in his instrumental *Equality of Educational Opportunity* report, the significance of desegregation in schools. When schools are segregated there is an imbalance of provision for each school, causing minority districts to receive less funding. Additionally, many public schools depend on local property taxes for funding, causing disadvantages within low-income districts. On average, nationwide, White districts with high poverty levels receive about $1,500 more per student than minority school districts with high poverty levels. This becomes a political and racial issue. Public schools provide crucial training in developing effective citizenship among learners. According to Johnson and colleagues (2016), increases in school funding leads to students achieving more educationally and receiving higher pay and lower rates of scarcity in adulthood. Although minorities have made great strides by progressing in higher education, accessing more career opportunities, and moving into suburban communities, disparities among racial groups continue to exist and serve as barriers for minorities students (Williams, 2011).

One of these barriers is the achievement gap. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), an achievement gap appears when one group of students (i.e., race/ethnicity) achieves significantly higher than another group. The achievement gap underscores differences within education among minority students. This body of literature specifically highlights the African American and White achievement gap. An example of the gap can be seen in grades, comprehensive exam scores, curricula, and dropout prevalence. According to Williams (2011), these inequalities are also found outside of the school system, in employment opportunities, voting rights, property acquisition, medical treatment, and justice systems. Such inequalities create lifelong barriers for African Americans. Additionally, although there have been various advances in reducing the gap with nationally known legal cases and policies, students still feel the pressure, stress, and shame of the achievement gap.

African American students are overrepresented in special education programs and rarely present in gifted programs (Ford, 1995; Fish, 2017). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, as of 2016, only 36% of African Americans were enrolled in college, compared to 42% of White students. Additionally, only 21% of African American students graduated college within a four-year time frame, compared to the 45% of White students who finished within four years. Moreover, African Americans ages 25-34 earned $49,400 annually compared to their White peers who earned about $54,700.

There is a wide range of literature exploring the broader achievement gap; however, this study specifically focuses on the reading portion of the achievement gap.

Reading ability is important for academic success and broader achievement. Yet, only a limited number of students attain the skills needed to be effective readers (Lonigan et al., 2013). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2019), 45% of fourth grade White students scored at or above the basic level in reading. In contrast, only 18% of African American fourth grade students scored at or above the basic level. In 2019, it was reported that White and African American fourth-grade students scored lower in reading than in 2017, indicating a regression in reading skills nationwide. This regression demonstrates that the systems in place are ineffective and need significant adjustment. Additionally, the NAEP (2019), reported that the average mathematics score for African American fourth-grade students was 25 points lower than their White peers. Furthermore, there were no major changes in score differences compared to 2017 across student groups in fourth-grade mathematics.

In addition to the academic challenges that the achievement gap brings, African Americans face many psychological difficulties because of these academic inequalities. According to Monroe (2019), any child, who has established a stout sense of shame, is left exposed to the destructive results of shame. Subsequently, this fosters a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence. Such feelings can be devastating, affecting future accomplishments and endeavors. Thus, shame becomes inescapable, destroying a child's ability to fulfill his or her potential. Additionally, it is important to explore how the lasting effect of shame associated with the achievement gap to effectively understand

each factor of the gap. Without meaningful disruptions of the harmful systems, the disparities will likely continue.

According to Cohen et al. (2006), self-integrity—seeing oneself as moral, admirable, and prosperous is a fundamental human motivation. Therefore, negative depictions of one's group can be threatening, particularly in persistent evaluative settings. Minorities are constantly subjected to negative stereotypes that challenge the astuteness of their race. Therefore, they may be likely to think that their poor performance could confirm the stereotypes. Such encounters not only cause stress but the psychological threat of shame in educational settings. Shame may undermine academic performance if it becomes too challenging, potentially widening the achievement gap. Their findings indicate that lessening psychological threats can improve intellectual achievement.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of literature explored numerous multidisciplinary strands of literature as a context for the historical phenomenon known as the achievement gap. History and law explained the connection between the achievement gap and critical race theory (CRT). This review of literature then explored the subject of shame and resilience and how those concepts contributed to the success or demise of African American college students.

Achievement Gap

The achievement gap is not a new phenomenon or a random occurrence that happens throughout a person's academic career. It actually starts before a child begins kindergarten and continues into adulthood (Economic Policy Institute, 2015). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), achievement gaps happen when a racial or gender group performs better than another group resulting in a statistically significant difference. The gap suggests that curricula and interventions implemented by schools are differentially effective for certain groups of students (Williams, 2011). Additionally, minority students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are, on average, two years behind other students by the time they reach fourth grade (Moore & Neal, 2008). This suggests that regardless of the available resources, the strategies that are used to assign children to school, or the means for grouping children

for instruction, African American students still maintain lower scores than White students (Ferguson, 2003). According to the NAEP, the achievement gap has remained fairly stable since 1992. Therefore, despite the alleged improvement discussed by politicians, the gap remains.

According to the APA Task Force on Educational Disparities (2012), the most successful approach to abolish educational disparities is to eradicate social class and other structural inequities in U.S. society. These injustices are linked to heightened stress in families by various factors, including limited financial resources, living in violent communities with low social capital, and not having the means to enroll children in good childcare, schools, or college.

Some may argue that the term achievement gap denotes a softer way of discussing widespread racial and socioeconomic disparities in student achievement. This seems to be true when the long-term implications of the gap are explored, as there is a significant impact that comprises more than just an unfair academic system (Allen, 2008). After ages of being portrayed as intellectually inferior, many African Americans internalized the idea that failure is inescapable, and this expectation of failure stops many youth from seeking a college education, promotions, and career advancement (Degruy, 2017). According to Graham and McClain (2019), minorities report a lower sense of belonging, higher levels of self-doubt, and difficulty adjusting at predominately White institutions. While White students generally have good experiences when they attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Libarkin, 1984).

Furthermore, the stark contrast in learning outcomes between African American students and White students can be exemplified through social disparities throughout adulthood including income, employment position, elections, and incarceration rates. Due to the role that education has in preparing individuals with the tools needed to participate in American democracy, educational differences between racial groups may perpetuate existing inequalities in political policy for future generations (Hartney & Flavin, 2014).

Additionally, African American students are at a disadvantage by not having as many scholastic opportunities as their White peers. Although African Americans have the legal right to be presented the same opportunities as Caucasian students, the academic achievement gap demonstrates otherwise (McLauchlin, 2007). These biases even translate into disciplinary approaches, as African American students are often suspended or expelled from school at disproportionately higher rates than other ethnic groups. These disproportionate rates of suspension and disciplinary action often negatively impact students' standardized test scores, as students are often unprepared for, or barred from state tests, due to their disciplinary record (Finkel, 2010).

In another study, Hertzel and Soto-Hinman (2007), highlighted that an important reason for the No Child Left Behind Act was to alleviate illiteracy among students in underprivileged communities. In doing so, three distinct gaps stood out as related to literacy and literacy practices by teachers (Hertzel & Soto-Hinman, 2007). These three gaps included: (1) the gap between the student and literature, including background learning history; (2) the gap between the educator and the student, including social

factors; and (3) the gap between the student and classmates, including cultural and family history (Hertzel & Soto-Hinman, 2007, p. 2).

We see in the literature that the achievement gap may be attributed to a plethora of components including, but not limited to, academic performance, school environmental factors, the role of teachers, parenting styles, and socioeconomic status. However, it is important to consider the historical context of many of these disparities.

Additionally, between 1967-1977, Project Follow Through was the most extensive educational investigation ever conducted. Project Follow Through was challenged by the federal government to explore better ways of teaching at-risk children from kindergarten through 3rd grade. The study consisted of over 200,000 children from 178 communities and compared 22 different models of instruction. The participants were from various geographical locations, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The evaluation process took place nine years later, in 1977. The results suggested that students who received Direct Instruction (DI) had higher academic success, self-confidence, and self-esteem than students in any of the other models. Later investigation found that the DI students continued to have higher levels of success than their peers and were more likely to graduate from high school and attend college. While this assessment undoubtedly favored the DI, the findings of the analyses were suppressed by the U.S. Office of Education. It is important to note that performance of this magnitude and reliability has never been demonstrated in schools before this study. The majority of the other models

were less effective than traditional schooling, nonetheless, they continue to be used today (Englemann, 2007).

Considering the centuries of slavery and discrimination based upon race, the United States has become accustomed to educational inequality. African Americans were enslaved, and laws were passed forbidding their ability to learn to read (Chaplin, 1993). These inequalities obstructed the progress of African Americans for generations and continue to with modern-day housing policy, financial opportunity, and educational disenfranchisement. McLauchlin (2007) reported:

> The Brown v. Board of Education decision of 1954 legally authorized equitable academic conditions and access for African American students in the United States' public-school systems. However, in actuality, Brown did not lead to substantial de facto changes in equity and access. The American Public education system continues to confront a wide disparity in the achievement of African American students and their Caucasian counterparts due to racial discrimination. The disparity, commonly referred to as the achievement gap, has also given way to the emergence of racist education myths, such as: a) African American students innately cannot learn; b) African American students are incapable of competing academically with their Caucasian counterparts, and c) the academic achievement gap between the African American and Caucasian student population is irreducible. (p. 1)

Despite historical progression through landmark court cases and other policy changes, issues of equity in education remain ever-present. For African American students, it is not enough to simply provide equality among resources. To fully capture the impact of the achievement gap, theories exploring race and ethnic-based phenomena must be evaluated.

Critical Race Theory

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theory that was developed in the late 1980s to produce racial reform to change the partial privileges of minorities within western society (Fernandez, 2002). Historical patterns continue to demonstrate the existence of educational inequalities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). The objective of the theory is to transform the operational and cultural pieces of education that continue to demonstrate racial stances in and out of the classroom. The theory also uses a commitment to social justice, racial emancipation, and societal transformation to eliminate the power of race that calculates educational and life outcomes (Fernandez, 2002). CRT attempts to evaluate the law and legal traditions through the history, present experiences, and racial sensibilities of racial minorities in this country (Brooks, 1994).

The mere statistical data on the achievement gap demonstrates the inequality in education among White and African American students. It shows the education inequality but overlooks the fact that it is impeding educational growth among African Americans. The CRT challenges society to create a fair academic field where quality education is accessible for all students (Taylor, 2006).

Taylor (2006) analyzed the racial achievement gap and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), employing the Critical Race Theory (CRT) to reveal inequity and social injustice in U.S. schools. During his analyses, he reported that White students have always been given the presumed privilege to access education, while African American students have consistently been forced to lobby for this same access. CRT asserts that the color of an individual's skin intensely impacts how they are treated, and radically shapes how a person thinks and feels about a society (Williams, 1991).

Additionally, the alleged "equal" education in the South produced confirmation of political dishonesty against African American citizens and included obvious disproportionate funding and a White supremacist curriculum that allowed White schools to be remarkably different from African American schools (Anderson, 1988). Minority schools are often twice as large as predominately White schools, having approximately 3,000 more students. Additionally, schools that are predominantly minority have less qualified teachers and lower quality materials (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

After the decision of Brown vs. Board, a school district in Moberly, Missouri closed a segregated African American school, causing 11 certified African American teachers to be fired, one of which had a doctoral degree. The White teachers in the district were allowed to keep their positions, although they had less experience and college education (Will, 2019). According to Walker (2018), when the school districts integrated, administrators in a north Georgia district transferred many of the students and teachers out of an African American district and docked the teacher's salaries by $3,000.

Additionally, after schools were integrated, many White superintendents in the southern United States refused to put African American educators in positions of power over White teachers or students (Long, 2020). Furthermore, prior to the court decision, 35 to 50 percent of the teaching force was African American. Currently, approximately 11% of principals and 7% of teachers are African American. These particular incidents continued to haunt African American educators, as the percentage of African American students majoring in education decreased (Upchurch, 2016).

It is important to recognize that African American schools may have lost their identities when desegregation consumed the South. Before integration African American educators creatively endured with used textbooks, taught an incomplete curriculum, and worked in unsatisfactory school facilities. Although African American students and educators were given access to these new amenities after integration, the overall quality of education did not improve. Before integration African American teachers engaged in close, empathetic relationships with their students that encompassed knowledge of African American communities. This rapport enabled adequate motivation for success within African American students. It has been suggested that integration destroyed that relationship by undermining the position of the teacher as an advisor, example, and disciplinarian. It lessened African American students' interest in learning (Fairclough, 2004).

According to Vanessa Walker (1996), African American educators believed in integration, but they wanted an additive model, rather than a compromise or trade. They

wanted to continue to inspire, advocate, and protect children. The educators simply wanted to add to what they originally had, allowing their students to have the same access as their White counterparts. However, in exchange for access, they gave up an important component of an African American child's success—aspiration and advocacy (Walker, 1996).

Additionally, studies showed that African American students benefit academically and socially from having African American teachers. When an African American student has at least one African American teacher in elementary school they are more likely to be placed in gifted programs, graduate high school, attend college, and are less likely to be suspended, expelled, or placed in detention by African American teachers (Walker, 2018). According to Upchurch (2016), when schools integrated, African American students lost the advantage of having administrators and teachers who were interested in their success.

Academics

Burchinal and colleagues (2011), investigated the achievement gap in reading and math performance. The study included 314 children ages four and a half years old through 5th grade. They explored the differences in family, childcare, and education experiences. The researchers focused exclusively on low-income African American and White children in an attempt to examine social factors (i.e., racism) other than socioeconomic status. Findings suggest that the achievement gap is present at three years old (Burchinal et al., 2011). According to Juel (1988), students who have poor reading

skills in the first grade have an 88% probability of being a poorer reader in fourth grade. This study suggests that the gap in a student's reading competency is identifiable at an early age.

Chaney (2016) examined literacy from an intergenerational family-strengths perspective. She found that African American children were three times more likely than White children to be poor (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). She also reported that African American children are more likely to experience reading difficulties. Furthermore, Chaney suggested that if a child does not read well within the first few years of school, they may be at an increased risk for poor academic performance. According to the Matthew Effect "Those who are successful are most likely to be given the special opportunities that lead to further success, and those who aren't successful are most likely to be deprived of them" (Merton, 1968). It describes the gradual decline of poor readers, but also about the widening gap between poor readers and good readers (Stanovich, 1986). According to Stanovich, the Matthew Effect demonstrates how new readers acquire the ability to read. He states the earlier a child reads increases their desire to read while lacking the ability to read before the third grade may foster an inability to learn new skills. These early illiteracy skills have also been shown to predict school drop-out rates. As of 2009, impoverished students were five times more likely to not graduate high school than high-income students (Chapman et al., 2011).

Research showed that persistent access to effective teachers can help narrow the achievement gap, however, minority students are rarely taught by effective teachers. Additionally, teachers play a major part in the lives of students and could guide student achievement, with opportunities and knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2000). A student's rapport or outlook toward a teacher is vital for their success and behaviors (Cohen et al., 1999).

With the departure of African American educators, there were fewer teachers who showed African American children that they could believe in themselves. Those African American educators taught history where African American individuals were active participants of society. African American children lost educators who taught them how to aspire amid oppression (Walker, 1996). According to Delpit (1992), when there is a substantial difference between a students' home and school culture, teachers can easily misinterpret a students' skills, engagement, or aptitude as a result of the differences in styles of communication and interactional patterns. Additionally, many African American teachers embody African American culture and are able to give commands to a group of rowdy students directly and explicitly (Delpit, 1992).

According to Morgan (1990), African American children, boys more than girls, initiate communication with peers in the classroom when completing assigned tasks. She stated that a classroom that allows for more movement and interaction will better enable the learning and social preference of African American boys. A classroom that does not allow such action will overly penalize them. African American boys are excessively

punished in general education classrooms and disproportionately placed in special education classrooms. This could be avoided if teachers were taught how to restructure classrooms so that the learning and social preferences of African American boys are adapted.

Continuing further, in classrooms where there is a lack of African American representation, African American girls are praised for their nurturing behavior while White girls are praised for academic behavior. Though it is likely true that many African American girls are excellent nurturers, they are often stigmatized by the nurturing "mammy" stereotype. Especially, when they are not given the same push as White girls toward academic achievement (Delpit, 1992).

According to Burchinal and colleagues (2011), when teachers in high-risk areas have a cultural bias towards their students, it can be an educational hindrance. The student's environment has already created a disposition for failure and instead of teachers seeing potential in all students, they see failure. According to Klopfenstein (2005), more African American students enrolled in Algebra II when the amount of African American mathematics teachers increased. Additionally, when compared to White teachers, African American teachers are more effective when increasing vocabulary, reading comprehension, and economic literacy scores in African American students (Hanushek; Evans, 1992).

Race and Stereotypes

Specialists, politicians, and civilians often blame children and their families for lack of effort, poor parenting styles, or insufficient genes when discussing educational inequality and the achievement gap. The foundation of this thought is that 60 years after desegregation, equal opportunities now exist, but some African American students still seem to be lagging. Due to this belief, many individuals assume that there is something inherently flawed about the African American psyche (Darling-Hammond, 2007). However, this grand assumption overlooks relevant information, as African American students are disproportionately provided access to key resources (Denton & Anderson, 2005).

Racial stereotyping often occurs in educational settings, as the teachers expect less of African American students because they have been deemed by society as less intelligent than other students (Ferguson, 1998). Wong et al. (2003) examined the relationship between perceptions of school-based discrimination and academic outcomes such as perceived school utility, perceptions of academic self-competence, and grades in 629 African American adolescents. Their findings indicated that experiences of racial discrimination at school from a teacher or peer forecasted a decrease in grades, decreased academic aptitude, increased negative self-concepts, decreased psychological health, and gravitation toward like-minded behavior. A student's awareness of discrimination and bias provides additional stressors that interfere with academic progress.

Despite unambiguous differences in the capital, teacher quality, curriculum, and class sizes, many individuals still perceive poor academic outcomes to be the students' fault. As such, it is important to tackle and address these inequalities head-on (Darling-Hammond, 1998). For African American students, these inequalities began in the policies. The deficit discussion of the achievement gap slightly mentions accountability and testing policies, however, this often overlooks systemic inequalities yet expects an equalization of educational outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

According to Rothstein (2015), education policy is controlled by housing policy. The researchers note that it is not possible to integrate schools without desegregating both low-income and prosperous neighborhoods. However, the enthusiasm to modify the policy to desegregate neighborhoods is staggered by an increasing ignorance of the country's racial history. Yet, evidence proves that housing segregation is a result of racially motivated and overt public policy that continues to impact minority groups today. Because of these cultural differences between working-class educators and underprivileged families, overt and covert racism may limit opportunities for families, in terms of housing and the quality of schools. This may also result in lower teacher expectations (Burchinal et al., 2009).

Hazelbaker and colleagues (2018) conducted a study that examined perceptions of social stratification in children five to eight years old. Their finding contested the idea that children are economically blind. The researchers found that children show an awareness of the broader social class categories of wealth and poverty, developing

preliminary ideas about social stratification. Additional research supports the idea that young children are aware of social class, denoting power, prestige, and control over sources (Diemer et al., 2013).

Furthermore, Sharkey (2013) concluded that where a parent lives during childhood significantly impacts their children. He found that if a parent lived in a low-income neighborhood over two consecutive generations, it has the capacity to diminish a child's cognitive abilities by eight points. He postulated that this is similar to missing two to four years of education.

Robert Dreeben (1987) conducted a study that uncovered how instructional disparities influence learning and achievement for students of color. The study evaluated 300 African American and White first graders. He discovered that the difference in reading outcomes among the two groups was almost fully explained by the quality of instruction received. The study also found that African American students received lower quality of instruction than that received by White students.

According to Lightfoot (1978), everyone uses class, ethnicity, and gender to create perception, and teachers are no different. He stated that teachers, rather than gaining a full understanding of the student, use their biases to create an inaccurate perception of students. Relatedly, Baron, Tom, and Cooper (1985) found that race and class may prompt a teacher to operate based upon their assumptions, instead of developing individual expectations for students. This common act of stereotyping continues to occur, making it difficult for minority or underprivileged students to

distinguish themselves from the generalized expectation. Such stereotyping may cause a student to experience isolation, chronic stress, mental health concerns, and the forfeiting of their full potential (Pascoe & Richman, 2009).

According to Fisher and colleagues (2000), racially influenced incidents are not rare for many African American children. Additionally, researchers concluded that African American adolescents should learn to cope with racial discrimination to promote healthy development (Garcia et al., 1996).

Fisher et al. (2000) found that discrimination within academic settings was linked to lower self-esteem in a sample of minority adolescents. Similarly, Wong et al. (2003) investigated self-concept in junior high students and found that perceived discrimination at school was negatively correlated to later measures of adolescents' self-concept. The reports were also associated with greater levels of anger, psychological symptoms, and involvement in problematic behaviors. Simons et al. (2002) concluded that racial biases were associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms at the community and individual levels. Of these depressive symptoms detailed in the literature the construct of shame seems to have a significant impact on African American students.

Shame

According to Hall and Goetz (2013), the emotions of children and adolescents are linked to their academic achievement. Particularly, positive emotions are positively correlated with achievement, and negative emotions are correlated with poor achievement, as there is an array of emotions that contribute to each. Racial trauma refers

to a person of colors' reaction to real or perceived experiences of racial discrimination. These experiences may include threats of harm, feelings of shame, witnessing harm to other persons of color to real or perceived racism (Carter, 2007). Subsequently, racial trauma carries psychological and physiological effects. Additionally, the effects of racial trauma consist of hypervigilance, avoidant behavior, somatization, and nightmares. Racial trauma is not a one-time experience, it encompasses the ongoing manifestation of race-based stress. Furthermore, research has found that severe psychological and physiological trauma can have intergenerational effects, as it is a result of historical trauma: dislocation, colonization, slavery, genocide, etc. (Yehuda et al., 2016).

Additionally, van Steenwyk and colleagues (2018), explored the construct of epigenetic inheritance in a large sample of independent rat breeding over ten years. The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the mechanisms of transgenerational epigenetic inheritance up to the third generation or further generations. The authors included a model of postnatal trauma, which included "unpredictable maternal separation combined with unpredictable maternal stress." (van Steenwyk et al., 2018, p. 2). Their findings provided evidence for transgenerational inheritance of metabolic and behavioral effects up until the fourth generation. The researchers simulated the idea that trauma and stress are passed down from generation to generation. Additionally, Upchurch (2016), stated that epigenetic patterns produced in traumatic settings such as those that occurred after the African Diaspora; can lead to both mental and physical illnesses in the person's children. Degruy (2017), reported that the

inheritance of trauma is displayed in an individual's behavior and beliefs. She stated that the beliefs and behaviors were important for survival but damage one's ability to thrive.

The current study specifically underscores the shame component of racial trauma. Shame is an emotion or feeling of embarrassment or humiliation when previously concealed shortcomings become known either to oneself or to others. Additionally, shame is considered the more painful emotion, as shame is about the self and leaves a person feeling diminished, worthless, and exposed (Tangney et al., 2014).

According to Szentágotai-Tătar et al. (2020), shame is a difficult self-conscious sensation, usually experienced in situations of perceived personal transgressions or failures. Szentágotai-Tătar and colleagues (2020), defined shame as being a self-focused, destructive evaluation of the global self, and it is accompanied by a sense of weakness and insignificance, and a desire to escape or isolate.

Kemeny et al. (2004), further explored shame, suggesting that it is the emotional reaction to situations that threaten one's self-esteem, social rank, and social approval. Such fears appear in an array of settings, particularly those that require an evaluative audience, as individuals may be left feeling unworthy of affiliation (i.e., organizations and academic institutions). Their objective was to show that a decrease in one's social status and social regard is the primary inducer of shame. The researchers randomly assigned participants to engage in a set of challenging speech and mathematic assignments in the presence or absence of an evaluative audience. Participants who were

in the presence of an evaluative audience experienced more shame than those who were not.

Furthermore, research has shown that shame can increase the risk of depression, anxiety, addiction, and suicide (Bilevicius et al., 2018; Candea & Szentagotai-Tăta, 2018). According to Mereish and Poteat (2015) shame interferes with one's perception of loneliness, social support, and relationship status. Shame is also believed to reduce cognitive abilities by producing unnecessary thinking, such as thoughts concerning failure and those that weaken intrinsic motivation (Pekrun et al., 2017). The issue is so critical that there are consistent recommendations that African American adolescents must be prepared to develop strategies to cope with institutional barriers and racial oppression (Ogbu, 1985).

Achievement Gap and Shame

The impact of social class is far-reaching, shaping essential aspects of health and well-being, educational attainment and the types of schools attended, access to safe shelter, clean water, and healthy food (Lareau, 2011). Furthermore, the ability to progress within the socioeconomic ladder is affected by the social class into which individuals are born (Ryan et al., 2018). Essentially, some African American children are born into an environment that generates shame. Pekrun and colleagues (2017) underscored the importance of emotions for students' achievement. They found that adverse emotions (anger, anxiety, shame, boredom, hopelessness) projected underachievement, and

achievement negatively predicted these emotions. According to Elliot and Thrash (2001), achievement goals significantly impact a person's psychological processes.

Pekrun et al. (2009) proposed a model linking achievement aims and achievement emotions to educational achievement. They examined undergraduates using assessments for both goals and feelings. The findings suggested that achievement aims (mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance) predicted discrete achievement emotions. Additionally, there were clear associations between the student's midterm exam aims a week prior to the exam and their emotions felt the day before the exam.

Additionally, belief is powerful, and it determines how a person perceives and evaluates their experiences. According to Degruy (2017), beliefs determine what a person considers to be possible or impossible, strongly impacting how they think and feel. Degruy states that children from affluent families assume they will be successful while African American children do not make that assumption because of what they have experienced. African American children experience more barriers than White children in academic, housing, and career settings.

Shame and African American College Students

Many school policies and mission statements support a diverse student population. Yet, African American students have remained a silenced and marginalized population. This ongoing stigma has impacted many students and is an overt institutional barrier. Additionally, African American identities have often been branded and informed by discrimination, thus fostering racial expectations for African Americans that

ultimately create social rejection and unacceptance. In the context of the achievement gap, shaming cannot be isolated to a single feature, it consists of many components working in alliance. Turning to school policies, we find relatively clear shaming efforts (Goodman & Cook, 2019). Shame has been suggested to be at the core of students' terror of failure and has been linked with performance-avoidant achievement goals (Thompson et al., 2008; Perkun et al., 2006).

Johnson (2020) examined the association between racism and internalized shame among African American college students using two hierarchical linear regression models. Shame is internalized when shame encounters become part of individual identity (Cook,1988). The findings suggested that the frequency of racist experiences predicted higher internalized shame scores. However, the relationship between the occurrence of racist events and internalized shame was not robust. Johnson stated that measuring only internalized shame does not reveal the pervasive bearing of racism on shame involvements among African Americans. Feagin and Sikes (1995) explored how African American students cope on White campuses. They stated in their study that African American students are forced to lay aside their identities and to take on White culture.

In another study, Johnson explored the impact of shame on a student’s learning environment. He stated that because shame affects a student's ability to learn, classroom engagement, and ability to withstand adverse penalties, it would seem critical for instructors to become aware of emotions and the emotion antecedents. Johnson employed a survey that analyzed interactions between students' feelings of shame, sense of

community, burnout levels, details of achievement goals, shame coping skills, and academic success, as these are components were considered to be factors of the compass of shame (Nathanson, 1992). The findings suggested that 50 percent or more of the students who completed the survey felt shamed by others about a range of personal attributes. Despite experiencing increased feelings of shame, African American college students have demonstrated unshakeable resilience.

Resilience and African American College Students

African American college students' resilience quotient is unparalleled, as evidenced by their ability to develop coping strategies across generations. However, with the achievement gap being the focus, the significant difference in academic settings is hidden. This echoes the idea that the educational performance of all African American students is lacking. The emphasis on the achievement gap overlooks the fact that many African American students are intellectually resilient (Neblett et al., 2006).

Dixson and Stevens (2018) explored the efficacy of hope and its ability to predict five different psychosocial variables—school belonging, academic self-concept, goal valuation, attitude toward teachers, and academic motivation/self-regulation. The authors used the variable to collectively create an achievement-oriented psychosocial profile that may enable academic success. The study included 117 African American students ranging between 14-19 years old. Findings suggested that hope is a possible direction for improving achievement-related outcomes in African American students and may also help to mitigate the effects of the achievement gap.

Zand and Thomson (2005) explored the direct and indirect effects of demographic, individual, and contextual variables of the achievement gap. The study included 174 African American adolescents. Their findings suggested that those that exhibited higher levels of self-worth were more likely to have allegiance to their school, and those who felt more allegiance to their schools reported higher school grades. Additionally, Jones and Mueller (2017) found that a students' academic and social foci in school relate to their achievement goals, but not their achievement.

The Present Study

To date, there is an absence of empirical studies that investigate the relationship between the achievement gap, shame, and resilience in African American college students. This study explored the disproportionate psychological impact that the achievement gap has had on African American college students by exploring the constructs of psychological distress and academic-related shame.

The current study explored the following research questions:

1. Does the achievement gap produce shame in African American college students?
2. Do African American college students experience more shame than White college students?
3. How does resilience impact shame in African American college students? Does it serve as a buffer?

The current study explored the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a statistically significant relationship between the achievement gap and shame in college students.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a relationship between shame, resilience, and achievement (the lower the shame, the higher the resilience, and the higher the achievement); (the higher the shame, the lower the resilience, the lower the achievement).

Hypothesis 3: African American college students will experience higher levels of shame than White college students.

Hypothesis 4: Resilience will act as a buffer against shame for African American college students.

CHAPTER III
METHOD

Introduction

This study examined achievement gap, shame, and resilience inventories to determine the impact of the achievement gap on shame and resilience in African American college students. Quantitative research methods were used to explore the avenues by which students internalize shame because of disparities.

Participants

Participants included both current college students and college graduates from across the United States with various backgrounds (education, psychology, engineering, administration, dentistry, human services, medicine, communication, biology, criminal justice, finance, and beauty). All participants were18 years of age or older. There was a total of 274 participants.

Instruments

Three instruments were used to test the hypotheses: The Other As Shamer Scale (OAS) (Allan, Gilbert, & Goss 1994), Achievement Questionnaire, and Connor-Davison Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). Demographic information was also collected.

Demographics. Participants were first asked to provide their educational level, mother and father educational level, GPA, race/ethnicity, income level, and type of education

they received (Appendix A). Participants were then asked to rank themselves in a series of questions about core curriculum subjects.

Shame. Shame was measured using the Other As Shamer Scale (OAS) (Appendix B). The OAS is an 18 item self-report instrument used to measure external shame. Participants were probed for occurrences on a 5-point scale (0 = *Never* to 4 = *Almost Always*) of their experiences with items such as, ‘‘I feel other people look down on me’’. A higher score reveals higher external shame. Questions on this scale were adapted from the Internalized Shame Scale (ISS; Cook, 1996), however, the scale has been modified, changing the statements that began ‘‘Other people see me as...’’ with characteristics such as ‘‘inadequate’’. For example, ‘‘I see myself as fragile’’ was changed to ‘‘Other people see me as fragile”. This measure was designed to give a complete evaluation of how people perceive others to see them (OAS; Allan et al., 1994; Goss et al., 1994). Attempts were made to contact the developers of the OAS scale, however, there was no response. The scale was retrieved from a public domain.

Resilience. Resilience was measured using the CD-RISC (Connor & Davidson, 2003) (Appendix C). The CD-RISC was created to examine a person’s ability to withstand adversity. The CD-RISC is a 25-items instrument that is scored on a 5-point scale. The responses range from 0 =*rarely true* to 4= *true nearly all the time*. Greater scores indicate higher levels of resilience with scores ranging from 0 to 100. Examples of items are “Even when things look hopeless, I don’t give up,” and “I tend to bounce back after illness, injury, or other hardships”. According to Connor and Davidson (2003), the CD-

RISC has an internal consistency reliability coefficient of .89. Additionally, after two consecutive follow-ups, a test-retest reliability coefficient of .87 was achieved.

***Achievement Gap*.** The achievement gap was measured by a five-item self-report measure that was created by the researcher to access academic achievement in five domains (reading, math, history, writing, and science) (Appendix D). For each question, the participants were asked to rank themselves compared to their peers. This measure was developed by the researcher who consulted with professionals in the field. This is the first study to explore the achievement gap concerning shame and resilience among African American college students. It is important to note that the scores for achievement were reverse coded. Indicating that the higher the score, the higher participants rated their academic ability compared to peers.

Procedure

Approval was gained from the university IRB before the beginning of the study. Following IRB approval, participants were recruited from two sources. First, participants were recruited through public university communication systems across the United States. Second, participants were recruited on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Before completing the survey, electronic consent was signed by all participants. All surveys were distributed online via Qualtrics at one time and were anonymous. One incentive was offered for participation, as ten participants were randomly selected to receive one of 10, $10 gift cards.

Research Design and Data Analyses

This study is a non-experimental, self-report survey design conducted at a single point in time, as this design explores the differences between groups and allows participants to compare themselves to their peers. The researcher first analyzed the data using a Pearson correlation to determine if a statistical relationship existed between the achievement gap, resilience, and shame. Data were then analyzed using a *t*-test to examine the relationship between African American students and White students. Lastly, a moderation analysis was used to determine if resilience serves as a buffer against shame in African American college students. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze data.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Data Cleaning Procedures

Data cleaning was performed using listwise deletion. Listwise deletion is used to process missing data. Listwise deletion is one of the most repeatedly used missing data approaches (Wang & Aronow, 2021). When using this method, missing responses from questions within the inclusionary measures are removed from the study. Contrarily, listwise deletion may decrease sample sizes and changes and generalizability (Little & Rubin, 2002). There were 26 survey responses removed because the survey was not completed, leaving a total of 274 participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics, N=274

Characteristic	**N**	**Percentage**
Ethnicity		
African American/Black	126	46
Asian	8	2.9
Caucasian/White	114	41.6
Hispanic	18	6.6
Native American	2	.7
Other	6	2.2
Gender		
Female	244	89.1
Male	29	10.6
Transgender Man	1	.4
Degree Level		
Undergraduate	77	28.1
Associate/Bachelor's degree	22	8

Table 1

Participant Demographics, N=274

Characteristic	N	Percentage
Master's degree	118	43.1
Professional degree	12	4.4
Doctorate degree	28	10.2
Other	17	6.2
Mother's Degree Level		
Nursery school to 8th grade	10	3.6
9th, 10th, or 11th grade	7	2.6
12th grade, no diploma	4	1.5
High school Diploma/GED	65	23.7
Some college credit	22	8
Associate degree	42	15.3
Bachelor's degree	43	15.7
Master's degree	38	13.9
Professional degree (MD, DDS, etc)	6	2.2
Doctorate degree	4	1.5
Father's Degree Level		
Nursery school to 8th grade	17	6.2
9th, 10th, or 11th grade	17	6.2
12th grade, no diploma	4	1.5
High school Diploma/GED	88	32.1
Some college credit	29	10.6
Associate degree	18	6.6
Bachelor's degree	45	16.4
Master's degree	28	10.2
Professional degree (MD, DDS, etc)	6	2.2
Doctorate degree	5	1.8

Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables are reported in Tables 2 and 3. As seen in Table 2, participants reported moderate levels of achievement (M = 9.24, SD = 2.81) and lower levels of shame (M = 38.96, SD = 11.79). Additionally,

participants reported moderate levels of resilience (*M* = 94.69, *SD* = 13.37). As shown in Table 3, correlations among variables ranged from -.54 to .26.

Table 2

Scale Means, Standard Deviations, and Internal Consistency Reliability

Scales	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's alpha	Range of scores
Achievement	9.24	2.81	.93	5–20
Shame	38.96	11.79	.76	18–90
Resilience	94.69	13.37	.92	59–120

Note. *P<0.01

Pearson Correlation

Pearson Correlations were used to test Hypotheses 1 and 2. Hypothesis 1 stated there would be a statistically significant relationship between the achievement gap and shame in college students. The hypothesized relationship between achievement and shame was supported, indicating that as shame increased, academic achievement increased. Hypothesis 2 stated that there would be a relationship between shame, resilience, and achievement (the lower the shame, the higher the resilience, and the higher the achievement); (the higher the shame, the lower the resilience, the lower the achievement). The hypothesized relationship between achievement, resilience, and shame was not supported, indicating the higher the reported shame, the lower the resilience, and the higher achievement.

Table 3

Correlations Between Variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. Achievement	-	-	-
2. Shame	.259**	-	-
3. Resilience	-.226**	-.539**	

Note. ** P<0.01

Independent T-Test

An Independent sample T-Test was used to analyze Hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 3 stated that African American college students would experience higher levels of shame than White college students. There was no significant difference in shame scores reported by African American college students (M=37.99, SD=12.85) and White college students (M=39.24, SD=11.03) conditions; t (238) =-.801, p = .424. As such, the hypothesized relationship between African American college students and shame was not supported.

Table 4

Independent T-Test, Comparing shame in African American and Caucasian students

Scales	N	M	SD	t	*p*
African American	126	37.99	12.85	-.801	.424
Caucasian	114	39.24	11.03		

Moderation Anaylsis

Hypothesis 4 stated that resilience will act as a buffer against shame for African American college students. To test the predicted moderating effects, a hierarchical

multiple regression analysis was conducted, testing the moderating effect of resilience on the relationship between achievement and shame. For the hierarchical moderated regression analysis, the predictor (African American college students), the outcome variable (shame), and the moderator variable (resilience) were entered. The interaction, between shame and resilience in African American students was not significant, ΔR^2 =0.29, F (3, 269) = 0.28, $p < .001$. As shown in Table 5, the predicted relationship between shame and achievement was supported; but the expectation that resilience serves as a buffer against shame was not found. The hypothesis stating that resilience would serve as a buffer against shame was not supported.

Table 5

Moderation effect of Resilience Relationship between Shame and African American college students, N = 126

		$CI_{95\%}$ for *b*				
Predictor	β	Lower	Upper	*r*	sr^2	*p*
Model Summary	-	-	-	.5424	.2941	.000**
Constant	79.94	68.54	91.34	-	-	.000**
African American	10.13	-7.36	-27.64	-	-	.26
Resilience	-.43	-.56	-.31	-	-	.000**
Interaction	-.10	-.28	-.08	-	-	.28

Note. Fit for model R^2 = .29, F (3, 269) = .28, $p < .001$.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of the achievement gap in relation to shame and resilience in African American college students. This study also explored the disproportionate psychological impact the achievement gap has had on African American college students by exploring the constructs of psychological distress and academic related shame. A deeper understanding of these psychological constraints will better inform educators and clinicians that serve and advise African American college students, as they will be able to create strategies that better support the development of resilience. In other words, the achievement gap is a complex phenomenon that warrants a great deal of attention, and any goal associated with addressing the achievement gap could be deemed monumental. The research questions and hypotheses were explored using Pearson correlations, an Independent T-Test, and a Moderation analysis.

Major Findings

Hypothesis 1 stated that there would be a statistically significant relationship between the achievement gap and shame. The hypothesized relationship between achievement and shame was supported, indicating that as shame increases so does academic achievement increase. This direction of the relationship was not expected, as previous research has demonstrated academic achievement has the ability to cause shame

in students, hindering academic success (Perkun et al., 2006). According to Monroe (2008), learners who have difficulties within the classroom are prone to shame. Additionally, Mastsumoto (1993) found that African American students perceived emotions more intensely than any other ethnic group, as they experience different cultural expectations. These cultural expectations involve continually disrupting stereotypes (Brown, 2006).

Hypothesis 2 stated that there would be a relationship between shame, resilience, and achievement (the lower the shame, the higher the resilience, and the higher the achievement); (the higher the shame, the lower the resilience, the lower the achievement). The hypothesized relationship between achievement, resilience, and shame was not supported, indicating that the higher shame levels were, the lower resilience, and the higher achievement. Additionally, according to Prekrun et al. (2017), emotions indeed have an influence on adolescents' achievement, beyond the effects of general cognitive ability and prior accomplishments. Historically, when enslaved, if individuals expressed themselves they faced consequences. Similarly, today in and outside of African American homes when emotions and feelings are disclosed there is a possibility of backlash and punishment. Culturally, African American households may have strict rules as a means of preparing their children for the turmoil that they may face outside of the home. Although this is thought to be of good intent, it does more harm than good (Patton, 2017). This sends the message that it is dangerous to be angry or sad, causing individuals to repress their emotions and vulnerability. As a result, many African Americans do the work that is

expected, and that is to become academically and professionally successful to make it out of their limited environments (Gump, 2000).

Hypothesis 3 stated that African American college students will experience higher levels of shame than White college students. The hypothesized relationship between African American and White students was not supported, as there was not a significant difference in the amount of shame that African American college students (M=37.99, SD=12.85) and White college students (M=39.24, SD=11.03) experiences, conditions; t (238) =-.801, p = .424. This was not expected, as Johnson (2020) stated that shame impacts an African American student's ability to learn, to become engaged in his or her classes, and to tolerate adverse consequences. Additionally, race is a relevant influence for African American students in higher education. The academic and social experiences of African Americans are generally stained by discrimination, bigotry, and stereotypes; and these concepts of inferiority are communicated to African American students at an early age (Moore, 2001).

According to Moore et al. (2003), the prove-them-wrong syndrome is a core theoretical framework for understanding and explaining the phenomenon of persistence for African American males. They posit that for African American students some challenges call for adaptive and non-adaptive coping mechanisms that promote academic persistence in unwelcoming and hostile environments. In a study conducted by Steele (1997), many participants indicated that they work harder to challenge stereotypes and choose to control the reigns of their academic destiny. According to Moore (2000b),

determined students refrain from letting negative experiences, thoughts, and perceptions obstruct their academic performance and ambition (Moore, 2000b).

Hypothesis 4 stated that resilience will act as a buffer against shame for African American college students. The interaction between shame and resilience in African American students was not significant. This was not expected, as research continues to suggest that African American students need coping tools to shield themselves from barriers within the academic setting, as early as 10 years old (Ogbu, 1985). According to Moore (2000b), regardless of the hurdles or difficulties, determined students seem to have many skills that empower them to survive as well as endure in unsupportive and intimidating scholastic environments.

Strengths

There are many strengths to be found in the current study. The Cronbach's alpha value for most measures was acceptable, indicating that the measures were reliable and internally consistent for the sample.

Additionally, the study focused specifically on African American college students, who experience shame as a result of the achievement gap, and can persist because of resilience—more than other groups. This study adds to the limited body of research that focuses on African American college student's emotional wellbeing in the academic sector.

Limitations and Future Studies

Although this study contains strengths, there were also limitations. First, the study uses self-report data that is not confirmed by another source of information. This may impact the generalizability of the results. Second, although there are consistent results, due to a question within the Connor-Davison Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) being omitted, resilience results are not considered valid. However, results are still considered a good interpretation of the data, as there are briefer versions of the CD-RISC scale that omit certain items. Also, participants were asked to explain their idea of resilience, which provides information and insight about individual resilience. Additionally, response partiality and social desirability may have affected the results of the study as participants may have responded to survey items falsely to appear socially acceptable. This may have impacted the validity of the study. Moreover, future studies should further examine better ways of exploring academic achievement, as the measure used was created by the researcher and advisors.

Implications and Conclusion

This study contains many important implications that are useful for working with African American students. The results indicate that the more a student achieves, the more that they experience shame. Secondly, the results indicate that there is not a significant difference in the amount of shame that African American and White college students experience. Lastly, the results reveal that resilience does not lessen the amount of shame that an African American college student experiences.

However, studies continue to suggest that African American college students experience high levels of shame, and resilience shields them in academic settings. This refutes the results of the present study (Johnson, 2020). Research also refutes the result claims by suggesting that African Americans experience shame differently, possibly even more because of their distinctive encounters with stereotypes and barriers (Ferguson et al., 2000). However, there are several possible reasons for this outcome.

The first reason being that through the transatlantic slave trade from 1525 to 1866, approximately 12.5 million citizens of Africa were kidnapped and sent to foreign lands. During this journey, only 10.7 million individuals endured the two-month passage (Solly, 2020). These individuals were stripped from their homes, forced to suppress their emotions, and abandon their original languages and rituals (Schiele, 2005).

African Americans began their stead in America by being told that they were less than White Americans, as they were forced to be caregivers, cooks, maids, and field workers. Despite how hard they worked and performed they were always given scraps and had to be innovative with deficient resources. As a result of this transgenerational trauma, many African Americans began to identify with the notion of not being good enough. According to Cross (1991), during development African Americans began to resent their own culture and racial identity, and adapt to White American culture believing it to be better. African American children are often required to take in the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture in educational settings, and this reintroduces the idea that White is better (Tatum, 2017).

Enslaved people were not allowed to be educated and feared establishing genuine connections with their children due to lynchings and consequences (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017). These individuals were marginalized and oppressed until they had experienced enough and began to escape. In 2021, African Americans continue to be limited and treated subordinate, as there are still salary and academic gaps, voter suppression, redlining, and oppression. African Americans are still being told by law enforcement, government, and media that they are not good enough, as African American bodies continue to be weaponized. In 2020, George Floyd was suffocated by a police officer, Breonna Taylor was murdered by police officers in her own home, and Ahmaud Arbery was murdered by a former police officer while jogging (Barrie, 2020; Hoofnagle, et al, 2020). Additionally, African American women being only 13% of the United States population represent 20% of women killed by police and approximately 30% were killed while unarmed. Like Breonna Taylor, since 2015 approximately 36% of women were killed by police in their homes (Brown & Ray, 2020). In 2021, African Americans continue to be profiled as a threat to society and this repeated message has a psychological impact. However, like their ancestors, African Americans choose to be resilient and escape the limitations placed on them (Weller & Roberts, 2021).

African Americans and enslaved Africans have displayed resistance in every area of their journey and no amount of literature that can help onlookers to understand what that journey is like. This endurance has enabled African Americans to focus on resilience. Enslaved individuals always believed that they were worthy of freedom. This resilience

and belief was displayed when they were able to employ innovation and creativity to prepare good things for themselves while being enslaved (Jagger et al., 2021)

As mentioned previously prove-them-wrong syndrome may be another potential reason as to why participants responded to items in the manner in which they did. Historically, the laws and political movements that sought to disallow enslaved individuals' education only intensified the longing and determination to be educated. Education became a way of resisting oppression and how they identified with freedom (Kynard 2013). For centuries African American students have swallowed their shame to achieve their ultimate goals of success and accomplishment, as it speaks louder to opposers and communicates victory.

Moore (2000b) found that the prove-them-wrong syndrome appears to be a dominant response for African-American students in general and that their coping mechanisms developed into force and vitality despite hardship. Moore et al. (2003), found that the prove-them-wrong syndrome was triggered in social and academic domains, where African American students lacked representation. Prove-them-wrong syndrome is characterized by working hard to reach one's goals, while simultaneously proving critics wrong.

The second possible reason for the outcome of this study is Superwoman/Strong Black Woman Syndrome. This is important to note because many of the participants were African American women. According to Woods-Giscombe (2010), the Strong Black Woman/Superwoman phenomenon has the ability to safeguard self, family, and

community. The idea of Superwoman was created as a result of African American women's mission to reduce the damaging societal description of African American womanhood. It was also used to emphasize the unacknowledged traits that were formed and continue to exist despite oppression and suffering (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003). This particular phenomenon has been fundamental for an African American woman's survival and continues to reign true for African American women in academia. Woods-Giscombe posits that without this survival tool, African Americans might not have borne the tremendous historical challenges. As it requires an obligation to display strength, emotional dominance, and disallows vulnerability and dependence. These requirements have left African American women more susceptible to mental illness and premature illness, exclusion from positive political change, and without medical service (Geronimus, 2001).

In a study completed by Nelson et al. (2016), researchers found that participants viewed the Strong Black Woman/Superwoman role through five characteristics: independence, taking care of family and others, hardworking and high achievement, overcoming adversity, and emotionally restricted. Although studies reveal that Black women who internalize these types of strengths gain some psychosocial benefits, these characteristics are linked to several psychological consequences (Jones et al.,2021). These effects have caused African American women to reckon with their upbringings and lineage about what it means to be strong. Within many environments, such as White institutions, the shortage of Black women on campuses intensifies feelings of entrapment

and being muzzled. This often leaves African Americans suppressing their feelings, living by the notion of "picking their battles," (Corbin et al., 2018).

Today, there are a large amount of African American women achieving. According to the State of Women-Owned Businesses Report (2016), African American women are the fastest growing group of entrepreneurs in the United States. In an interview conducted by Byng (2017), many African American women stated that they feel pressure to succeed and obligated to not fail. Historically, African American women have been placed at the bottom of the totem pole and are now choosing themselves. However, this decision has not come without consequence or sacrifice, as African American women have suffered romantically. According to Birger (2015), African American women face inequality when it comes to romantic partners, as men seem to desire African American women less than they do other groups of women (Bany et al., 2014). Moreover, when African American women do engage in romantic relationships they are often required to shift, redirecting their own needs and strengths. Many even feel forced to adjust their confidence and candor and reduce their achievements to allow men the comfortability of manhood (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). According to Wang and Parker (2014), the amount of African American adults ages 25 and older who have never been married skyrocketed from 9% in 1960 to 36% in 2012. Research also posits that African American men are also less likely to get married due to disproportionate employment rates. Additionally, the ratio of African American men to women is unbalanced due to homicides and mass incarceration rates. As a result, African American

women decide to forgo motherhood or are often left to be single mothers (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Mechoulan, 2011). Despite these outcomes, African American women have chosen to be more assertive in changing the narrative of Black womanhood, as they strive to bridge the labor and education gap (Mechoulan, 2011).

For African American students, quitting is rarely an option. As the successful completion of a college degree satisfies not just a personal goal, but an ancestral desire as well. It is also important to complete college to debunk myths that suggest that African American students are quitters, or intellectually inferior (Twyman-Hoff, 2016). Education is how African American students control the narrative and challenge negative stigmas. Completing a college degree serves as an act of independence when an individual has consistently been put down and belittled.

Consistently, African American college students in White spaces become susceptible to forms of racial battle fatigue, trying to resolve negative images about themselves while facing racial biases (Smith, 2004). Systemic and foreseeable racial insults are widespread at colleges within the United States. Smith et al. (2016) found that African American men who experience prolonged racial insults will perceive their environment as tremendously stressful, draining, and threatening to their sense of control, wellbeing, and meaning, causing them to feel defeat, uncertainty, strain, irritation, and injustice. According to Adams (2005), a person's race is the most intense division in America, making it difficult for African Americans to obtain the same satisfaction in higher education settings. The racist principles and anti-Black messages saturate the

learning and social spaces of African American students at historically White colleges. Additionally, African American students absorb messages that they are not wanted; that they are lethargic, delinquents, and less scholarly than their White peers (Smith et al., 2016). These messages continue to transcend outside of the classroom. In 2019, the median net worth of African American households was less than 15% of White households (Bhutta et al., 2020).

Another way that African American students overcome shame is to advocate for themselves. The ability to advocate does not mean that shame will no longer exist, it just transforms into an act of resilience. Advocacy is a public display of interest in a specific cause, and the individual taking the clear initiative to support the improvement of that cause (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Advocacy is simply how African Americans fight back and choose to put an end to harmful demands. For many African Americans, fighting back is a very significant coping strategy—a practical approach for change. Through advocacy, African Americans can overcome barriers and transform their lives. They begin to no longer just survive but to thrive by confronting dehumanization (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). This is displayed when African Americans become entrepreneurs, politicians, educators, doctors, lawyers, activists, creators, law enforcement, engineers, social workers, journalists, and any other fulfilled dream.

Lastly, it is important to note that the participants in this study were either pursuing or had already obtained a college degree, which may have countered many

responses. These individuals may now have a different outlook on success and achievement, as they now operate beyond certain limitations.

In conclusion, there is an absence of empirical studies that investigate the relationship between the achievement gap, shame, and resilience in African American college students. This study explored the disproportionate psychological impact the achievement gap has had on African American college students by exploring the constructs of psychological distress and academic-related shame, as educators and clinicians benefit from having a clearer understanding of their client's experiences. The results indicate that the more a student achieves, the more that they experience shame. Secondly, the results indicate that there is not a significant difference in the amount of shame that African American and White college students experience. Lastly, the results reveal that resilience does not lessen the amount of shame that an African American college student experiences. The result of this study provides some insight into the experiences of African American college students.

African American students face tremendous challenges and are often left feeling reduced and overlooked. However, an ultimate goal of success allows them to overcome shame and oppression. The respondents in this study were asked to provide one word denoting what makes them resilient, the common responses were: passion, hope, family/support, determination, faith, stress, adaptability, future, being a minority, perspective, roots/childhood, adversity, stubbornness, purpose, and being underestimated. Although in this study resilience did not serve as a buffer against shame in African

American college students, it is clear that resilience plays a part in their achievement. Therefore, it is important for educators and clinicians to properly discern their students' experiences to foster resilience. This will enable all stakeholders to provide adequate mentorship, psychoeducation, resources, and opportunities.

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APPENDIX A

Demographics

1. Age____
2. Ethnicity
    a. Black/African American
    b. White/Caucasian
    c. Hispanic
    d. Native American
    e. Asian
    f. Other
3. Gender
        a. Male
        b. Female
        c. Non-binary
        d. Transgender
        e. I prefer not to say

4. Did you attend Public or Private School?
5. Were you in Special Education?
6. What is your of origin income?
        a. Less than $10,000
        b. $10,000 to $19,999
        c. $20,000 to $29,999
        d. $30,000 to $39,999
        e. $40,000 to $49,999
        f. $50,000 to $59,999
        g. $60,000 to $69,999
        h. $70,000 to $79,999
        i. $80,000 to $89,999
        j. $90,000 to $99,999
        k. $100,000 to $149,999
        l. $150,000 or more

7. What is your current/graduating GPA?
8. Undergraduate or Graduate?
9. Highest Degree
        a. Student
        b. Associate degree (for example: AA, AS)
        c. Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, AB, BS)
        d. Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)
        e. Professional degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
        f. Doctorate degree (for example: PhD, EdD)

10. Education level of father: What is the highest degree or level of school your father completed?
    a. Nursery school to 8th grade
    b. 9th, 10th or 11th grade
    c. 12th grade, no diploma
    d. High school graduate - high school diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
    e. Some college credit, but less than 1 year
    f. 1 or more years of college, no degree
    g. Associate degree (for example: AA, AS)
    h. Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, AB, BS)
    i. Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)
    j. Professional degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
    k. Doctorate degree (for example: PhD, EdD)

11. Education level of mother: What is the highest degree or level of school your mother completed?
    a. Nursery school to 8th grade
    b. 9th, 10th or 11th grade
    c. 12th grade, no diploma
    d. High school graduate - high school diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
    e. Some college credit, but less than 1 year
    f. 1 or more years of college, no degree
    g. Associate degree (for example: AA, AS)
    h. Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, AB, BS)
    i. Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)
    j. Professional degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
    k. Doctorate degree (for example: PhD, EdD)

APPENDIX B

OTHER AS SHAMER SCALE (OAS)

We are interested in how people think others see them. Below is a list of statements describing feelings or experiences about how you may feel other people see you.

Read each statement carefully and circle the number to the right of the item that indicates the frequency with which you find yourself feeling or experiencing what is described in the statement. Use the scale below.

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Seldom	Sometime	Frequently	Almost always

1. I feel other people see me as not good enough.	0 1 2 3 4
2. I think that other people look down on me	0 1 2 3 4
3. Other people put me down a lot	0 1 2 3 4
4. I feel insecure about others opinions of me	0 1 2 3 4
5. Other people see me as not measuring up to them	0 1 2 3 4
6. Other people see me as small and insignificant	0 1 2 3 4
7. Other people see me as somehow defective as a person	0 1 2 3 4
8. People see me as unimportant compared to others	0 1 2 3 4
9. Other people look for my faults	0 1 2 3 4
10. People see me as striving for perfection but being unable to reach my own standards	0 1 2 3 4
11. I think others are able to see my defects	0 1 2 3 4
12. Others are critical or punishing when I make a mistake	0 1 2 3 4
13. People distance themselves from me when I make mistakes	0 1 2 3 4
14. Other people always remember my mistakes	0 1 2 3 4
15. Others see me as fragile	0 1 2 3 4
16. Others see me as empty and unfulfilled	0 1 2 3 4
17. Others think there is something missing in me	0 1 2 3 4
18. Other people think I have lost control over my body and feelings	0 1 2 3 4

1

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX D

Achievement Questionnaire

*****In the context of this study, a peer is defined as any individual across the United States of the same age and of any ethnicity and race---beyond your current friend group.**

12. Compared to your same-age peers where do you think you fall in Reading?
    a. Better than 75%
    b. Better than 50%
    c. Better than 25%
    d. Below 25%
13. Compared to your same age peers where do you think you fall in History?
    a. Better than 75%
    b. Better than 50%
    c. Better than 25%
    d. Below 25%

14. Compared to your same age peers where do you think you fall in Mathematics?
    a. Better than 75%
    b. Better than 50%
    c. Better than 25%
    d. Below 25%

15. Compared to your same age peers where do you think you fall in Writing and English Essay?
    a. Better than 75%
    b. Better than 50%
    c. Better than 25%
    d. Below 25%

16. Compared to your same age peers where do you think you fall in Science?
    a. Better than 75%
    b. Better than 50%
    c. Better than 25%
    d. Below 25%

VITA

Brittany Thomas was born in Minden, Louisiana, to Raymond Williams and Valerie Thomas (Clyde Davis). After completing her work at the Lakeside Jr./Sr. High School, Sibley, Louisiana, in 2011, Brittany entered Wiley College in Marshall, Texas. She received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with a minor in Psychology. During the fall of 2015 she attended Alabama A&M University in Normal, Alabama, where she received her Master of Science in Counseling Psychology. Brittany completed an accredited doctoral internship with the Tennessee Internship Consortium in Knoxville, Tennessee (2020-2021). In pursuance of her professional licensure and following her doctoral completion, she will complete a Post-Doctoral Psychology Fellowship position with Next Steps Worldwide Psychological Services in Dallas, Texas.

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