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# The Achievement Gap from the Student's Perspective

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The Achievement Gap from the Student's Perspective

Submitted by Jennifer Hipp

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present their findings. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

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## Abstract

African American students disproportionately perform poorly compared to their peers academically. This research project reviews previous findings for causes of the achievement gap. Race, Socioeconomic Status, Family and High Quality Teaching/Schools were the recurrent themes in the existing research. A qualitative research method was used to discern the barriers to graduating high school on time from the student's perspective. Semi structured qualitative interviews were used to conduct research about why students did not graduate high school. The sample for this study included seven adult male participants who did not graduate high school. Overall, the research showed that participants agreed with previous literature. Participants generally did not think that their parents or school supported their education. The majority of participants also thought that their family's income impacted their learning negatively. The implications of this project invite continued research on why being mobile and poor impact education negatively. Further research also needs to be conducted to identify what students and families affected by the achievement gap identify as areas that need improvement and how it has affected them. Implications for education are to offer a culturally sensitive curriculum to students and provide individualized instruction to students identified as struggling.

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**Table of Contents**

Section	Page
I. Introduction	1
II. Literature Review	4
A. Race	4
B. Socioeconomic Status	7
C. Family	9
D. High Quality Schools/Teaching	11
III. Conceptual Framework	17
IV. Methodology	20
A. Sample	20
B. Data Collection/Procedures	20
C. Measurement	21
D. Data Analysis	22
E. Protection of Human Subjects	22
V. Findings	25
VI. Discussion	29
A. Race	29
B. Socioeconomic Status	30
C. Family	31
D. High Quality Schools/Teaching	32
E. Implications for Social Work Practice	33
F. Limitations of Study	34
VII. References	36
VIII. Appendices	
A. Flyer	42
B. Consent Form	43
C. Interview Questions	46
D. Resource List	47

## Introduction

In the United States, a disparity in academic achievement persists between races and social classes of students. Poor and minority students are not graduating high school at the same rate as their advantaged peers (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2009). In the United States, African Americans comprise 12.6% of the population, and have a dropout rate of 16.1%, Hispanics who comprise 16.3% of the population dropout at the rate of 26.1% (US Dept of Commerce, 2010). It is predicted that the number of students who do not complete high school will continue to increase in the future, especially for minorities (US Department of Education, 2001).

In the last decade, No Child Left Behind Act (2001) attempted to close the achievement gap by setting performance targets for children from economically disadvantaged families and racial groups. This was an important policy written specifically to address the disparity between groups of children in educational settings. Because of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), if any racial group fails to meet performance standards, the school is held accountable and funding could eventually decrease. Schools success is essentially measured by narrowing the achievement gap (NCLB, 2001).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (2009) report that minority students are about four years behind Caucasian students by the time they reach 12<sup>th</sup> grade. They also report that African American and Hispanic students are more likely to drop out of high school than their Caucasian peers. The achievement gap is worse than reported because an inaccurate picture of achievement gaps exist between African American and Caucasian and Hispanic and Caucasian students because many poor performing African American and Hispanic students

dropout and it leaves the high academic performers in school, thus distorting the statistics (Verdugo, 2011).

Dropping out of high school is related to many negative outcomes. The median income of persons who had not completed high school was roughly \$23,000 in 2008, or half those who completed a high school education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). High school drop outs have a higher unemployment rate according to the US Department of Labor (2010). There are also a disproportionate number of prison inmates and inmates on death row who did not graduate high school (US Department of Justice, 2009).

Comparing those who drop out of high school with those who complete high school, the average high school dropout is associated with costs to the economy of approximately \$240,000 over his or her lifetime in terms of lower tax contributions, higher reliance on Medicaid and Medicare, higher rates of criminal activity, and higher reliance on welfare (Levin & Belfield, 2007, p.180).

Preventing high school dropout may lead to fewer crimes and less dependence on welfare which may lead to a stronger workforce and society. Programs to prevent school dropout may be costly, but when compared to the cost on society, it may be the better option. Research into how money should be spent on preventing high school dropout should be investigated as it will help ensure the money is being spent appropriately in areas deemed to be most useful. School social workers should have a role in making sure the educational wellbeing of children is promoted in students' environments and ensuring that students are not being discriminated out of an education.

The research for the achievement gap highlights possible risk factors for poor academic success. There is a lack of studies that focus on the student's perspective. Therefore this study aims to hear from students who did not graduate on time to understand what challenges prevented or slowed down their high school graduation. This qualitative study using semi-

structured interviews will gather information about the experiences of those who did not graduate high school in an effort to get the student's perspective about barriers to education.



## **Literature Review**

There are many proposed explanations to why there is such disparity between races and social classes in regard to achievement in school. This research project focuses on four factors: Race, Socioeconomic Status, Family and High Quality Teaching/Schools. These themes were the most reoccurring and identified by previous research as having the largest impact on academic achievement. Each theme highlights potential risk factors to avoid widening the achievement gap. By identifying possible causes of the achievement gap, educators, parents and community leaders may gain a better understanding of why it exists and therefore glean ideas on how to attempt narrowing the gap.

### **Race**

African American males are disproportionately exposed to the type of psychosocial stressors that can lead to depression and poor decision making (Mizell, 1999). The psychosocial stressors that African American males are exposed to more than other groups are low educational and occupational achievement and low self esteem. These risk factors can lead to depression and a poor sense of self and therefore not attaining the goals one once had. It is important when working with minority students to be sensitive to the psychosocial stressors that many African Americans are dealing with in an effort to help them cope and be successful students (Allen, 2011).

One cannot avoid race when discussing the achievement gap. The statistics presented about the achievement gap are almost always broken down by race of students. “Most of the underachievers (students with low effort, students with low grades), students with the poorest work ethic, and students with the lowest academic achievement are African American males” (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008, p.234). The educational gap between African American

students and their White counterparts is not only an education problem but it is also a significant socioeconomic problem that impacts African American children and their families from one generation to the next (Leach & Williams, 2007). “Children in African American families are twice as likely to have repeated a grade, 73% more likely to be suspended from school, and 23% less likely to be doing advanced work in any subject or attending special classes for gifted students” (Kaushal & Nepomnyaschy, 2009, p. 963). African Americans are not afforded the same opportunities as Caucasian students. African Americans are placed in fewer academically challenging courses in high school, which results in problems with their academic preparation (Leach & Williams, 2007).

There are a disproportionate number of minority students that do not graduate high school. Griffin (2002) reports that the African American and Hispanic communities have developed subcultures that culturally oppose academics and states that this may cause detachment from academics. Detachment from academics can be detrimental to learning as students do not feel as though they belong in an academic setting. Disidentification with school can also occur with minority students when they feel marginalized by society and in their school setting. It is important that students feel connected and identify with the learning process in an effort to keep them coming back to school.

Griffen (2002) conducted research to determine if there was evidence that supported the idea that African American and Hispanic students place less importance on academic performance when deciding to withdrawal from school. In a study of 132,903 high school students in Florida, he was able to support the claim that African American and Hispanic students GPA's had little to do with school withdrawal when compared to Caucasian and Asian students ( $p < .001$ ). This finding is important as it identifies the value of keeping African

American and Hispanic students engaged in the learning process through means other than good grades. Grades alone do not keep African American and Hispanic students in school. It is important that students feel connected through the understanding of their significance in the academic setting. The more success in school a student experiences, the more identified with school the student becomes. Having students identify with their school means that students have internalized important aspects of schooling to the point that their perception of self is shaped in some extent by their performance in school (Steele, 1997).

Minority students are disproportionately suspended from schools when compared to their Caucasian classmates (Campbell, Pungello, Ramey, Miller & Burchinal, 2001). African American students in particular are suspended on average two to three times more frequently than Caucasian students (Brooks, Schiraldi & Ziendenberg, 1999). Mattison and Aber (2007) conducted research to explore if there was an association between racial climates and academic achievement in schools. In a study of 1,838 high school students, they found that positive perceptions of school racial climate were associated with students that receive higher grades and fewer disciplinary actions. African American students reported a more negative perception of racial climate and had lower grades and more disciplinary issues. If students can perceive themselves as valuable members and the school environment as fair, they may be able to engage in more academic tasks.

Caucasian teachers report behavior of African American students as more disruptive (Stearns & Glennie, 2007). Blau (2003) found that African Americans are more likely to engage in behaviors that break school rules and norms. In a study of all North Carolina high school students (N= 14,364) Stearns and Glennie found that African American males were more likely to

be thrown out of school for disciplinary actions, such as suspensions, expulsions, or incarcerations than any other ethnic or gender group.

There is some support for the idea that it is counter to the African American culture to be good at school. Murray (1994) states that the achievement gap is occurring due to cultural and attitudinal differences between students. He argues that there is a “culture of poverty” that promotes crime, welfare participation, and nonmarital childbearing. This culture he goes on to say inhibits cultural and academic success in minority communities. Ogbu (1986) writes similarly about an “oppositional culture” of African American youth who go against mainstream expectations and disengage from school because they fear being accused of “acting white”. Many young people who ascribe to this culture do not care about the benefits doing well in school may bring them. They believe that there are few material rewards that outweigh the cost of the stigma of “acting white”. When large subcultures come together in a school due to demographics, it creates segregation of the population. Neighborhoods form because of socioeconomic status (SES) and the schools become pockets that live in this “culture of poverty”. This cultural process may reflect structural causes that have led to the marginalization of minority youth in the school system (Rothstein, 2004).

### **Socioeconomic Status**

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2009), 36% of all African American children and 33% of all Hispanic children are poor. Being poor is defined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2009) as having a family household income of less than the federal poverty threshold. The current federal poverty threshold for a family of four is \$22,350 (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2009). According to Martin, Martin, Gibson, & Wilkes (2007) poverty has been consistently associated with the achievement gap.

“In truth, all children can learn, but how much they learn depends on socioeconomic conditions as well as school effectiveness” (Rothstein, 2004, p. 82).

According to the US Dept of Commerce (2008) median African American family income is about 65% of the median Caucasian family income, and median African American family net worth is only about 15% of Caucasian family net worth. There is a gross overrepresentation of African Americans in poverty in the US. Some have argued that this is due to negative stereotypes associated with the African American community. Although some of these negative stereotypes may be true for some individuals, it should be remembered that African Americans were enslaved, segregated and excluded from equal opportunity for more than a century after slavery was abolished (Rothstein, 2004).

“Being impoverished has important detrimental effects on schooling, including raising the risk of poor performance” (Verdugo, 2011, p.187). A family’s socioeconomic status is often impacted by parent academic achievement. (Roscigno, 2000). “Living in poverty usually means families are less able to afford good healthcare, secure nutritious food, or provide enriching cultural or educational experiences for their children, all of which are essential preconditions for students to sustain success in school” (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002, p.426). Poor families are less likely to invest in educational enrichment items (e.g. educational toys, books, participation in educational activities) and these investments are associated with the cognitive development of children (Kausnal & Nepomnyaschy, 2009).

Students from high socioeconomic homes have great advantages in doing schoolwork and are more likely to have access to computers and other learning devices in their many hours away from school, to say nothing the value-added intellectual stimulation that results from the type of language used and books read by their parents (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002, p. 428).

Stability in household and neighborhood income may have an impact on males in school.

Grogan-Kaylor and Woolley (2010) studied 2,099 middle and high school students and found

that socioeconomic factors contribute to school success for students ( $p < .01$ ). They also reported that neighborhoods with higher than average household incomes had higher graduation rates; this was especially true for African American males. Ensminger, Lamkin and Jacobson (1996) reported that male students who live in neighborhoods where more than 60% of adults are employed in blue collar jobs are three and a half times more likely to drop out of high school.

Kaushal & Nepomnyaschy (2009) found in a study of 15,887 students that African American children are approximately two times more likely to repeat a grade than Caucasian children even after sociodemographic characteristics were controlled for ( $p = 0.083$ ). They also reported that students from African American families with a net worth of less than \$10,000 had a much higher chance of repeating a grade ( $p < .01$ ). It was also found that African American and Hispanic families have lower rates of home ownership and monetary savings than Caucasian families. These were also noted to be statistically significant factors for school success.

### **Family**

Family climate has an effect on student achievement. “The family is the first educator of the child, and the school cannot accomplish its purpose without at least the implicit support of the family” (Constable & Lee, 2004, p.220). “The expectations and behaviors exhibited in the family can have an important effect on lower academic performance” (Verdugo, 2010, p. 188). Low parental education expectations, parents who dropped out of school, having a sibling who dropped out, minimal parent contact with the school, lack of homework monitoring or study aids and infrequent discussions with a child about school are all linked to lower school performance (Verdugo, 2010).

Leach & Williams (2007) argue that family support and setting early educational goals are two of the strongest predictors for student development and academic success. The academic

achievement gap impedes the social and economic advancement for the African American family. Leach & Williams (2007) go on to state that ameliorating the achievement gap would strengthen the African American family. They make this claim by arguing that without quality education and higher rates of graduation from both high school and post secondary schools that there will be no way for African Americans to have social and economic equality.

Shearin (2002) conducted a study of 179 African American middle school aged males to determine if strength of family relationships affects school outcomes. What he found was that a student's GPA was the largest indicator of family relationships ( $p < .0001$ ), followed by, "son does homework regularly" ( $p < .0001$ ), and finally, that there is a positive relationship between parent adolescent interaction and participants' academic achievement ( $p < .0001$ ). These findings indicate that a student's performance may be enhanced or hindered by a consistent or inconsistent interaction with their parents.

Parents act as resources for their children's learning by sharing their knowledge, investing their time and energy, and acquiring material goods and opportunities that can optimize child development. Parents may be better positioned to enhance their children's learning when they have more education, more life experience, more economic resources... (Fram, Miller-Cribbs & Van Horn, 2007, p. 312).

When children are raised in a home that nurtures a sense of self worth, competence, well being and autonomy, children will be more apt to take the risk to learn (Shearin, 2002).

Early in life, children learn valuable skills that set a foundation for later learning. In infancy, children form a bond with their caregivers. In a healthy environment, infants learn how to communicate their needs to caregivers and the caregiver responds accordingly. This leads to children eventually imitating and identifying with caregivers by internalizing the values and attitudes of those around them. These early relationships establish the path that allows children to develop physical, social, emotional, ethical and cognitive skills (Comer, 2001).

Many children from disadvantaged backgrounds enter school ill equipped due to the lack of trusting relationships they had earlier in life. Some children who did not have positive developmental experiences struggle to make the connections necessary to be successful in school (Davis & Dupper, 2004). If children are lacking basic social and relational skills, the schools may dismiss them as being “bad” and as a result are at a higher risk for school failure (Griffin, 2002).

Poor and minority children need to feel a sense of belonging and attachment (Metz, 1983). This can be achieved through positive relationships with caregivers, friends or teachers and other adults who care. Positive social relationships can be a strong incentive for children to go to school (Davis & Dupper, 2004). Poor performances in school can directly harm a student’s self perceptions or lead the student to disidentify from academics in order to protect or maintain the student’s perception of self worth or value (Griffen, 2002).

### **High Quality Schools/Teaching**

The measured learning happening for students occurs at school. The educational achievement one accomplishes is tied directly to their school and the education they receive. Once a child is enrolled in school it is the school’s responsibility to ensure that it is providing the essential tools and skills for students to navigate the academic environment (Horton, 2004). “Students, regardless of race, must perceive schooling as legitimate, respectful of them and deserving of their efforts if they are to invest in the forms of achievement expected by schools” (Mattison & Aber, 2007, p.9). Mattison and Aber (2007) also state that a school’s racial climate is a factor in racial disparities in achievement and discipline.

In an effort to promote an atmosphere of learning, many schools dismiss students who are deemed “troublemakers”. This is done in an effort to promote the learning of other students who



are distracted by them. Students that have the distinction of troublemaker are often suspended or expelled by school administration. Students who are suspended or expelled from school repeatedly have a much higher dropout rate than students who do not have disciplinary action taken against them (Davis & Dupper, 2004).

Teachers are given a large responsibility in educating students regardless of the student's ability or personal circumstances. "High quality teaching is related to students having more positive attitudes about learning in school and their future in general. Students who report having high quality teaching are more likely to report that they want to learn" (Horton, 2004, p.69). Achievement is affected greatly depending on if students have consecutively low or high effective teachers (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002).

Schools and teachers have a large impact on the learning environment children are placed in. Teachers can recommend students for special education services. Well intentioned teachers want to see all of their students learn, and make a recommendation for students they perceive are struggling. Many of these well intentioned teachers have not taken into account cultural differences in regard to behavior in the classroom. It is important that students who receive a referral to special education need it. Many students may gain some initial help by being in special education, but once they are in the special education system, they have less access to more rigorous classes and may be stigmatized, thus taking away all of the learning impact special education may have brought them. This is why teachers need to make appropriate, well informed referrals to special education. Students who drop out of school who are enrolled in special education services are less likely to receive help from vocational rehabilitation, or enroll in postsecondary schooling (Kortering & Christenson, 2009).

African American and Latino students are more likely than Caucasians to be diagnosed with learning disabilities and placed in restrictive educational settings where they are isolated from regular classrooms and nondisabled peers (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Moving students out of regular education classrooms into more restricted settings can lead to further isolation of a minority student which can lead to drop out.

Students in school who have a disability can be moved out of mainstream classes into a higher federal setting, thus removing them from their mainstreamed peers. Schools have the ability to categorize students with disabilities that are not recognized by other professionals, such as the label of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD). African American males are twice as likely to be labeled EBD as Caucasian students, over twice as likely to receive special education services for Severe Emotional Disturbance (SED) than any other cultural group and three times as likely to receive special education services as Caucasian students (National Education Association [NEA], 2007). Minority students who have a special education label are more likely to be in a restricted, higher federal setting classroom than their Caucasian peers. Fifty-five percent of Caucasian students who are in special education spend 80% or more of their school day in a general education classroom setting compared to only one-third of African American students (Fierros, 2006). According to the NEA (2007) the dropout rate for students in special education was 29%, for the subgroup of students labeled EBD, the dropout rate is 53%.

Minority students are more likely to receive referrals to the office, suspensions and expulsions. Of all minority groups, low income African American males are the most likely to be suspended, and African American males are more likely to receive a more severe punishment for the same offence as a Caucasian student (NEA, 2007). Furthermore, African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students who were receiving special education services were

67% more likely than their Caucasian peers to be removed from school by an officer on the grounds that they were dangerous (NEA, 2007).

School policies and procedures are put in place to promote conditions that contribute to higher standardized test scores, as that is where funding is often secured. Therefore, in an effort to have an environment that encourages high scores, “many schools systematically exclude, and discharge ‘troublemakers’ and low performing students with repeated suspensions and expulsions” (Davis & Dupper, 2004, p. 182). For these students who are forced to leave school because of disciplinary issues, many argue that the term dropout is not appropriate; rather pushout would be more accurate in these situations (Davis & Dupper 2004; Griffen, 2002; Stearns & Glennie, 2006).

In contrast, teachers who express confidence in students and their learning when they do well set a foundation for building positive relationships and learning experiences. Positive regard enhances a student’s motivation to do well and can contribute to loyalty between the teacher and student. Students are likely to do their best when students respect and have confidence in their teacher (Davis & Dupper, 2004).

A famous study conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968), demonstrated the powerful influence teachers have on student achievement. Students were chosen to excel by their teachers, and the students that the teachers chose to excel outperformed their peers by the end of the school year. The students who were chosen by teachers to achieve, gained an average of 15 points on their IQ tests. The authors concluded that the outcome could only be due to teachers’ expectations, attitudes and behaviors toward the students. Hispanic children showed the most improvement in scores. This study showed that the treatment of students by teachers increased test scores regardless of race, SES, and family circumstances.

Another study conducted by Christie, Jolivette & Nelson (2007), documented the dramatic impact of school failure on student dropout. They were able to show a relationship between students' sense of belonging and dropout rates. Students who had a sense of belonging at school were less likely to drop out ( $p < .004$ ). The authors were also able to show a relationship between dropout and disciplinary actions taken by the school. There was a positive relationship between dropout rates and students who had disciplinary records ( $p < .004$ ). Children need to have a positive experience at school to promote learning and keep them coming back.

Students who are excluded from school have less opportunity to gain academic skills and appropriate social skills. Due to school policies students who are not performing well at school or have a disciplinary record are excluded from many extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities promote students' sense of belonging and have shown to increase academic performance (Davis & Dupper, 2004).

A school with a majority of minority students is five times more likely to have a weak graduation rate as compared to a majority Caucasian school. Forty-six percent and 39% of African American and Hispanic students respectively attend schools where graduation is not the norm (Christie, Jolivette & Nelson, 2007).

Bainbridge and Lasley (2002), argue that in schools where teachers have a real belief in students' abilities and are able to articulate that to students in meaningful ways, students achieve better. They also suggest that having teachers who are culturally competent and vary instructional strategies to be more culturally relevant to students, leads to children becoming more engaged in the learning process.

Uhlenberg & Brown (2002) surveyed 54 public school teachers from 14 different schools in North Carolina to explore teachers' perceptions of why the achievement gap exists. They

reported that Caucasian teachers seemed less supportive of possible solutions targeted at changing the behavior of Caucasian teachers, such as recruiting African American teachers or receiving diversity training. It was also shown that Caucasian teachers believe that frequent misbehavior of African American students contributed to their lack of learning. On average, the teachers surveyed agreed that teacher quality has little to do with certification. Both African American and Caucasian teachers agreed that certification of teachers does not impact the quality of teaching they provide.

Fram, Miller-Cribbs and Van Horn (2007) report that high poverty and high ethnic minority schools have teachers with less experience, less education, and lower levels of credentialing. Schools with mostly minority students and high poverty rates are more likely to have overcrowded classrooms and less access to technology (Rothstein, 2004). In an effort to get teachers with more experience, more education, higher subject specific preparation and higher cultural competency, all associated with positive effects on students learning (Mayer, Mullens, Morre & Ralph, 2000) schools may need to offer incentives. Right now, there are no incentives for more experienced, high performing teachers to change jobs (Fram, Miller-Cribbs and Van Horn, 2007).

In an article written by Grossman, Beaupre, & Rossi (2001) that was published by the Chicago Sun Times titled “Poorest kids often wind up with the weakest teachers” it was argued that children who come from families without means often have the lowest quality teachers. Nearly half of all Illinois public school teachers were part of the study that showed that children in the lowest performing, highest poverty and highest minority schools were five times more likely to be taught by teachers who failed at least one teaching certification test than children in the highest performing, lowest poverty and lowest minority schools.

## Conceptual Framework

This research was informed by social dominance, ecological and systems theory of human development. Social dominance theory offers an explanation of the persistence and sustenance of social inequality. The theory asserts that society is characterized by dominant and subordinate groups (Pratto, 1999). In the context of American culture, members of the subordinate group are less likely to possess or attain power while members of the dominant group have greater access to socially desirable resources. Social dominance theory is grounded in the belief that inequalities are perpetuated by shared beliefs. Social dominance theory avows that cultural beliefs excuse and provide justification for discriminatory behavior. The discriminatory behavior brings about hierarchies within cultural groups creating the dominant and subordinate groups. As humans, legitimizing myths are used to explain why people belong within the dominant or subordinate group. People who are a part of the dominant group tend to endorse more legitimizing behavior leading to further isolation and discrimination of those in a subordinate group (Van Laar & Sidanius, 2001).

Research has shown that children who have access to better teaching, families with more financial resources, children from Caucasian families and children from families who are actively involved with their children all have a better chance of attaining graduation and higher education. In comparison, the opposite is true for children who lack these resources and connections. Children who have less trouble attaining academic success are part of the dominant group.

The ecological theory believes that the human organism and the environment are interrelated. “Humans evolved as being connected to the physical environment and ecological processes continue to connect humans and other systems of living things to the systems of non

living things with which they interact” (Forte, 2007, p. 119). Ecological theory acknowledges the existence of individuals, but the theoretical base is explained by individuals in relationships. Therefore, humans cannot be fully understood without the context of their environment.

Ecological theory as applied to the achievement gap takes into consideration the student within their environment. A student’s family, classroom, and peer groups all affect a child in school. The interactions between school and home through parent teacher conferences, relationships with neighbors and teachers all impact the social connections students are able to make. Finally, the larger societal and cultural context in which the student resides also have an impact on student outcomes in regard to the policies and funding put in place for public schooling. Students cannot help but be affected by their environment.

Systems theory is related to ecological theory in that it asserts that as humans we are all parts of a whole. Parts and wholes cannot be meaningfully separated without destroying something essential (Forte, 2007). All social experience can be viewed as a web of interrelated relationships that occur within a person. Therefore, a student as a part contributes to a larger system in which it is embedded, such as a school and family. There are also implications to consider within how human behavior impacts the whole. Everything the student (part) does, impacts the larger system (school, family, peers, teachers).

Systems theory applies easily to the achievement gap as one considers the behavior of students and schools. A student is perceived as misbehaving, the teacher labels the student as being disruptive, has limited trust toward the student, this mistrust is manifested in poor marks, the student moves to another teacher who has made comments about the student and given them poor grades, the next teacher has a prejudice toward the student. The student’s reputation is now

carried forward through life, and the student believes it about him or herself. This is just one example of how one part affects the whole.



## **Methodology**

This study was focused on barriers to high school graduation. A qualitative research method was used to discern the barriers to graduating high school on time from the student's perspective. An exploratory design was used to help determine what students who did not graduate high school have in common, and what about their experiences made attaining graduation harder. A qualitative approach was used for this research as "certain experiences cannot be meaningfully expressed by numbers" (Berg, 2009, p.3).

### **Sample**

A semi structured qualitative interview was used to conduct research about why students did not graduate high school. The sample for this study included seven adult participants who did not graduate high school. Participants were chosen based on the criteria of being over 18, not graduating high school or receiving a traditional high school diploma.

Non probability sampling was used to find the participants. Convenience and snowball techniques were utilized to find participants that did not graduated high school. Participants from this study were volunteers from the community who responded to copies of a flyer (see Appendix A) that were posted on community boards in General Education Development (GED) testing sites. Participants were also garnered through word of mouth by teachers, school social workers, and members of the community who know of persons over 18 who did not graduate on time.

### **Data Collection/Procedures**

In January 2012, after receiving IRB approval, the researcher posted flyers advertising the research study (see Appendix A) on community boards in GED testing centers. The researcher also acquired participants through word of mouth. Those interested in participating in

the study were directed to contact the researcher at a confidential, private phone number, in order to express interest and learn how they could be involved. The researcher answered all questions participants had at the time they called to express interest in the study. Individual interviews were scheduled with participants once they were well informed of the process and all of their questions were answered.

Each interview was audio recorded in a quiet, confidential space that was convenient for the participant. Interview settings included library study rooms, and community rooms within GED testing centers that were available to check out. Before the interview began and any data was collected, the participant was asked to review and sign a consent form (see Appendix B). After the interview, participants were supplied with a list of local resources to access in case the content of the interview left them distressed (See Appendix D). Participants were thanked for their participation in the study. Participants were reminded that they could contact the researcher or the supervisor of the research at a later time if they had any questions and/or concerns about the research. Participants were asked if they wanted a summary of the results that will be available in June, 2012. If participants were interested in receiving a summary, they were asked to provide a postal or email address where they would like it sent.

## **Measurement**

Semi structured interview questions guided each interview (see Appendix C). The first four questions were used for demographic purposes. The semi structured interview consisted of nine open ended questions intended to gain an understanding of participants' thoughts about the perceived barriers to their graduation. Many of the questions had follow up questions to be used as a prompt if the participant could not think of an answer. Most of the questions were designed to address the four main themes of race, socioeconomic status, high quality teaching/schools and

family. The remaining questions were in place to allow the participant to speak about their ideas on what impacts drop out or graduation rates. The researcher also asked participants to share any information they thought impacted their decision to leave school. The last question was a self regulation question. It was asked last in an effort to have the participant leave the interview feeling positive. The anticipated length of each interview will be approximately one hour.

### **Data Analysis**

Once all of the interviews were finished, the researcher transcribed all of the audio recordings. A grounding theory coding process, moving from specifics to generals was used to analyze the transcriptions and look for themes that emerged from the interview data (Toft, 2011). The interviewer read through and transcribed each interview and coded for themes that emerge from the participants responses. Codes were organized into topic areas by similarities in order to identify themes in the data. Once themes were identified, the researcher looked for similarities and differences between participants' experiences of each theme and whether or not there were challenges associated with the experiences of each theme.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

Considerable efforts were made to protect the confidentiality of participants in this study. Interviews were conducted in a quiet, confidential space. Audio tape recording of interviews, consent forms, and all other research data were stored in a locked safe that only the researcher had access to. An electronic copy of the transcript was kept in a password protected file on the researcher's computer. Any identifying information from the transcript was deleted.

Participants were informed of the risks involved in this study both verbally and in writing. Participants were made aware of the risks of the study and efforts were made to minimize risks throughout the recruitment and interview process. Participants were also

reminded of their freedom to withdrawal from the study at any point in time, and their right to skip any questions that they did not feel comfortable answering. The flyers advertising the research noted that the interviews were to be audio recorded (see Appendix A). The risks to participants were thoroughly reviewed before conducting the interview, both verbally and in writing on the consent form. Participants were also informed of the confidential nature of the study, and the exceptions to confidentiality, namely, the responsibility of the researcher as a mandated reporter.

Before the interviews began, and before the consent form was signed, participants were asked to explain to the researcher their understanding of the study procedures and their rights to withdrawal at any point during the study. Participants were also asked to explain their understanding of the confidential nature of the study as well as the exceptions to the confidentiality: issues of mandated reporting as well as the risks and benefits to being a participant of the study. Participants were asked to share their understanding of these topics to assure they were providing informed consent for the study. Once it was clear the participants understood the risks of the study and their rights, the consent form was signed and the interview began. Audio tape recordings were labeled with participant number rather than with the name of the participant or any other identifying information. When the interviews were complete, the researcher spent time debriefing each participant and provided each participant with a list of local resources that they could access if the material of the interview was distressing for them (Appendix D).

The resource list included crisis and non-crisis resources along with GED testing center information. The three phone lines at the top of the resource list are staffed 24 hours a day: USA National Suicide Hotline, Crisis Intervention Center and Crisis Connection. Other resources on

the list included free walk in counseling centers: Walk in Counseling Center, and Family Tree Clinic. The list also included resources to help participants find GED testing centers in Minneapolis and St Paul with a website included to access the list for the state of Minnesota.

## Findings

The seven participants in the research study ranged in age from 19 to 45 years old with a mean age of 29. All of the participants identified themselves as male. Five (71%) participants reported finishing 11<sup>th</sup> grade and two (29%) participants reported finishing 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The majority of the participants (86%) identified themselves as Caucasian and one (14%) participant identified as an African American.

Participants were asked if their family supported their education. Three participants reported that their family did not support their education; three reported that their family sometimes supported their education and one participant responded that their family was supportive of their education. One subject reported, "I ran all my own school stuff. There was never any support". Another participant who had a similar opinion stated, "Not a lot of attention was given to school stuff". To determine how supportive families were, the participants were asked qualifying questions to determine how supportive their family was. Of the seven participants, six (86%) responded that their parents did not talk to their teachers about their learning, four (57%) responded that their parents did not attend open houses or conferences, and five (71%) reported that their parents either never helped them or only occasionally helped them with homework. As one subject stated, "My parents did not support school like I would have liked them to. They never really pushed it, and never asked if I had any homework".

Participants were asked if race made a difference in the classroom. Six (86%) participants responded that race did not make any difference in the classroom. Six (86%) participants reported that their teachers liked them, that their teachers were not afraid of them, and that teachers listened to them. One subject stated, "The classes I liked were all with teachers that were helpful; the ones I hated were because teachers didn't listen". When asked if teachers listen,

a subject responded, “Teachers listened to me because I never talked or participated in class, so when I did finally say something, they were all ears”. Another participant responded, “Even though I felt listened to, I kinda felt like some of them didn’t care for me”. One subject responded “My teachers liked me, but many of them had nothing to offer any student educationally” when asked if teachers like him.

Two (29%) respondents reported participating in special education services in their school. Respondents stated that their special education services were related to their diagnosis of attention deficit disorder (ADD). All respondents did not believe that their disability contributed to dropping out of high school. Both respondents reported having sporadic parental involvement with their individual education plan (IEP) meetings. As evidenced by one respondent stating, “My mom came only when she was forced to, but when I turned 18, I did it all myself”.

Participants were asked how their family’s income affected their learning, five (71%) of respondents reported that their family’s income impacted their education negatively. Five (71%) respondents reported that they moved schools more than six times during their school aged years. Subjects stated, “I did what I had to do to make ends meet and I just slowly let go of one thing after another, including school.” “My parents couldn’t afford to take care of me, when it comes to clothes and books and transportation, when you don’t have any money all of that stuff is affected” (Respondents, 2012). None of the respondents were ever homeless while they were in school. All of the respondents reported that the only resources available for homework help was through the school.

Respondents demonstrated mixed opinions on how their school supported their education. Four (57%) of the participants noted their school sent them to an alternative learning center (ALC) and three (43%) reported the school pushed them along just to move them through

the grades. Six (86%) of the respondents report having an adult in school they felt connected to. As one subject stated, “Having an adult at the school I liked helped me try harder”. Another subject responded, “I think every school thinks they support your education, but in reality, it’s a game of pushing you through or moving you out”. Five (71%) respondents played sports. Six (86%) respondents have been suspended and two were expelled from schools.

The majority of respondents (71%) stated that no effort was made to retain them as a student. A subject stated, “My school pushed me out because I had missed too many days, I showed up at school, and they said ‘sorry you will have to wait until next year to reenroll’”. None of the respondents had a truancy hearing for their absences. When asked about truancy hearings, a subject responded, “Once I turned 18, I was emancipated so there was nothing anyone could make me do”. When asked if anyone called to ask why they were not in school, four reported that no one ever called. One subject stated, “No one ever cared that much about me”.

Participants were asked what could be done to keep students in school. Three (43%) participants responded that better parenting will keep students in school. One subject stated, “Parental involvement, there need to be classes that teach parents the importance of school”. Three (43%) participants noted that having a school care about student’s education would help. A subject shared, “Schools need to have teachers who care about students”. One subject stated that helping students stay away from drugs will aid in keeping students in school.

When participants were asked to share information that impacted their decision to leave school or not graduate on time, three themes emerged, drugs, working, and attending too many schools. Four (57%) of the respondents stated that their drug habits made it difficult for them to finish school. One subject stated, “Keeping me in school was the biggest problem, I didn’t want



to go, I wanted to get high and numb out so I didn't have to be a part of home or school". Four (57%) participants stated that lack of parental involvement had an impact. A respondent noted, "If my parents would have been more law abiding, things could have been different for me, maybe I would be farther than I am in life". Four (57%) participants reported that having a job and needing to make money was a reason they left school. One participant declared, "I was encouraged to get a job; my family was insisting I help with the bills". Finally, five (71%) of the respondents stated that they were moved around to too many different schools. One subject affirmed "I went to eight different schools; there was no way I could keep up with all of the changes going on in my life".

## Discussion

Overall, the research showed that participants agreed with previous literature. Participants generally did not think that their parents or school supported their education. The majority of participants also thought that their family's income impacted their learning negatively. Race was the only area that the participants did not agree with previous research. The participants did not think that race made a difference in the classroom. However, it is difficult to assess whether 86% of the participants being Caucasian influenced this finding.

Race, socioeconomic status, high quality teaching/schools and family were compared to previous findings in the literature review to evaluate and determine factors related to each theme. Contemplating the relevance of each theme may provide insight to why each remains a factor in understanding the achievement gap. As factors contributing to the achievement gap are discussed and compared many of the themes discussed are related and hard to separate. Many statistics identify that African American and Hispanic students perform poorly in school when compared to other racial groups, therefore, looking at how race plays a factor in education is important. However, African American and Hispanic students are disproportionately represented in poverty, thus making it hard to separate from race. High quality teaching/schools is also intertwined with the previous topics as students who live in low income areas often get less funding for their schools based on tax revenue and urban areas often have overcrowding in schools as well as being underfunded. One could also argue that all of the themes also impact family dynamics and how one is raised within a family system.

### Race

The achievement gap is often discussed in terms of race. Race is often how the achievement gap is measured. There is some debate about why race is a contributing factor to

educational attainment. Eighty six percent of the respondents in this research project were Caucasian and argued that race did not make a difference in the classroom. Whereas, the research showed that there is a disproportionate number of minority students that do not graduate high school. “Children in Black families are twice as likely to have repeated a grade, 73% more likely to be suspended from school, and 23% less likely to be doing advanced work in any subject or attending special classes for gifted students” (Kaushal & Nepomnyaschy, 2009, p. 963). Perhaps the discrepancy in findings between the research and participants is due to the fact that Caucasian students are not aware of the systemic racism that occurs in the public school system, as evidenced by African Americans not being afforded the same opportunities as Caucasian students. African Americans are placed in fewer academically challenging courses in high school, which results in problems with their academic preparation (Leach & Williams, 2007).

### **Socioeconomic Status**

Seventy one percent of respondents stated that their family’s income impacted their education negatively. “Living in poverty usually means families are less able to afford good healthcare, to secure nutritious food, or to provide enriching cultural or educational experiences for their children, all of which are essential preconditions for students to sustain success in school” (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002, p.426). The respondents shared similar sentiments “My parents couldn’t afford to take care of me, when it comes to clothes and books and transportation, when you don’t have any money all of that stuff is affected” (Respondent, 2012).

Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002, p. 428 reported that “Students from high socioeconomic homes have great advantages in doing schoolwork and are more likely to have access to computers and other learning devices in their many hours away from school, to say nothing the

value-added intellectual stimulation that results from the type of language used and books read by their parents.” All of the respondents reported that the only resources available to them for homework help were through the school. This may imply that living in a literacy rich environment and having opportunities to learn outside of the classroom may be contributing factors to the achievement gap.

Additionally, when participants were asked about how their family’s income affected their education, seventy one percent of respondents stated they had moved schools more than six times. Perhaps being highly mobile during school age years affects schooling as well as finances. It could also be argued that being highly mobile during school years has an impact on transferring credits and may also have social implications which could all lead to possibilities of why students do not graduate on time.

### **Family**

Family is critical to a child’s learning, especially in building relationships. It is important for parents to have relationships with teachers so that parents, teachers and students can be partners in education. This can aid both parents and teachers by teachers communicating with parents and parents reinforcing what is taught in the classroom at home. Eighty six percent of respondents stated that their parents did not talk to their teachers about their learning. “The family is the first educator of the child, and the school cannot accomplish its purpose without at least the implicit support of the family” (Constable & Lee, 2004, p.220). One respondent shared, “I ran all my own school stuff. There was never any support” (Respondent, 2012).

Leach & Williams (2007) argue that family support and setting early educational goals are two of the strongest predictors for student development and academic success. One respondent shared that “There needs to be classes that teach parents the importance of school”

(Respondent, 2012) when asked what more could be done to keep students in school. This is a bleak reminder that families who are not involved in the education of their children could be setting them up for failure.

### **High Quality Schools/Teaching**

The majority of respondents did not feel supported by their school. As one subject stated, “I think every school thinks they support your education, but in reality, it is a game of pushing you through or moving you out” (Respondent, 2012). The research agreed with the respondents, “Students, regardless of race, must perceive schooling as legitimate, respectful of them and deserving of their efforts if they are to invest in the forms of achievement expected by schools” (Mattison & Aber, 2007, p.9). This is important when one considers the push out factor students often perceive. If students feel pushed out and the school is not providing any incentive to garner students’ attention, the argument could be made of which came first.

“High quality teaching is related to students having more positive attitudes about learning in school and their future in general. Students who report having high quality teaching are more likely to report that they want to learn” (Horton, 2004, p.69). Students in classrooms with low or highly effective teachers impact achievement (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002). Respondents agreed with the research stating that “The classes I liked were all with teachers that were helpful; the ones I hated were because teachers didn’t listen” and “My teachers liked me, but many of them had nothing to offer any student educationally” (Respondents, 2012). Students may need to feel as though their education is important in an attempt to help them see value and make an effort toward their education.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice**

There are implications to be drawn from this research for social work practice, especially in the important role of school social worker. Being a bridge between teachers, student, home is an important role. Making sure that all persons involved have a vested interest in the child's education, and advocating for the student when they are falling behind is important to a child's progress in school. Integrating a student into community resources to reinforce their education or to help a student get extra services outside of school can be an important way to engage the student back into the learning process. A school social worker is often on an education team and can advocate for how a child receives services in the school. It is also important to identify possible barriers to a child's education. If for instance attendance is inconsistent, and students are doing poor in school because of missing assignments and late work, it may be prudent to find a way to get them to come to school consistently.

It is also important for social workers to continue to research why being mobile and poor impact education negatively. Data should be collected on how to keep children in their schools and homes rather than moving around because of a lack of economic resources. Perhaps offering open enrollment and bussing for students who have to leave their school because of a move would offer students some consistency in their life. Additional studies of programs that are successful at narrowing the achievement gap should be researched. Identify what is working for students who are at risk for performing below their peers. Further research also needs to be conducted to identify what students and families affected by the achievement gap identify as areas that need improvement and how it has affected them. Continuing to speak directly to those most at risk may be the most important research to be sustained.

Implications for education could be to provide a culturally sensitive curriculum to students and provide individualized instruction to students identified as struggling the most. To ignore the impact of the achievement gap is to ignore children and their needs as learners. It is imperative to the future of society and financial wellbeing of the nation that all students be educated. To make the US competitive in the future, it is important that all children have an equal chance at education or the US will not remain globally competitive.

The implications for policy are great. No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was the largest policy put in place to address the achievement gap. This is a good place to start as the policy is already written and may just need an amendment to make it more effective. The way that NCLB is written currently allows for funds to be taken from schools that are performing poorly. It is important to give these schools extra support and funding. Mandated extra funding and skilled teachers in struggling schools may start to make a change.

### **Limitations of Study**

Due to the study size, the findings cannot be generalized. Another limitation could be the lack of diversity in regard to race of the participants. The majority of the participants did not think that race made a difference in the classroom, perhaps this would be different if the majority of participants were not Caucasian.

In order to start closing the achievement gap, it must first be identified why the gap exists. All students should receive the same opportunities for educational advancement. The gap that is present in academic achievement in the United States should be addressed locally and nationally to ensure that all students graduate and have an opportunity for post secondary education. Further research and development of existing programs that narrow the gap should be

pursued to identify strengths in an effort to generate ideas on how to implement growth on a mezzo and macro level.



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## Appendix A

### Flyer

#### Research Study: The Achievement Gap

##### Volunteers Who Did Not Receive Their High School Diploma

- Who:** Adults, age 18-80 who did not graduate high school
- Purpose:** This purpose of this research study is to gain ideas on how to remove barriers to high school graduation by talking with students who did not graduate. The objective is to hear from the student's perspective what prohibited their high school graduation in an effort to increase awareness as to why student's dropout.
- What:** Participants will be asked to meet with a graduate student researcher for approximately 60 minutes one time to answer prepared questions about their academic experiences and related causes to why they may have dropped out. The interview will take place in a private place and be audio taped. All records will be kept confidential.
- Risks:** May bring up past stressful feelings related to not graduating high school
- Benefits:** There is no direct benefit to you from being in this study. This study may benefit others in the future by knowing additional information about why students drop out of school.
- Contact:** To learn more about this research, or if you are interested in participating in this research, please call Jennifer Hipp Johnson (Masters of Social Work Student) 763-218-2822.

This research is being conducted under the direction on Colin Hollidge, Ph. D., LICSW, Professor of Social Work at the University of St Thomas



## Appendix B

Institutional Review Board

**CONSENT FORM**

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.  
Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

<b>Project Name</b>	Achievement Gap	<b>IRB Tracking Number</b>	284100-1
<b>General Information Statement about the study:</b>			
<p>The goal of this research project is to assess barriers to graduation from the perspective of someone who did not complete high school. I am interested in investigating possible barriers to education that cause students to drop out of school.</p> <p>You will be asked to meet with me for approximately 45 minutes one time to answer prepared questions about your academic experiences and related causes to why you may have dropped out. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed. All records will be kept confidential.</p>			
<p>You are invited to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant for this study because:</p> <p>You were invited to participate in this research study because you are over 18 and did not graduate high school.</p>			
Study is being conducted by:	Jennifer Hipp Johnson		
Research Advisor (if applicable):	Colin Hollidge Ph. D., LICSW		
Department Affiliation:	Social Work		
<b>Background Information</b>			
<p>The purpose of the study is:</p> <p>This purpose of this research study is to understand the barriers that impede high school graduation by conducting a semi structured interview with students who did not graduate. The objective is to hear from the student's perspective what prohibited their high school graduation in an effort to increase awareness as to why student's dropout.</p>			
<b>Procedures</b>			
<p>If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following: <i>State specifically what the subjects will be doing, including if they will be performing any tasks. Include any information about assignment to study groups, length of time for participation, frequency of procedures, audio taping, etc.</i></p> <p>You will be asked to meet with me for approximately 45 minutes one time to answer prepared questions about your academic experiences and related causes to why you may have dropped out. A place and time will be determined that is convenient to you. The interviews will be conducted in a private room in a community center, library, or GED testing site. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed.</p>			



<b>Risks and Benefits of being in the study</b>	
The risks involved for participating in the study are:	
May bring up past stressful feelings related to not graduating on time.	
The direct benefits you will receive from participating in the study are:	
This study has no direct benefits to you.	
<b>Compensation</b>	
Details of compensation (if and when disbursement will occur and conditions of compensation) include: <i>Note:</i> In the event that this research activity results in an injury, treatment will be available, including first aid, emergency treatment and follow-up care as needed. Payment for any such treatment must be provided by you or your third party payer if any (such as health insurance, Medicare, etc.).	
A resource list will be provided to you including crisis phone lines, free counseling centers and GED testing sites in the event that the research creates questions or discomfort.	
<b>Confidentiality</b>	
The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report published, information will not be provided that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records, who will have access to records and when they will be destroyed as a result of this study include:	
The records of this study will be kept confidential. All audio tapes will be coded with a number instead of your name. The tapes will be stored in a locked safe that only I has access to. Once the audio tapes are transcribed, all identifying information will be deleted from the transcript, and the electronic copies will be stored on my computer in a password protected file. As the transcriptions are printed, all copies will be stored in a locked file cabinet that only I have access to. The audio tapes and transcript will be destroyed by July 1st 2012.	
<b>Voluntary Nature of the Study</b>	
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with any cooperating agencies or institutions or the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until the date\time specified in the study.	
You are also free to skip any questions that may be asked unless there is an exception(s) to this rule listed below with its rationale for the exception(s).	
If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw\ at any time until the data is collected. Should you decide to withdrawal after the data is collected about you, the data will still be used.	
Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you	will be used in the study
<b>Contacts and Questions</b>	
You may contact any of the resources listed below with questions or concerns about the study.	
Researcher name	Jennifer Johnson
Researcher email	hipp7064@stthomas.edu
Researcher phone	763-218-2822
Research Advisor name	Colin Hollidge
Research Advisor email	cfhollidge@stthomas.edu
Research Advisor phone	651-962-5818

UST IRB Office	651.962.5341		
<b>Statement of Consent</b>			
I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I am at least 18 years old. I consent to participate in the study. By checking the electronic signature box, I am stating that I understand what is being asked of me and I give my full consent to participate in the study.			
Signature of Study Participant <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Electronic signature</i>		Date	
Print Name of Study Participant			
Signature of Parent or Guardian (if applicable) <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Electronic Signature</i>		Date	
Print Name of Parent or Guardian (if applicable)			
Signature of Researcher <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Electronic signature*</i>		Date	
Print Name of Researcher			

\*Electronic signatures certify that:

The signatory agrees that he or she is aware of the policies on research involving participants of the University of St. Thomas and will safeguard the rights, dignity and privacy of all participants.

- The information provided in this form is true and accurate.
- The principal investigator will seek and obtain prior approval from the UST IRB office for any substantive modification in the proposal, including but not limited to changes in cooperating investigators/agencies as well as changes in procedures.
- Unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events in the course of this study which may affect the risks and benefits to participation will be reported in writing to the UST IRB office and to the subjects.
- The research will not be initiated and subjects cannot be recruited until final approval is granted.

## Appendix C

## Interview Questions

1. How old are you?
2. Do you identify yourself as male or female?
3. What was the highest grade you completed?
4. What is your race/ethnicity?
5. Did your family support your education? In what ways?
  - a. Did your parent or guardian talk to teachers about your learning? How often?
  - b. Did your parent or guardian attend open house and conferences?
  - c. Did your parents or guardian help you with homework?
6. Did race make a difference in the classroom? If so, how?
  - a. Did teachers like you?
  - b. Were teachers afraid of you?
  - c. Did teachers listen to you?
7. Were you in Special Education?
  - a. For what disability?
  - b. Do you feel this contributed to not finishing high school? Why?
  - c. Did your parent/guardian come to IEP meetings?
8. How did your family's income impact your learning?
  - a. Were you ever homeless while you were in school? If so, did it impact your ability to go to school? How?
  - b. Did you have a computer in your home?
  - c. What resources were available to you when you struggled with a subject?
9. Did your school support your education? How?
  - a. Was there an adult at the school you felt connected to?
  - b. Did you play sports?
  - c. Were you suspended from school? How often?
  - d. Were you expelled from school? For how long?
10. What effort was made to keep you as a student by your school?
  - a. Did you have a truancy hearing?
  - b. Did anyone call to ask why you were not at school?
11. What could be done to keep students going to school?
12. Please share any information you feel impacted your decision to leave school, as well as any additional factors that contributed to you not graduating
13. What are your biggest strengths?
  - a. What do you enjoy doing?

## Appendix D

## Resource List

Minneapolis GED Testing Center  
 Southside Adult Basic Education  
 2225 East Lake St, Minneapolis  
 612-668-3800

Call for registration times and fee schedule

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Ronald M. Hubbs Center for Lifelong Learning  
 1030 University Ave, St Paul  
 651-290-4779

Call for registration times and fee schedule

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For additional GED testing sites and information  
[www.education.state.mn.us/mde/learning\\_support/adult\\_basic\\_education\\_ged/ged/index.html](http://www.education.state.mn.us/mde/learning_support/adult_basic_education_ged/ged/index.html)

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Crisis Connection– Staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (for twin cities metro area residents)  
 612-379-6363

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Walk in Counseling Center – no appointment needed. Simply walk in during clinic hours.  
 Services are first come first served so there may be a wait.  
 2421 Chicago Avenue South, Minneapolis  
 612-870-0565

M, W & F afternoons 1-3pm  
 M & Th evenings 6:30-8:30pm

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Family Tree Clinic – check in with receptionist at the Family Tree entrance.  
 1619 Dayton Ave #205, St Paul  
 651-645-0478

M & W evenings 5-7pm

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USA National Suicide Hotline – Staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week  
 1-800- SUICIDE  
 1-800-273-8255

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Crisis Intervention Center (HCMC) – Staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week  
 612-873-2222 suicide hotline  
 612-873-3161 crisis referral line