

It Takes a Village:
Can Faith Based Organizations Help in Closing
the Educational Achievement Gap?

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Introduction

The educational achievement gap reports, The Schott Report (2015) and the State of Back America (2015) Reports show that the opportunity and achievement gaps continue to be the greatest for Black males of all racial/ethnic and gender groups, [with Latino males following closely behind]; the gap between graduation outcomes for Black males compared to their White male counterparts continues to widen.

Therefore, finding an avenue to provide the supports needed to help young minority (African American and Latino) males is essential to their success. This research proposes to determine what those individual needs are and if faith-based organizations contain a relevant avenue to address those needs during the grades of transition; 4th through 8th.

Theoretical Framework

The existing research contained some gaps. The following summary provides an overview of which theories have been studied and were applied when evaluating “causes” for the achievement gap.

The burden of acting white theoretical implications	
Cultural-ecological theory	Minorities struggle with associating achievement with white culture and where their own culture fits in. Minority status + assimilation.
Personal sabotage theory	A group of minorities sabotage their own academic achievement by prohibiting members of their group to do well academically. Minority achievement – own group protection = negative reinforcement.
Oppositional culture theory	Dislike towards dominating culture = conscious opposite behavior to mainstream

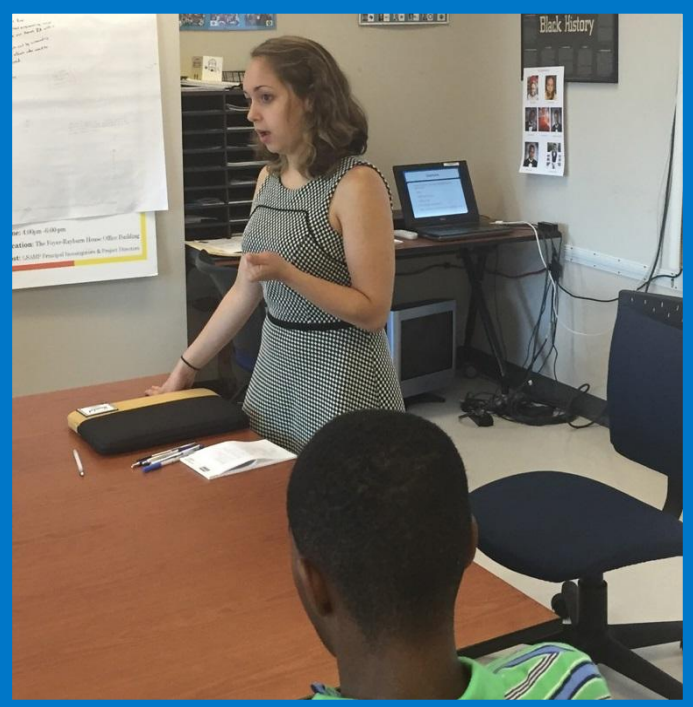
- **The Social Equity Theory** explains how the lack of equal distribution of resources among families and youth affects the educational achievement of students.
- **Critical Race Theory** implies that racism is embedded into American culture; therefore, the achievement gap is merely a long-term effect of American racism.

Results

- Findings relied on a review of the literature and an emergence of themes in order to identify significant variables within those themes. Taking into account theoretical frameworks, the research found that significant variables to the achievement gap included:
- Psychological distress
 - Family and peer relationships
 - The racial “discipline” gap.
- ❖ For the purpose of this research, *psychological distress* is defined as mental stress, emotional instability, anxiety and other impairments to the mental well being of an individual.
- ❖ Elements that were identified as affecting psychological distress and ultimately student achievement included:
- Family involvement
 - Peer pressure
 - Living arrangements
 - Classroom expectations
 - Middle school transition
 - Family and school relationships

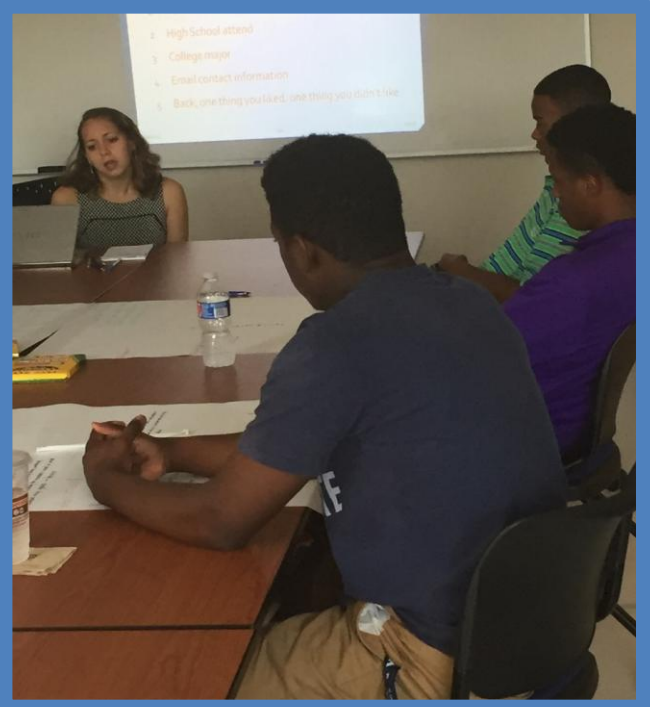
community context
socioeconomic status/poverty
services that provide social support
violence and gang activity
services that provide academic reinforcement

- ❖ The literature review also included studies on faith based programs that addressed academic needs of students and also community needs.
- ❖ This chart provides categories that were found to affect and influence psychological distress within communities. These are the areas that can be addressed by faith based programs to ameliorate psychological distress.



These images were taken during a focus group at UAH.

High achieving high school graduates expressed their experiences and opinions on educational inequalities and the needs of their communities.



Conclusions

Church programs and school programs that address the necessary needs of minority students and partner with a wider community create a support network. Once organizational relationships are established, under-resourced schools and community organizations, like churches, can work together to garner the political effort necessary to address the systemic economic issues involved in this educational gap. When paired with schools and instructional goals, these programs should enhance academic performance, and contribute to a positive feedback loop that assists in addressing students' basic needs and the key factors that have perpetuated the achievement gap.

References

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