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Barriers To Individuals Of Entering The Field Of Education

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BARRIERS TO INDIVIDUALS OF COLOR ENTERING THE FIELD OF
EDUCATION

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Education

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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“Racism is still with us. But it is up to us to prepare our children for what they have to meet, and, hopefully, we shall overcome.”

Rosa Parks

“We cannot reform institutional racism or systemic policies if we are not actively engaged. It's not enough to simply complain about injustice; the only way to prevent future injustice is to create the society we would like to see, one where we are all equal under the law.”

Al Sharpton

“Racism cannot be cured solely by attacking some of the results it produces, like discrimination in housing or in education.”

Sargent Shriver

“Education is the key to success in life, and teachers make a lasting impact in the lives of their students.”

Solomon Ortiz

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As an individual of color and a teacher, I would like to use my experience and training to help other individuals of color enter the field of education. Through my research, I would like the following question answered: *What are barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education?*

In this chapter, I provide an overview of issues associated with individuals of color entering the field of education, my personal background, and my rationale for this research question.

Overview of Issues

The demographics of the United States of America are changing, and nowhere is the change more evident than in the classrooms in public schools across the nation. Public schools bear the major responsibility to address these changes in demographics and the disparities that may be caused due to such changes. Many of the students in the United States of America are born in other countries, speak different languages, and have varying cultural values and traditions. Diversity and immigration in the United States of America is on the rise. According to Pew Research Center (2015) projections,

immigrants will make up a record 18% of the population in the United States of America in 2065, compared with 14% today and 5% in 1965. The arrival of new immigrants and the births of their children and grandchildren account for 55% of the U.S. population increased from 193 million in 1965 to 324 million today.

(para. 2)

The immigration rates in the United States of America change daily and so do the demographics of the student population in schools across the country.

Effects of changing demographics. Changing demographics poses a number of challenges for public schools. For instance, the majority of the teachers in the United States of America are middle class, European American women. This does not match the demographics of the students in the schools. According to data from the United States Department of Education (2013), more than 80 percent of teachers are European American. I believe that all students suffer from not having a more diverse teacher population and disparities in the academic performance of racially diverse, Non-European American students, can be linked to academic factors, social factors, and factors related to personal choice. Gaps in achievement have appeared in grading, test scoring, employment figures, and graduation rates at the secondary and postsecondary level.

In my view, one of the primary objectives of a public school education, is to provide all students with a quality education that ultimately leads them to becoming a productive member of a society. As an educator of color (Non-European American), I believe that more must be done in order to remedy disparities in the demographics of teachers, because increasing teacher diversity is an important aspect of improving educational equity for all students. At first glance, people would assume that the need for teachers of color is only necessary for students of color, but a study published by Cherng and Halpin (2016), found that students of all races respond more favorably to teachers of color than to European American teachers. When students are educated in an environment that provides them with few opportunities to learn from individuals from

diverse backgrounds they miss out on learning more about themselves and the world around them.

Being taught by an individual from a middle class, European American viewpoint can limit the ability for growth in many ways. For instance, a European American teacher can misread the behaviors of students of color due to cultural incompetence. Teachers of color tend to have more positive perceptions of students of color than other teachers. Research has found that teachers of color are less likely than European American teachers to perceive the behavior of students of color as disruptive, and as a result write fewer disciplinary referrals (Howard, 2002).

Teachers of color bring background knowledge to the classroom that others cannot. For example, when discussing social ills related to racism, prejudice and privilege, teachers of color can discuss their own experiences. Discussions about society's ills provides an opportunity for growth in the area of emotional intelligence. By learning about the experiences of their teacher, students get the opportunity to identify and manage their own emotions and the emotions of others. Researchers have found a positive effect in both math and reading scores when students of color were taught by teachers of color (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). This is why I believe increasing teacher diversity is an important aspect of improving educational equity especially for students of color, and I want to address the disparity of individuals of color in the field of education by identifying barriers that may prevent them from entering into the field of education.

Challenges of academic achievement. Academic success remains a challenge in public education for racially diverse students. As shown in the chapter two literature review, many scholars support the idea that the public school system should focus on

improving the success rate for all students, especially students of color. A problem I believe can be solved if educational policy makers and legislators can identify common barriers that exist among individuals of color that can prevent them from not only becoming productive members of society, but also entering the field of education.

Most teachers are European American and research suggests that the majority of individuals currently pursuing a career in the field of education continue to be members of the aforementioned ancestry. According to the most recent U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), a nationally representative survey of teachers and principals, showed 82 percent of public school teachers identified as European American (2013). Conversely, according to research study results introduced by Cherng and Halpin (2016), teachers of color are considered to be favored over European American teachers by all students. Educators of color tend to produce more favorable outcomes for students of color. When taught by teachers of color, students of color typically perform better academically, socially, and emotionally.

Having a faculty that is more reflective of the students' experiences can help close the achievement gap by helping students develop a positive ethnic identity (Bell, 2009). In communities across the United States of America, students are gathering knowledge based on their personal experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. Those experiences are a major contributing factor in ethnic identity development (Bell, 2009). For instance, in my community the students are predominantly African American. However, the students attend schools that employ predominantly European American teachers. I believe diversity is a key component to educational equality and academic opportunity.

Academic achievement data and discipline referrals may provide helpful information to understand systemic issues of racial educational inequity. The public schools in my district have been closed, however, the students in my community attend schools in neighboring districts and charter schools. I have spoken with several parents in the community and they feel that their children are experiencing educational hardships due to racism and racial diversity issues within the accepting school districts and the Charter schools in the area. The gap between the percentage of students of color and teachers of color, and the lack of diversity in the field of education may help to explain why students of color are suspended or expelled from school at disproportionate rates. Being suspended or expelled from school place students of color at higher risk of subsequent academic disengagement and increased probability for drop out, which is significantly predictive of the student's future academic outcomes. Failure to complete secondary education, typically means inability to enter postsecondary education which becomes a barrier to entry into teacher preparation programs.

Researcher Background

I am interested in learning from the experiences of other individuals of color. I believe that my success was a result of hard work, perseverance, and privilege. Privilege may be more of a deciding factor to my success than hard work and perseverance. With acknowledging my privilege and examining the experiences of others, I may be able to identify barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education. My hope is upon completion of the study I will have some answers to at least some of the questions that I have wondered about in the past. By educating myself and presenting my research findings, I hope to help close achievement gaps related to disparities in teacher

demographics for good. There are many points to consider when investigating the barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education. The answers to the following questions are what support the research into the identification of barriers and will be expanded upon in the literature review:

- How many teachers of color are needed?
- Does the number of teachers of color reflect the student population?
- Why is change necessary and to what degree is it considered to be statistically significant/successful?

Research Question Rationale

This capstone study will provide research and reporting from individuals of color about their experiences of, opinions about, and reasons for not entering the field of education. This information is critical to understanding the barriers to entering the field of education for individuals of color. European American teachers make up more than approximately 80 percent of the teacher force in the United States of America. The answer to the research question can identify barriers to recruiting individuals of color into the field of education and increase the number of individuals of color in the teacher workforce, if barriers exist. Thus, the primary purpose of this study identifies barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education. My guiding question throughout the duration of this study: *What are the barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education?* I will address the possible causes or barriers that cause racial disparity in the field of education.

Conclusion

Currently, the number of teachers of color does not reflect the racial demographics of the students in my community. It is my desire to collect data that will identify many of the barriers that can cause the racial disparity of individuals of color in teacher preparatory programs and that affect recruitment of teachers of color in the field of education. Second, I will review literature that has been previously presented by other scholars to develop an understanding of the factors that contribute to racial disparities between individuals entering the field of education. Last, I will compile a list of the causes of the barriers that will detail the possible reasons for the discrepancy between the numbers of students of color and teachers of color, enrollment between European American students and students of color.

Summary

This capstone is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is the introduction to capstone. Chapter two examines the of factors that influence individuals of color entering the field of education and ends with conclusions and implications. Chapter three consists of research methods, procedures, and participants. Chapter four reveals the results of the study. Chapter five summarizes the outcome and identifies implications associated with the research findings.

Chapter two details the research related to barriers individuals of color face when entering the field of education. It discusses academic factors related to individuals of color in general, including items such as the achievement gap and the teacher-student relationship. It also discusses common factors associated with self, family, and environment. Through my literature review, I explain more about the impact of covert

and overt bias. I explain research and best practices and ways to remove some of the barriers facing individuals of color.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to review the research that answers the question: *What are the barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education?*

The literature review helps to inform the project of larger conceptual issues that are relevant to the identified research question. The literature review is divided into the following four subtopics: Academic Factors, Environmental/Cultural Factors, Family/Community Factors, and Factors Related to Self. The information provided in the subtopics is by no means considered to be an exhaustive list, but does provide an organizational tool from which to study the barriers related to teachers of color entering the field of education.

Within the subtopic of Academic Factors are studies that paint a clearer picture of the issues associated with the effects of biases and misconceptions about students of color. These biases are often demonstrated through a lack of respect and acceptance for cultural diversity and the development of policies that prevent needed changes from occurring in schools nationwide. For example, low expectations for underachieving students of color, poor teacher/student relationships, over identifying students of color for special education, high levels of dropout, suspension and expulsion rates due to zero tolerance policies. Within the subtopic of Environment/Cultural Factors are studies that discuss research findings which indicate that experiences with discrimination, racism, prejudice, and oppression in early stages of academic development predict a decline in importance of schooling and academics for students of color. For example, there are complex relationships between students of color and their environment and the social

positions (i.e., race, social class, gender, and ethnicity) that create alternative developmental paths for students of color which increase their likelihood of encountering challenging social conditions related to social status (i.e., oppression, racism, prejudice, discrimination).

The studies listed in the Family/Community Factors subtopic include issues related to adversity and dire circumstances such as poverty, food insecurity, housing instability and other factors associated with limited economic and social resources that many individuals of color face. The reality that many students of color are from low-income households and they tend to live in communities with high levels of poverty, violence, crime, homicide/suicide, drug use/abuse, joblessness, crime, violence, and teen pregnancy (Benson, 1997; Berliner, 2009) will be expounded upon. This subtopic will delve into the research that indicates students who grow up in these communities are less likely than their higher income-level peers to graduate from high school, to attend selective colleges, to graduate from college, and to receive a graduate degree (Wyner et al., 2007). Parenting styles, parental involvement, parental expectations, and parental support are also discussed. The subtopic of Factors Related to Self includes studies that illuminate factors common among the individuals of color that significantly affect their academic outcomes. Issues related to poverty-induced physical, sociological, and psychological problems are due to inadequate health, dental, and vision care which is often the result of inadequate or nonexistent medical insurance, food insecurity,

environmental pollutants, family relations and stress inducing criteria (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007). These psychological problems that develop may cause students to experience issues ranging from low self-esteem, low self-image, identity issues, poor peer relationships, excessive absenteeism, speech delays, behavioral disorders, and a range of challenges that affect academic achievement. As a reminder, the information listed in the subtopics of this literature review is not intended to be a definitive list of barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education.

Academic Factors

Although it would be relatively impossible to provide an exhaustive list of all of the issues related to the achievement gap caused by educational inequity in the United States of America, it is important to provide an overview of many of them. The following literature review highlights poverty being a powerful predictor of school performance, but more importantly how issues such as race, culture, ethnicity, and language function independently of economics and continue to contribute to gaps in achievement. School success is highly correlated with overall success in life (Howard, 2002). Therefore, disequilibrium in areas such as grading, test scoring, attendance, disciplinary referrals, dropout or graduation and achievement rates has led to members of our nation's population to be disenfranchised (Howard, 2002). Our nation's schools function as a system of privilege which is reinforced by power, favoring certain groups over others. Howard (2006) suggested, "The assumption of rightness, as related to the achievement

gap, often leads teachers to assume that the problem of school failure lies in the students and their families and not in the structure of schooling” (p. 119). The privilege and preferences of the dominant group has an influence on the climate of a school. The climate is created by combining the beliefs, values and attitudes that are a fundamental factor associated with students’ educational achievement (Rolland, 2011, p. 43).

Achievement gap. There is a myriad of issues related to the causes of the achievement gap between individuals of color and their European American counterparts. Those issues include outright racism, stereotypes, and misguided perceptions about poverty and race. Which can be demonstrated through a lack of respect and acceptance for cultural diversity, inadequate funding, lower expectations, poor teacher/student relationships, and a sense of privilege that prevents needed changes from occurring in schools lead to the abandonment of urban public education, and teachers not prepared to deal with diversity (Howard, 2002). Public schools need a teaching force that is more reflective of the population of students that it serves. All students can benefit from being taught by individuals from varied ethnic and racial backgrounds. A diverse teaching force challenges the stereotype that individuals of color lack many of the qualities needed to be effective teachers i.e. intelligence, content knowledge, determination, effort, and work ethic. Teachers of color can serve as role models for all students, not solely for students of color. The public schools here in the United States of America have created a race gap, with its teacher force being made up of predominantly European American teachers with

a deficit of teachers from more racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds (Berchini, 2015; Strauss, 2015). There is a “race gap” in the number of qualified educators that is not likely to close anytime soon (Rich, 2015). The problem is particularly severe in urban school districts. European American teachers are less likely to work in urban school districts while teachers of color are two to three times more likely to be employed in such districts. Urban school districts are associated with high-poverty, high-minority and having the most unfavorable working conditions (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). Research has shown that teachers’ perceptions are related to students’ academic and social outcomes (e.g., Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Ferguson, 2003). Research also supports the idea that European American teachers have higher expectations for European American students and lower expectations for students of color (Baron, Tom, & Cooper, 1985; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). In particular, research using the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS, 1988) found that teachers perceive Black students as putting in less effort for good grades and as being less attentive in class compared to their European American peers. A teacher’s misconceptions, prejudices, unconscious stereotypes, and biases explain why the achievement gap is particularly harmful for students of color. Having larger numbers of teachers of color has the potential to dispel stereotypes about the intellectual abilities and work ethic of individuals of color. Some studies have found that race matching between teachers and students is linked to favorable academic and social outcomes, such as higher teacher expectations

(Fox, 2016; Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2015) and lower rates of student absenteeism and suspensions (Holt & Gershenson, 2015). Prior research has also found that student perceptions of teachers are a significant factor in predicting academic success (Midgley et al., 1989; Teven & McCroskey, 1997). Teachers of color may be viewed more favorably by students of color because they are sensitive to the cultural needs of their students. By teachers of color serving as role models, favorable outcomes can be produced for students of color. Simply knowing that individuals of color can and do have the potential and ability to excel in academia can have a positive impact on students from all racial and ethnic demographics. Not only are race-matched role models important but teacher-student relationship intervention is also needed for many students of color who may doubt their abilities to be successful.

Teacher-student relationship. The teacher-student relationship is important. A positive teacher-student relationship can determine whether the learning process is completed and the desire to learn is strengthened in students. There are “linear relationships between academic achievement and student-teacher relationships” (Toldson as cited in Jones, 2011, p. 12). As a result, the teacher-student relationship can affect the dropout rate. There are many factors associated with contributing to the dropout rate, but it is important to understand that dropping out of school is a long process not something that happens overnight (Bell, 2012, p. 12). Smith (2005) suggested that many European American educators, through race related biases, have developed low expectations and

assumptions about students of color. These assumptions often result in low expectations that hinder the learning of students of color (p. 24). The lower expectations are a threat to the academic performance of marginalized students because it hinders their achievement (Steele, 1992). Ogbu (1994) posited that African American children may not be given access to advanced classes because teachers and administrators may perceive of them as inferior to their European American counterparts. This biased treatment is revealed through several practices including tracking students into low-level classes, over representation and over identification for special education programs. Ferguson (1998), found that European American instructors treated students from marginalized groups differently than European American students. These teachers tend to be less supportive of students of color which may help perpetuate the cycle of low academic performance in marginalized groups. According to Steele (1999),

high standards, at least in a relative sense, should be an inherent part of teaching, and critical feedback should be given in the belief that the recipient can reach those standards. These things go without saying for many students. But they have to be made explicit for students under stereotype threat. (How to Reduce Stereotype Threat section, para. 9)

Covert and overt devaluation. In covert and overt ways, students of color remain devalued in public schools (Steele, 1989). Stereotypes and bias are forces that contribute to students of color being devalued, and work against their academic

achievement. From elementary through high school, students from marginalized groups are twice as likely as European American students to receive corporal punishment (Steele, 1992) and be disproportionately suspended or expelled from school (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002). According to Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997), “Teachers who are prone to accepting stereotypes of adolescent African American males as threatening or dangerous may overreact to relatively minor threats to authority, especially if their anxiety is paired with a misunderstanding of cultural norms of social interaction” (p. 336). The perceived threat may result in the teacher overreacting to a small act of insubordination and could lead to further school code violations and further disciplinary actions such as suspension and expulsion due to zero tolerance policies. Research suggests students of color are more harshly punished than their European American counterparts for the same offenses (Howard, 2002). Suspension or expulsion are often the consequences for committing these offenses, causing students of color to miss valuable learning opportunities. Students who frequently experience a loss of instructional time typically have lower academic achievement. Jones (2011) found that students who are suspended or expelled are more likely to drop out of school (p. 12). Jones (2011) suggested that students of color are more likely to be recommended for special education services and less likely to participate in gifted coursework (p. 17). Being over identified or recommended for special education services negatively affects academic achievement because the students in these programs have restricted access to the general education

program, as a result have restricted access to higher education and post-high school employment (Jones, 2011).

Students of color need teachers who are culturally proficient and who can create culturally proficient schools. They also need highly qualified teachers that can teach general education curriculum in ways that helps to close the achievement gap. Less experienced teachers are employed by the schools with the most need (Jones, 2001, p. 29). Teacher experience affect student engagement (Bell, 2012, p. 6). Effective teachers encourage student academic growth through a variety of different methods. Cultural competence or being culturally competent is a method that allows teachers to have high expectations for all students. The use of this method assists educators in identifying and implementing strategies that are appropriate and effective for students of color. There are a multitude of practices and policies that have perpetuated and exaggerated the achievement gap between individuals of color and their European American counterparts. It is imperative teachers, school administrators, legislators, and policy makers examine current policies and practices that are biased in order to enable students of color to be supported and successful. Many of the conflicts that emerge in the classroom are often the result of cultural incompetence.

Cultural Competency

Cultural competency is vital. Many public schools employ teachers that lack cultural competency. Cultural competency is more than just knowing the cultural

traditions of racial subgroups, it also means recognizing and understanding the norms and tendencies of their students who are from those subgroups. Cultural competency and awareness provides teachers with a knowledge of European American dominance and privilege in American society. The dominance and privilege is a result of the social arrangement of cultural and institutional dominance imposed on individuals of color due to historical events and influences (Steele, 1992). The institutional dominance is perpetuated mostly by political, cultural and socioeconomic influences and impacts societal interactions. Segregation exists in all aspects of social life and social interactions. In forty percent of the schools in the United States of America, there are no teachers of color on staff (Bireda & Chait, 2011). As a result, teachers and students in these schools may miss opportunities to question bias and challenge stereotypes they may encounter while navigating their social networks. Teachers have several duties. Relationship building is one of those duties. Building relationship with a person of a different race can help teachers counter the effects of stereotypes and neutralize bias. Another duty is to teach content in order to increase academic proficiency and understanding while creating an environment that is conducive to learning.

Creating meaningful relationships between students and teachers begins with teachers having cultural competency and establishing relationships with students to bridge the cultural disconnections that are a byproduct of cultural incompetence. Building these bridges is central to social and academic success both inside and outside of the

classroom. Disconnections in the relationships between teachers and students can determine students' attitudes and actions. In an effort to encourage positive attitudes and actions, teachers must connect with their students in such a way that students know that they are valued (Steele, 1992).

Teachers must take a step out of their comfort zone and engage with their students. They must ask their students questions in an attempt to get to know who their students and their families are both inside and outside of the classroom by asking questions like:

- What language do my students or their families speak at home?
- What is the racial demographic of the community that my students live in?
- Do the parents or guardians of my students have high school diplomas or GED's?
- What are my student's likes and dislikes?
- What kind of activities do they take part in?
- Are there members of the community that can add to the learning process in the classroom?
- What resources are available in the community?

Culturally competent teachers provide their students with the educational experiences they deserve. Culturally competent teachers assure that the curriculum will be delivered in a way that is responsive to the collective norms and experiences of the

student population and that the relationships forged between teacher and student is built on respect and sincerity and not bias and stereotypes.

In summary, students are more likely to graduate from school and have academic success when relationships with educators and school administrators are positive. Also, ideas, policies and procedures that are biased must be eliminated and new more culturally accepting policies must take their place. Barriers to equal education for all are also barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education, because inequities that prevent the educational achievement of any kind threaten these students' ability to compete economically and socially in 21st century society.

Environmental and Cultural Factors

According to Logan et al. (2012) and numerous other scholars and researchers, no group has suffered more from the failures of public education system in the United States of America than students of color. The reality of continuous gaps in achievement, being overidentified and over-represented in classes designated for special education services, along with attending schools that receive fewer educational support services and financial resources, receiving higher high school suspensions and expulsions, being placed in gifted and talented programs at lower rates, and having lower graduations rates at high school and the post-secondary level has severely affected the social condition of individuals of color. Many scholars and researchers have conducted studies which indicate that experiences with discrimination, racism, prejudice, and oppression in early

stages of academic development predict a decline in importance of schooling and academics for students of color.

Societal factors. There is a complex relationship between individuals of color and their environment. Determining whether societal factors such as decades of systematic oppression, discrimination, and racism are to blame for the condition of the lives of individuals of color can be a daunting task. Research has shown that these societal factors contribute to low socioeconomic status and poverty (Steele, 1992). The effects of low socioeconomic status and other environmental characteristics that are specific to individuals of color have been studied extensively and studies have found that there is a link between poverty and low graduation rates. According to a study conducted by Kusimo (1999), there is a link between poverty and people failing to graduate from high school. Kusimo (1999) found a connection between desegregation of the schools to a deterioration of community relationships for students of color. Before desegregation, students of color were taught by teachers of color. Students of color saw their teachers in the community in which they lived. The students were able to see their teachers in different roles in the community. Instead of simply being a teacher, they were advocates, coaches, counselors, role models, community leaders and even surrogate parents in some instances. After desegregation, students of color were sent to schools that were outside of their community. Many students were no longer being taught by teachers of color and

began being subjected to the standards and the imposed social identities of the communities that were bused into (Kusimo, 1999).

The importance of psychology. Yeager and Walton (2011) suggested that being valued by the school in which a student attends can affect the student's psychology. Students' beliefs and performance can improve based on how they are treated and whether they feel valued or not. For students of color, having to contend with negative stereotypes, racism, oppression, and suppression can not only impair academic and social performance but it also can lead to stagnation. Stagnation can stigmatize individuals because in an attempt to avoid unpleasant situations they may remain in environments that are familiar even if they are dangerous or increase their likelihood of encountering challenging social conditions related to social status. According to Schmader et al. (2008), Increasing diversity in organizations, schools, and communities, makes it essential to understand how the status affects performance (p. 26). According to Purdie-Vaughns et al. (2008),

most schools and workplaces—reflecting the broader society—are saturated with cues that signal devaluation of certain social identities: for example, low minority representation, few individuals from underrepresented groups in positions of power, and curricula and practices that inadvertently marginalize certain group identities. Reducing identity-related threats that are rooted in the setting may

therefore be the most effective intervention to improve intergroup relations. (p. 628)

Public schools are state sponsored institutions that lay the foundation for the social and professional futures of their students. Through means such as curriculum selection, course design, testing requirements and attendance policies have a direct influence on students and their parents (Staiger, p. 6).

Disadvantaged communities. In communities that are economically disadvantaged, many schools receive funding that is insufficient. In these schools, students are bombarded by negative social and environmental factors. While parents may try to isolate their children from negative influences in their communities, they may not be able to shield them from negative influences at school. According to Rolland (2011), factors associated with student success are as follows: “supportive parents, caring teachers, positive school environment, peer support, and community initiatives” (p. 2). The Holland (2011), qualitative research method enabled the researcher to learn and gather data from students by interviewing them. The students were able to give the researcher valuable first-hand accounts of factors that affect students of color. The students that were interviewed were juniors and seniors in high school. The study sought to understand factors associated with academic success as well as challenges to academic success and solutions for achieving academic success. Each participant was asked questions to determine their perspective on factors contributing to academic success or

failure, the solutions and challenges that they perceived to be necessary for students of color to achieve academic success. Some of those factors include: parent support, school environment, peer support, community resources and relationships teachers. The result of the study suggested that more mentors are needed in schools and these students need culturally literate educators in order to be successful. This information supports the notion that for students of color, environmental and cultural factors have a significant impact on their ability to be successful.

Family and Community Factors

Public education system in the United States of America has several obligations to the students that they serve, one being to create productive members of society. Members that are able to contribute to society in a positive way. According to Friend (2009), public schools are “the internalization of societal values” (p. 3). The presence of adversity and dire circumstances such as poverty, food insecurity, housing instability, and other factors associated with limited economic and social resources that many individuals of color face highlight how well the public schools in the United States of America are meeting their obligations. Much research has been conducted in regards to the link between living in poverty and vulnerability. According to Wright (2011), “youth are especially vulnerable to their environments, principally because of their real and perceived inability to impact the world around them” (p. 2). Research has found that by improving the health of

students, their overall dropout rates decrease and graduation rates increase (Wright, 2011).

Health risks of being an individual of color. According to Freudenberg and Ruglis (2007), “due to higher rates of graduation, workers can earn higher wages and have better employment possibilities” (p. 3). Because living in poverty makes parents more susceptible to health risks such as homicide/suicide, illegal drug use and or abuse, and emotional, behavioral, and psychological issues, students may have obligations outside of school that require them to contribute monetarily household or assist an ailing family member (p. 4), which can create a cycle of generational poverty.

The reality is many students of color are from low-income households and they tend to live in areas with high levels of poverty, violence, crime, homicide/suicide, drug use/abuse, joblessness, crime, violence, and teen pregnancy (Benson, 1997; Berliner, 2009). Due to the inequalities in the public educational system in the United States of America, parents of students of color have the duty of preparing their children for school academically but also to identify and navigate any potential negative experiences that may occur due to being a member of a marginalized group (i.e. discrimination, racism). Rolland (2011) suggested that parental support plays a vital role in the academic achievement of students of color. According Benson (1997), there are three strategies that can be used to improve the lives of individuals of color:

- (1) meeting basic human needs in order to enhance our national capacity to

ensure economic security, food, shelter, good and useful work, and safety for all residents; (2) targeting, reducing and eliminating the risks that diminish the healthy development of children and adolescents; and (3) developing language, vision and community. (p. 1)

Factors associated with living in poverty. Research suggests that there are common factors associated with living in poverty that significantly affect the learning opportunities of children and adolescents. These factors include low birth weight and non-genetic prenatal disorders or diseases, inadequate dental, vision and medical insurance which leads to substandard care in all three areas, environmental pollutants and safety issues, food insecurity, housing insecurity, and family relationships stress. Bellinger (2009) calls these issues Out of School Factors (OSFs) and they “are related to a host of poverty-induced physical, sociological, and psychological problems that children often bring to school, ranging from neurological damage and attention disorders to excessive absenteeism, linguistic underdevelopment, and oppositional behavior” (p. 1).

Family income plays an important role in educational attainment and future socioeconomic success. Since the majority of individuals of color live in households that meet the criteria for being at or below the nationally recognized low income level (Washington, 2012) their communities are dangerous because of high unemployment or underemployment rates and use of illegal drugs. Many students of color reside in households that are run by a single parent, where there are food and housing insecurities.

Research indicates students who grow up in poverty are less likely than their higher income-level peers to graduate from high school, to attend selective colleges, to graduate from college, and to receive a graduate degree (Wyner et al., 2007). Eliminating poverty and protecting the health of individuals of color is imperative. According to Wyner et al. (2007), schools in the United States of America are engines of social mobility; engines that enable individuals from the toughest economic circumstances to advance as far as their abilities can take them. “But these engines of mobility are sputtering for those lower-income students who are showing the most academic promise” (Wyner et al., 2007, p. 1). Public schools in communities of poverty have historically harmed the most vulnerable members of our society by not eliminating things like structural inequities that feed the cycle of disparity (Wright, 2011). To ensure that the public-school systems improve health and performance of all students, schools must adopt “intentioned social systems and school-based health centers that prioritize students, encourage community, and increase a positive school climate” so issues created by poverty can be resolved (Wright, 2011, p. 3).

Factors Related to Self

Issues related to poverty-induced physical, sociological, and psychological problems are due to inadequate health, dental, and vision care which is often the result of inadequate or nonexistent medical insurance, food insecurity, environmental pollutants, family relations, and stress inducing criteria. Psychological problems that develop may

cause students to experience issues ranging from low self-esteem, low self-image, excessive absenteeism, speech delays, behavioral disorders, and a range of challenges that affect academic achievement. A study conducted by Bell (2009), examined the impact of self-esteem and identity on the academic achievement of students of color. Ninety-three students participated in the study and were administered the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory and the School Perception Questionnaire (SPQ) to measure self-esteem and identification. Some factors that were perceived to be a challenge by the participants were as follow: negative stereotypes, lack of self-initiative, negative images, lack of belief in self and lack of after school community activities. Solutions that were suggested were: role-models, mentors and self-motivation. Bell (2009) drew the conclusion that “the school can be considered the place where children begin to develop their identity” (p. 6). It can be said that most students of color understand the importance of doing well academically, but many still struggle to achieve high levels of success in academia. Students of color typically receive lower grades, have higher dropout rates and have lower levels of academic achievement than do their European American counterparts (Mickleon, 1990, p. 44). Racial and ethnic identity is believed to be an integral part of development of self-esteem. Low self-esteem and low academic achievement of individuals of color can be traced to the society in which they live. The social inequalities, biased practices of school systems that inflate suspension, expulsion, and dropout rates, mass incarceration, and high levels of unemployment can make it difficult

for individuals of color to believe that an education can improve their situation.

Individuals of color have experienced the effects of inequalities in education, which has created a cycle of repeated social and economic inequality that lasts for generations. In such cases, the color of their skin has kept them and the people that share their phenotype from following their dreams. When faced with the inability to achieve due to a feature that one cannot control, many individuals of color lose hope and with it goes their self-esteem.

Importance of self-esteem. An individual's self-concepts are formed by their experiences both inside and outside of school. As a result of those experiences, they develop self-esteem, self-image, and self-concept which affects academic achievement. According to Bell (2009) “self-esteem may not be directly affected in a school setting through curriculum” (p. 26). However, self-perception can be directly affected in a school setting through curriculum. For instance, self-affirmation curriculum can alter the way students see themselves and improve academic outcomes. According to Washington (2012), a student’s academic experiences are affected by cultural, environmental, and social factors that affect their self-perspective. Washington (2012), ascertained that these experiences are likely to affect student academic success rates (p. 1). Negative social experiences can negatively affect social skill development and hinder the development of appropriate behaviors.

Link between experience and outcome. Researchers have found a link between the experiences of individuals of color in the public-school systems in the United States of America and their socioeconomic conditions as adults. Washington (2012) described the “remnant of oppression” as a byproduct of racism, in which poor academic performance is due to psychological, sociological, and environmental variables (p. 2). Additionally, research supports the belief that stereotypes can have a negative impact on the success rate of individuals of color. According to Cohen et al (2008), “In social environments like school and work, psychological processes can feed off their own consequences and interact with other psychological and environmental factors. Psychological theories should take into account these interactive and recursive feedback loops” (p. 11). According to researchers Borman et al (2014), self-affirmation has a positive impact on students of color. Writing self-affirmation has been found to improve mathematics test scores and is effective at reducing gaps in achievement.

Cohen et al (2008), examined the impact of identity engagement, which describes how social identity can trigger psychological threat. Factors related to unfulfilled desires to belong can produce a reduction in performance of students of color. which suggests that negative stereotypes related to the students’ intellectual abilities play a role in this underperformance. The students’ awareness of these stereotypes can psychologically threaten their overall success rate and their academics. Other research suggests that psychological factors such as low self-esteem, low self-image, and some behavioral

disorders can be pliable. “Perhaps more intensive efforts to reduce racism and prejudice, by transforming schools to make them places that are less identity-threatening for young students of color, might reduce achievement gaps even more powerfully” (Borman et al., 2015, p. 38). Berends et al. (2008), suggested that educational policy and research need to be attentive to educational needs of individuals of color in order to create opportunities for success both inside and outside of school. By implementing interventions that are specifically designed to address the special social-psychological needs of individuals of color, stakeholders can help to overcome deficits and improve outcomes.

Beyond K to 12

In an attempt to address the special needs of individuals of color in an effort to help them overcome deficits and improve their outcomes, researchers should explore how post-secondary programs are designed. Typically, general college admission requires the submission of standardized test scores such as American College Testing (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Institutions rely heavily on the SAT scores to determine undergraduate admissions or scholarship awards. According to Thernstrom (2004), individuals of color, on average, perform an average of one standard deviation lower on the SAT than European American students. Researchers believe that the difference in scores is closely related to the achievement gap. As previously stated, the achievement gap can be attributed to several factors, including the economic disadvantages that

individuals of color face. Students of color generally attend schools that have less resources due to economic disparities thus receiving lower quality of education.

Test bias. According Freedle (2003), the SAT has been shown to be both culturally and statistically biased against African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans. The study found that some questions may be harmful to the scores of individuals of color. While the owners and publishers of the ACT and SAT, College Board, has stated that their intent is not for colleges and universities to rely heavily on SAT scores when making enrollment and scholarship decisions, most colleges and universities that require SAT scores use these scores as an admissions factor. According to the Freedle (2003) study, the average test scores of individuals of color are lower than those of European American individuals because some parts of the test are racially biased. Santelices & Wilson (2010), suggested

the confirmation of unfair test results throws into question the validity of the test and, consequently, all decisions based on its results. All admissions decisions based exclusively or predominantly on SAT performance -- and therefore access to higher education institutions and subsequent job placement and professional success -- appear to be biased against the African American minority group and could be exposed to legal challenge. (p. 126)

As to the persistence of score differences, Santelices & Wilson (2010), suggested there is a correlation between item difficulty and difference estimates reported for

individuals of color and their European American counterparts when comparing verbal questions (p. 127). Ensuring that entrance requirements are fair for all individuals is the professional and ethical duty of all institutions of higher learning. The equity of the results of tests like the ACT should be of utmost importance not only to the test developers but also to any entity concerned with promoting fair access to higher education for different ethnic and racial groups. Since general admission must typically be obtained before or at the same time as admission to a teacher preparation program inside of an institution of higher learning it is imperative that we develop safeguards for individuals of color.

Cost and availability of teacher preparation programs. Racial disparities in scholastic achievement and academic opportunities in elementary, secondary, and high school, graduation rates, grades, test scores on entrance exams not only affect diversity in postsecondary preparation programs but also diversity among teachers in the field of education. Teacher preparation programs must be designed to support the unique needs of teacher candidates who are individuals of color (Richard & Dimitrios, 2017). Due to inequities in education, achievement gaps between students of color and their European American counterparts start in elementary education and continue throughout their academic careers. These gaps in achievement persist on assessments taken in college and beyond. Alternative teacher certification routes should also be developed and utilized. Institutions that offer teacher preparation programs should reduce tuition costs. The high

costs of higher education and incurring debt can act as a deterrent or barrier for individuals of color. Preparation programs with lower tuition do not guarantee the loss of quality, but can offer individuals an alternative route licensure without the the substantial financial burden typically associated with attending a program at a more prestigious university (Richard & Dimitrios, 2017). For example, alternative certification programs such as Teach for America and the Michigan Teaching Corps provide quality teacher certification at little cost to preservice teachers. Additionally, states should reevaluate the requirement of passing licensure exams and instead use performance-based assessments to certify and license teachers due to a gap in the success rate between European American individuals and individuals of color. According to the class action lawsuit, *Gulino v. The Board of Education of the City of New York and the New York State Education Department* (2002), the use of teacher certification exams like the National Teachers Examination (NTE) can have a negative impact on teachers of color and have even been classified as racial discrimination. The issues identified in this lawsuit highlighted how teacher certification exams serve as a barrier for teachers of color, which can provide policymakers and stakeholders with concrete strategies for increasing the racial/ethnic diversity of our country's teaching force.

Conclusion

There are a number of different strategies that can be used to improve the learning environment of students of color and motivate them. It has been hypothesized by many

researchers that if graduation rates of individuals of color are improved, it would also improve their chances of employment. Washington (2012) believes that low graduation rates can cause issues that affect an individual for their entire life.

According to Rowland (2001), more concern needs to be given to the unique needs of individuals of color by those who develop programs in the realm secondary education. According to Bell (2009),

first, African American students must participate in a curriculum that supports them by providing hands-on, engaging activities that incite motivation and determination. Second, these students thrive when given an opportunity to bring their home situations and experiences into the classroom and into the learning process. Third, their academic successes tie in with motivation, role models, and determination. (p. 96)

Programs that employ these techniques can assist in improving graduation outcomes for individuals of color. Attempting to understand issues that individuals of color face in graduating from high school and completing seeking post-secondary degree is an important first step to making changes to ideas, belief systems, programs, and policies that can have a positive impact on change. Numerous researchers' findings suggest that individuals of color have specific obstacles that are associated with academic factors, environmental/cultural factors, family/community factors, and research on factors related to self that compromise their academic success as compared to European American students. These factors are more likely to negatively impact individuals of color when considering their academic achievement in higher education. Several of these

factors likely compound upon one another, presenting several obstacles to individuals of color from entering specialized fields like the field of education.

By identifying barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education, stakeholders can develop a number of actionable steps for improving the probability that individuals of color can not only graduate from high school, but also enter specialized fields. By enhancing academic and social support programs, the lives and outcomes of individuals of color may be improved. A better understanding of students of color and their experiences can improve outcomes. In order to gain a better understanding of students of color and their experiences, research involving data collection through interviews, questionnaires and will be conducted. By examining barriers, interventions can be developed to help individuals of color not only graduate with a post-secondary degree, but also assist other students of color in doing the same. Through coordinated and targeted support, education in the United States of America can be an invaluable tool that can be used to ensure the success of students of color for generations to come. With changes to current policies and practices, we have a chance to fill our schools with a teaching force that is as racially and ethnically diverse our nation's students.

Summary

Although previous research has addressed unique issues associated with academic factors, environmental/cultural factors, family/community factors, and factors related to self that are specific to individuals of color more research studies should be undertaken. The information previously provided is by no means considered to be an exhaustive list, but does provide an area of focus to study the barriers related to teachers of color entering the field of education. In particular, the question is whether factors unique to individuals

of color act as barriers to becoming teachers. For the purposes of this study, a wealth of knowledge can be obtained by asking individuals of color to self-report on their experiences, beliefs, and viewpoints. Through the use of a structured style interview and open and closed ended questions, data and insight was gathered.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes an overview of how and why a mixed methods approach is effective for this research. The question guiding this research study is: *What are the barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education?* The following is discussed: Research question, Research design, Participants, Instruments/Data collection, Limits and Summary. This section is a description of how to answer the research question. The rationale and methods for the investigation will be explained.

Introduction

The results of data collection identified barriers to recruiting individuals of color into the field of education. There are many points to consider when investigating the question and few studies have documented how factors like perceptions, biases, cultural differences, and relationships impact the success of students of color.

Research

Design

At first glance, people may assume that the need for teachers of color are only necessary for students of color, but a study published by Cherng and Halpin (2016), found “students have more favorable perceptions of minority teachers compared to White teachers” (p. 411). When students are educated in an environment that provides them with few opportunities to learn from individuals from diverse backgrounds they miss out on learning more about themselves and the world around them. This capstone project understands that a disparity of individuals of color in the field of education exists and attempts to identify possible reasons for the disparity.

Individuals of color who are not currently educators (i.e. African, African American, Yemeni American, Asian American, Native American, Mexican American) and range in age from 18 to 60 were given a paper questionnaire and asked to answer the questions. The questions were aimed at gaining the participants’ perspectives on the barriers individuals of color may face when to entering the field of education. The study was completed as mixed methods research because this type of research is used to interpret human behaviors.

Participants

Approximately 250 adult members of a predominantly African-American community were questioned to identify barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education. Participants were human subjects over the age of eighteen. Therefore, a complete Hamline University IRB proposal form was submitted. To be specific the participants in the study were adult humans ranging in age from 23 to 57. Sixty-three males and seventy-four females participated in the study. This research involved one hundred thirty seven individuals of color, surveyed over the course of fourteen days. All participant

consent forms were completed before the questionnaires were given to the participants. After the participants completed their questionnaire, it was collected. **Instruments and**

Data**Collection**

The participants were given a four question questionnaire. The questions were aimed at gaining the participants' perspective on the barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education. Questionnaire questions included:

1. What experiences do you think make the greatest impact on the success rates of individuals of color?
 - A. Academic
 - B. Social
 - C. Personal
 - D. Professional

Please explain your answer.

2. What role, if any, do you feel teachers play in those experiences? Please explain.
3. Do you feel that having more teachers of color can increase the success rate of students of color? Please explain your answer.
4. What factors do you believe prevent students of color from being taught by teachers of color?
 - A. Academic
 - B. Social
 - C. Personal
 - D. Professional

Please explain your answer.

The completed questionnaires were stored in a locked case. The completed questionnaires will be kept in the locked case for a full calendar year. When the questionnaires are no longer needed they will be destroyed.

Research Methods/Procedure

Questionnaires were given in paper format. The questionnaires were given to the attendees at the community center, My Brother's Keeper Outreach program in my state, during two visits during both morning and afternoon sessions. The attendees use the program to access community resources (i.e. breakfast in the morning session and the afternoon session offers lunch). The location was chosen because the program aids community members from many different backgrounds and needs levels. For example, some individuals attend the program for social interaction, while others attend because they are homeless, hungry, and welcome a hot meal. The differing backgrounds of the respondents helped to paint a clearer picture of the possible experiences of other individuals of color. All the questionnaires were given to the participants in person by the researcher. The researcher read the directions and questions aloud. There was not a time limit. After the questionnaires were completed they were returned to the researcher.

Data was combined and synthesized into categories and subcategories: keywords, themes, phrases, sentences, while noting differences and similarities. The researcher used a grounded, values coding system, which means that notable themes and patterns emerged from the respondents' responses on the questionnaire. Information was summarized and presented by sharing significant findings in order to draw and defend conclusions.

Limitations

A limitation is due to location, because participants were only surveyed from one community as opposed to individuals of color living in a variety of communities across the United States of America. Another limitation is out of 250 questionnaires distributed only 137 were returned. The findings were based on a small number of respondents as opposed to an originally intended larger group.

Summary

This was a mixed methods study designed to explore the barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education. All data was derived from the self-reporting information provided by the participants. The next chapter presents the results of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The information in this chapter reveals the participants' responses to the questionnaire questions based on the research question. The research question for this study was: *What are the barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education?* The questionnaire responses were given by 137 male and female individuals of color. Data collection was made in the form of a paper questionnaire given with consent. The study was a mixture of open-ended and multiple choice questions (see Appendix A). The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of individuals of color and their feelings regarding those experiences as they relate to teachers of color.

Results

Participants were asked to convey their ideas in regard to the experiences that have the greatest impact on the success rate of students of color in Figure 1. The data in Figure 1, consists of the multiple choice portion of question one. Twenty-eight (20.44%) respondents reported that academic experiences made the greatest impact on the success of students of color while, the majority of respondents, eighty-three (60.58%), selected social experiences. Respondents also reported personal experiences, twenty-four (17.52%), while two (1.46%) reported professional experiences. The information below Figure 1 provides a narrative of the major themes in the participants' responses and actual responses from

participants.

What experiences do you think make the greatest impact on the success rates of individuals of color?

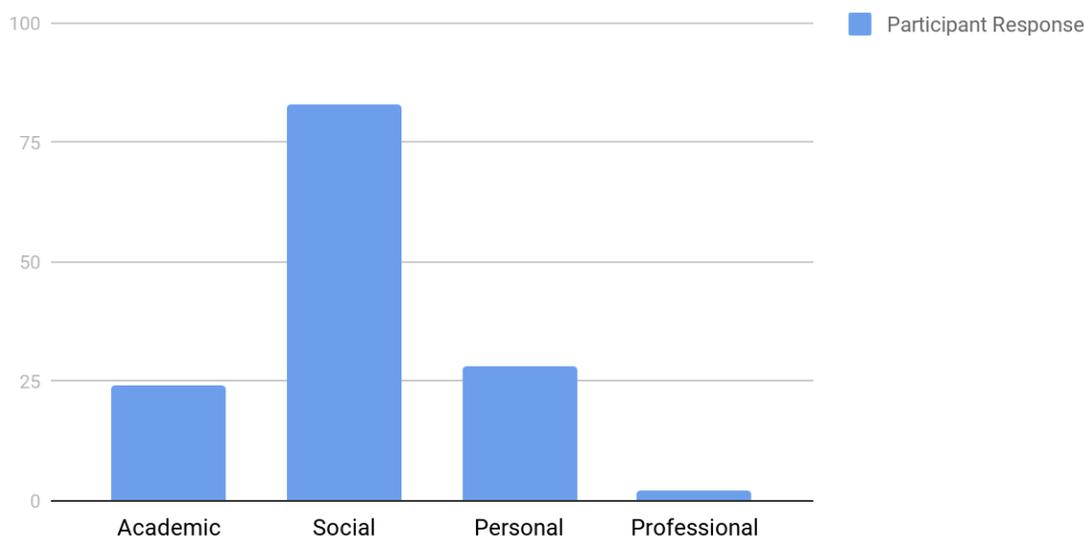


Figure 1. Results from the multiple choice section of the first question on the questionnaire.

What factors do you believe prevent students of color from being taught by teachers of color? Regarding the open-ended portion of the first question, 83 (60.5%) of the respondents wrote about societal issues associated with the success rate of individuals of color. The most prevalent themes raised included racism and prejudice. The following comments from respondents are some examples that illustrate this point: “America is a racist place. Look at Trump he is as racist as they come. Racism still exists. As long as there is racism we won’t get too much of anywhere” and “It’s hard to get ahead when white people have it all and don’t think you deserve anything. They think we want a hand out.” “Black people have it hard. We try and try but racism is difficult to get past. They say that it's over but it isn't.”

Personal issues was another common theme raised by respondents: “Folks go through different things like being on drugs. It is hard to get ahead when you have all that

going on.” “I know a lot of people that are broke. They living in cars or homeless. Nobody wanna help you so you can’t be a success.” Other respondents reported academic issues. “It’s hard to find a job with a little bit of school. I got my diploma but it don’t really go so far.” Another respondent stated, “Everybody don’t wanna work at McDonalds” and “Can’t get jobs with no education.” A few respondents reported professional issues, but upon further inspection, the responses were actually referring to societal issues, for example, one individual stated, “You don’t see black people on tv being successful unless they are a rapper or basketball player” and “Can’t be what you don’t see.”

Regarding the open-ended nature of the second question, the role teachers play in the experiences that make the greatest impact on the success rates of individuals of color, one hundred three (75.18%) of the respondents believed that teachers played a role in the experiences in question one. The most prevalent theme raised included teachers being role models. The following comments from respondents are some examples that illustrate this point: “My teachers encouraged me to think for myself.” “In my experiences, teachers were supportive and helped me to think in new ways.” “When I was in school, my teachers were ok. They gave me structure and discipline. I did not always like it but I needed it.” The participants’ responses to this question supported the previous notation that experiences with teachers are important, because teachers give their students skills that go beyond academic content knowledge. Teachers get to know their students well. They know when to encourage and push them to achieve levels that outside of their comfort zone. They teach their students critical thinking skills that help them apply their abilities to other areas of life, outside of the classroom.

Regarding the open-ended nature of the third question, can having more teachers of color increase the success rate of students of color, one hundred percent of the respondents believe that having a teacher of color can increase the success rate of students of color. The most prevalent theme raised included teachers being role models. The following comments from respondents are some examples that illustrate this point: “When you have black teachers you don’t have to worry about racism in the classroom.” “With a black teacher you know they care about you, because they know how you feel and what you go through in the real world.” “Black teachers talk in a way you can understand. You don’t have to be perfect. They get it.”

What factors do you believe prevent students of color from being taught by teachers of color?

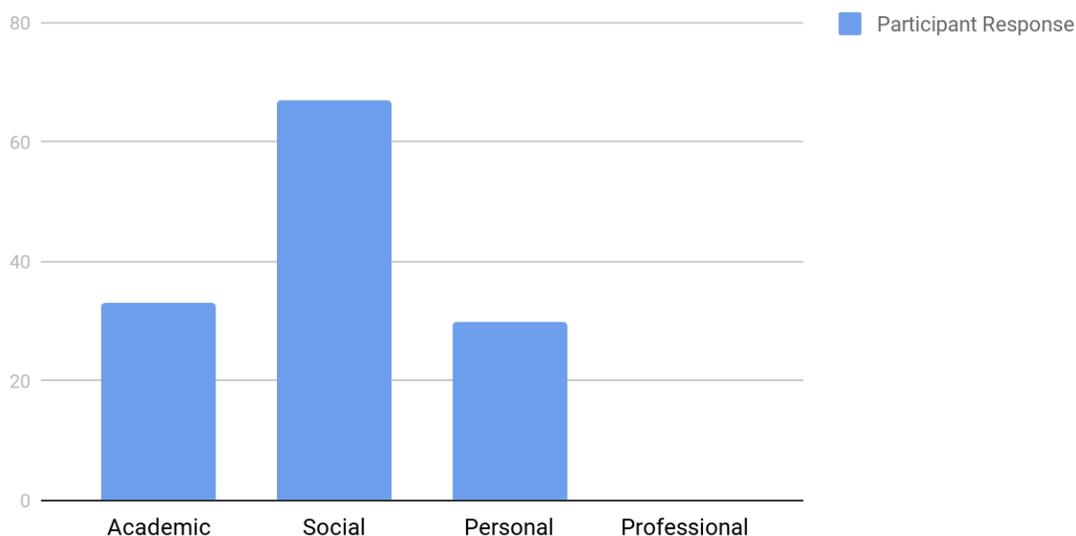


Figure 2. Results of the multiple choice section of the final question on the questionnaire..

Regarding the open-ended portion of the fourth question, factors believed to prevent students of color from being taught by teachers of color, sixty-seven (48.90%) respondents identified about societal issues associated with students of color being taught by teachers of color. The most prevalent theme raised included the racism and prejudice.

The following comments from respondents are some examples that illustrate this point: “Racism keeps us from achieving a lot of times. So that makes it hard to become a teacher.” “You can’t be a teacher if you can’t get into a college. White folks don’t want us in their colleges. They hang nooses on their campus and everything.” “Racist folks run the world. You can’t be something they won’t let you be.”

Personal issues were another common theme raised by thirty (21.89%) respondents. “If you didn’t see your parents do it, then it’s hard to know what to do when it’s your turn.” “School cost money. If it was free more people would probably go to school for it.” Other respondents reported academic issues. “You can’t be a teacher with a GED.” “I don’t know what you gotta have to be a teacher, but I know it is more than most of us got.” No respondents reported professional issues. One hundred thirty-seven (100%) respondents reported that individuals of color may struggle to find and keep jobs, which affects their ability to “pay bills” and meet other financial obligations, which affects their success rate. Sixty-three (45.99%) respondents believe that financial hardships may cause them to have low credit scores, or low income and make it difficult for them to pay expenses associated with housing, which leads to continued poverty and homelessness. Fifty-two (37.96%) respondents expressed a concern regarding incarceration; stating they had been or know people that had been to prison and “it’s hard to find a job” because of a felony convictions and previous incarceration. Five (3.56%) respondents reported that having a high school diploma would make it easier for them to be successful. Two of the five aforementioned respondents felt and noted that a general education diploma was not as useful as having a high school diploma in improving their success in life. While fifteen (10.95%) reported that they needed to have some level of college education to be

successful. One hundred three (75.18%) respondents believed that teachers play a significant role in success of individuals of color. One respondent noted his teacher gave him “structure and discipline” which was helpful in his ability to be a successful adult. Seventy-nine (57.6%) respondents mentioned teachers teaching the skills necessary for students to be successful in the future i.e. skills related “to work and go to college”.

One hundred percent of the respondents believe that having a teacher of color can increase the success rate of students of color. One hundred eighteen (86.13%) respondents felt that having a teacher of color is beneficial, because teachers can be the student's' role model. Many respondents had the idea that having a teacher that the students can visually “identify with” can increase rates of success. Ninety-five (69.37%) respondents give credence to the notion that European American teachers do not understand students of color and have prejudiced or racist views and biases that can hinder success in students of color. One respondent was noted to have divulged the following information: “They don’t understand us and a lot of them are flat out racist. Period.”

Nearly half, sixty-five respondents (48.91%), identified social factors being associated with barriers that prevent students of color from being taught by teachers of color. Thirty (21.9%) participants also listed personal factors associated with contributing to the barriers that prevent students of color from being taught by teachers that look like them. Twenty-five (18.25%) participants stated that they did not see their parents have success in life due to drug abuse, physical health and/or mental health issues. Eighteen (13.14%) of the aforementioned respondents believed that their parents struggled to provide financially or emotionally, because they were “dealing with the stress associated with racism” and abused drugs to cope with those stressors.

Of the 137 male and female respondents, three believed that the level of education a person has could prevent them from entering the field of education. “You can’t be a teacher with a GED”; “I don’t know what you gotta have to be a teacher, but I know it is more than most of us got.” Though they had received the general education degree, they did not feel that it would be accepted by a teacher preparation program. Another respondent responded to the same questionnaire item with the following information: “I dropped out of school in the 8th grade. Ain’t no way I’m bout to be a teacher. So I know if, I can’t alota people can’t.” Previous research supports this belief. For example, Washington (2012) suggested lower graduation rates is a lifelong issue, and continues to affect dropouts throughout their lives (p. 2).

One of the major lifespan issues is poverty (Lofstrom, 2007.) Poverty is a key contributor and risk factor towards dropout rates. Communities with a high level of poverty often have schools that have poor learning conditions i.e. unequal distribution of academic resources, including but not limited to; school funding, qualified and experienced teachers, up to date textbooks, and access to technology. Moreover, low teaching salaries do not only affect teachers’ disposable income, but for teachers of color, low pay can make it difficult to repay student loans and support the needs of their family. Many potential teachers of color are often recruited for and go into more lucrative sectors due to the issue of poverty (Richard & Dimitrios, 2017). Of the 137 respondents one explicitly mentioned the expense of education. “I can’t pay my bills. Food trumps a damn degree any day of the week.”

Summary

Mark Twain has been quoted saying, “good judgement is the result of experience and experience the result of bad judgement.” The experiences people have in life create the

people that they become. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed to randomly selected male and female adults who were phenotypically identified as being people of color. In 137 out of 250 questionnaires were returned to the researcher. Twelve of the respondents (8.76%) did not complete the open-ended portion of the questionnaire; however, their responses to the multiple choice questions were included in the data analysis. The respondents mentioned racism and race relations in the United States of America as a common theme. Subthemes were incarceration, absence of high school diploma due to dropping out of school or expulsion, level of education (i.e. the quality of possessing a general education degree versus a high school diploma or high school diploma as opposed to postsecondary degree), drug addiction, drug abuse, mental health issues, matters related to physical health, poverty, homelessness, low income, debt, low credit scores, low employment, and unemployment.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This capstone explored factors associated with identifying barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education, as well as explored ways to eliminate possible obstacles. The research question guiding this study was: *What are barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education?* My objective was to highlight and focus on reasons that were clearly identified in the literature review and through my study in hopes to develop a list of factors by which policy makers, stakeholders, educational organizations, and people who are working or will be working with students of color can use to develop preemptive measures designed to encourage the success of students of color and increase their entrance into the field of education. In my experience, I have seen firsthand what happens to students of color that are unsuccessful academically. I had relatives and friends who dropped out or were expelled from school. They now live in poverty, are on drugs or use alcohol to excess, are incarcerated or suffer from a plethora of stressed induced illnesses like depression and anxiety.

As a teacher, I often worry about the effects that life experiences will have on the students that I teach. Will my students become lifelong learners or will they feel rejected by their experiences and become just another statistic? I am worried that a failure to provide examples of role models that look like them will perpetuate the cycle of prison and poverty for generations. While there are no simple solutions, there are supports that can be provided that would improve students' chances of staying in school and deciding to enter the field of education.

Summary of Findings

Systemic racism still exists in the United States of America, due to this social issue individuals of color are more likely to have experienced poverty and received a lower

quality education than their European American counterparts, yielding a lower percentage of students of color who graduate from secondary educational institutions - significantly lowering the pool of prospective college graduates. Individuals of color are underrepresented among college graduates and as a result represent smaller numbers in teacher preparation programs which may be due to the fact that many teachers enter the field of education while in college (Bireda and Chait, 2011).

Racial disparities in scholastic achievement not only affect diversity in postsecondary preparation programs but also diversity among teachers in the field of education. Bireda and Chait (2011) suggested much of the shortage of teachers of color starts with the low graduation and academic achievement rates of students of color. High school graduation, a requirement for entering the college and teacher preparation programs (p. 5).

As a result of the issues that individuals of color face, we need to have an understanding of the systemic challenges of poverty and racism, because these experiences have a which came first the chicken or the egg type of relationship and effect on school, family, environment/community, and self. The need for better understanding of social and environmental components to the academic success of individuals of color in the context of self-image continues to be relevant in the racial society in the United States of America is clear. The use of a questionnaire in this capstone offered unique insight into obtaining an understanding of possible barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education. Possible barriers are as listed: lower academic achievement, poverty, issues related to poor health, poor self-image, financial insecurity, incarceration. All of these can be linked to racism.

There were a number of common themes that existed within the participant response data, which would resonate with a number of individuals of color. The data collected in this study supports the information in the literature review which provided further insight into the physiological and psychological effects of racism (i.e. poverty, lower life expectancy, poor self esteem, fewer economic, academic, professional and social prospects). As I have stated earlier, I am an individual of color and can relate to a number of experiences and viewpoints. I also believe that a number of my colleagues, who are also teachers of color, could identify with some of these experiences as well. I have come to learn that in attempting to identify; *What are barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education?* One should expect a multitude of answers, given the level of complexity involved with being characterized as phenotypically “an individual of color” while living in the United States of America during this pivotal point in history.

Future Research

I recommend that further research must be conducted on identifying and removing the barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education. If there is to be any serious progress in increasing the number of teachers of color, we must focus on closing the racial achievement gap and provide more opportunities for individuals of colors to be successful in their day to day lives.

Significance of the Study

Understanding racism and its effects on individuals of color living in the United States of America can be difficult. Stereotypes and racial bias can cause an individual of color to be treated poorly or in a discriminatory manner. For example, race-based discrimination can be a cause for stress which can be linked to poor self image. A few

respondents reported professional issues as being a factor affecting the success rate of individuals of color, but upon further inspection, the responses were actually referring to societal issues. As was shared earlier, “You don’t see black people on tv being a successful unless they are a rapper or basketball player” and “Can’t be what you don’t see.” These responses were analyzed and found to be related to the societal issues created by stereotypical images of individuals of color in the media. The image that we have of ourselves is often created by the people and environment we live in. Achieving greater levels of racial diversity in communities across the United States of America is vital to the long-term success of the country. In the United States of America, many individuals may cite elementary school years as the beginning of their learning journey; moving to middle school and in most cases to high school. During those years, we are learning from the experiences that we have and the experiences that others have. Not all knowledge comes from first-hand experiences. The experiences of some can have the potential to affect all of us.

One hundred percent of the respondents believe that having a teacher of color can increase the success rate of students of color. Previous research supports their belief. For example, Cherng & Halpin (2016), suggest students of color have more favorable perceptions of teachers of color. “Favorable student perceptions of teachers in turn can translate into better academic outcomes such as motivation, interest, and grades” (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Racial balance in education can be extremely beneficial for students of color and their European American counterparts. Research shows that students of European American descent also benefit from having teachers of color because it helps to counter their biases (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). A large body of literature demonstrates that racial

and ethnic minorities face persistent discrimination in health care, education, housing and employment. The findings of this study support the complexity of the issue, because the responses from the participants highlight the fear, low self-esteem, social conflict, emotional turmoil, psychological or physical pain and economic despair associated with racism.

This research is significant because it contributes to the body of research on barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education. It identifies how relationships and experiences can affect their educational outcomes. It identifies how history and current societal issues play a role in regards to health issues, dropout rates, expulsions, poverty, incarceration, which can affect a potential candidate's inability to enter the field of education. Findings from this study can provide lawmakers, educational policy administrators, preparation program developers with helpful information that can ensure that individuals of color complete secondary and postsecondary education, enter and emerge from teacher preparation programs without being affected by poverty due to student loan debt and low salaries. By using the list of possible barriers to develop programs that aid individuals of color in all areas of need (i.e. if the individual has monetary issues, provide free training programs).

This research can also affect society as a whole, because these changes have the potential to improve the education system in the United States of America for all students as they see more and more teachers of color in their classrooms throughout their academic careers. In addition, this research provides an opportunity to gather data that has been collected from individuals of color. Data that offers a wide range of perspectives and experiences that have been used to develop an understanding of the complexities that

surround the lives of individuals of color living in the United States of America, which the researcher will use personally, to be more effective as an educator in the future.

Limitations

This study only contains the responses from one hundred thirty seven individuals of color. When discussing more than one ethnic or racial group in reference to the perspective of a few, this no doubt poses a significant limitation. I would recommend using a larger sample size in the future. Another limitation was due to location, surveyed participants were from one community as opposed to individuals of color living in a variety of settings across the United States of America.

Summary

This study sought to identify the barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education. The researcher gathered information by giving respondents a questionnaire. This mixed methods research method enabled the researcher to learn from the respondents possible barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education. The social and academic challenges confronting individuals of color and their ability to succeed socially, academically and economically must be addressed. There is strong indication that educators need to be aware of the challenges that individuals of color face. Particularly, those who work in areas that are populated by students of color, through awareness policy makers, stakeholders, educators and administrators can develop a plan to support the academic success of individuals of color. The literature review highlighted many factors thought to lead to lowered success rates in individuals of color, those same factors were found to be barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education. The findings fell in line with the literature reviewed. Therefore, it is my recommendation that future research

be conducted that can possibly provide educators and educational policy makers with information on how best to support the academic development of students of color in an effort to increase the probability of college graduation and entrance into teacher preparation programs.

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APPENDIX A

- What experiences do you think make the greatest impact on the success rates of individuals of color?
 - A. Academic
 - B. Social
 - C. Personal
 - D. Professional

Please explain your answer.

- What role, if any, do you feel teachers play in those experiences? Please explain.
- Do you feel that having more teachers of color can increase the success rate of students of color? Please explain your answer.
- What factors do you believe prevent students of color from being taught by teachers of color?
 - A. Academic
 - B. Social
 - C. Personal
 - D. Professional

Please explain your answer.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Letter

October 9, 2017

Dear Prospective Participant,

I am a graduate student working on an advanced degree in education at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. As part of my graduate coursework, I plan to conduct study for the purpose of identifying barriers to individuals of color entering the field of education. The purpose of this letter is to request your participation. The research findings will be made public and cataloged in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons, and also available for viewing in a scholarly article in a professional journal or at an educational conference. I plan to give a questionnaire to individuals of color. The questionnaire contains four questions. The timeframe to collect data will be fourteen days. After completing the Capstone, I will summarize the findings in a report to be distributed to all participants. There is little to no risk if you choose to participate in this study. All results will be confidential and anonymous. Pseudonyms for participants will be used. Participation in the study is voluntary. At any time, you may decline to participate. I have received approval from the School of Education at Hamline University to conduct this study. If you agree to participate, sign and return the form to me no later than October 20, 2017. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Jamie Williford

(313) 676-0151

jwilliford01@hamline.edu

Informed Consent to Participate in Study

I have received the letter about your research study. I understand I will be given a questionnaire to complete at no risk to me. I also understand my identity will be protected, and I may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty.

Signature

Date