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# Social Worker and Teacher Perceptions of the Achievement Gap in Minnesota

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SOCIAL WORKER AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP  
IN MINNESOTA

by

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Social Work  
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

Committee Members  
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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 the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

**Abstract**

Narrowing the achievement gap has become an increasing issue in Minnesota. The purpose of this research project was to explore the attitudes of school social workers and teachers to see if there were any significant differences in the perception of the professionals who work with children directly affected by the gap. Using quantitative data analysis, 51 respondents, including 13 licensed social workers and 38 licensed teachers, were surveyed electronically, via Qualtrics, a survey creation and distribution website. All of the questions were created based on findings in the research. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings indicated that race and experience did not affect attitudes toward the achievement gap. However, the research did find significance in social workers being unanimous in believing African American students were treated differently. While a greater number of teachers were surveyed, the findings did evoke implications for further research.

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **Introduction and Purpose Statement**

While Minnesota has shown a very high proficiency in educating White students, statistically, the state is in the top 10 for under-educating Black students (Kersten, 2012). There has been a wealth of research done to point out causes for the academic achievement gap between African American (or Black) and Caucasian American (or White) students. While there are significant deficits across the entire country, the deficit in Minnesota is one that ranks very high. This study may ignite implications for further research in developing more approaches to answering the diverse needs of students who are directly involved in this conundrum.

The function of this study was to survey licensed social workers' and teachers' attitudes toward the achievement gap in Minnesota. While there is a significant problem of underachievement across the country, the researcher thought that the disparity in Minnesota was one that deserved a more in depth look. It is imperative to understand social worker attitudes toward the students, given that they have a significant role in student success while at school.

### Literature Review

Throughout the years, research has been done, on the plight of professionals, attempting to identify, hypothesize and find solutions for closing the achievement gap. Some of the major themes that present themselves in the research are funding, environment, socioeconomic status, family structure, institutional racism, teacher expectations and access to resources. The research will also glance at some more controversial conclusions that were less common, giving respect to the complete review of all encountered themes. Before exploring the state of Minnesota, the research will introduce a brief scan through the history of education in America, national data, causes of the achievement gap and proposed solutions. In the context of the research citing's and findings, the use of the terms "Black" and "African American" will interchange throughout the review.

Leach & Williams (2007) said the 1619 *Maryland Segregation Policy* was created to suggest that African Americans be excluded socially from society. Beyond the practice of slavery in the United States, the Civil War and the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to 1896 in the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* verdict which stated that African Americans were separate but equal, began a pattern of racially segregated policies that even effected education (Leach & Williams, 2007). The most historically significant case, *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* broke the segregation lines of public schools when the U.S. Supreme court unified in agreement, that the effects of separation of African American school children from other children based solely on race could cause a feeling of inferiority that may affect these children in a way that may never change (Grogan-Kaylor & Wooley, 2010). Barton & Coley (2010) claim, "the nation's attention has been focused

on the achievement gap between Black and White students since the desegregation decision (*Brown vs. Board of Education*) of 1954 and the 1965 passing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) whose focus was on the inequality of school resources” (p. 3). Harris & Herrington (2006) give a broader sense of the advantages and disadvantages of the time by saying:

This time period (1954-65) also marked the beginning of the larger civil rights movement and better access to K–12 education followed. School desegregation allowed some African American students to attend better schools with better teachers. Paradoxically, some political efforts to avoid racial integration had the effect of improving African American schools. In particular, local school districts poured additional resources into African American schools as an incentive for African American students to stay in their segregated schools. In short, the decades post World War II can be viewed as a period of increased exposure of minorities to the resources and academic content that had long been available only to Whites (p. 212).

Through the findings in the literature, there have been many reoccurring themes in addressing causes of the achievement gap. Much of the research found for this review identified themes that seem to be commonly derived from other researchers’ findings. By taking a look at those findings systematically, we can attempt to better understand the achievement gap in relation to external factors on a larger scale, community level and then address the implications as they relate more closely to the individual.

### **The Achievement Gap and Statistical Review**

The Achievement Gap is formally defined, by the U.S. Department of Education, as the difference in academic outcomes of various ethnic groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Throughout the findings, the disparity in educational achievement has produced some extremely imbalanced statistics. In their report on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the National Center for Education Statistics

reported close to half of all White students get placed in Proficient or Advanced categories for reading, whereas Black students show less than 20%. In five out of the seven subjects tested, a greater number (over 50%) of Black students rank Below Basic, whereas White students are near 20% (Barton & Coley, 2010). Another recent study found, when approaching the end of high school, Black students skill level in reading and math is nearly the same as White students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade (Farr, 2010). Over the course of 32 years, with a gap that was 44 points in 1971, African American students have only been able to reduce the gap by 13 points to a 31-point difference (Leach & Williams, 2007).

“No Child Left Behind (NCLB), is the largest intervention of the federal government into education in the history of the United States, which was the promised solution to remedy student learning and to close the achievement gap” (Hurst, 2007, p.295). Some of the most rewarding parts of NCLB were to help regulate accountability standards across the board for performance in the areas of teacher qualifications, scientific-based research methods in classrooms, close gaps between Whites and African Americans, various underserved populations (disabilities, low-income, non-English speaking) and provide parents with annual reports on student progress (Wenglinsky, 2004). While NCLB was supposed to be the answer, the findings offered some opposing viewpoints. Hurst (2007) explained, “by just focusing on education to solve social and economic inequality, it detracts the public’s concern from issues of poverty, low wage jobs and health care, that need to be addressed if attempting to move toward equality” (Hurst, 2007, p.295).

Laguna-Riordan & Aguilar (2009) said, “the current policy of NCLB does not address the importance of social and emotional deficiencies that prevent school success”

(p. 135). Shaker & Heliman (2004) noted, the NCLB was created due to the United States fear of students falling behind other industrialized nations and as a result, bringing negative economic consequences (Shaker & Heliman, 2004). Hurst (2007) also points out three other proposed failures of the NCLB, saying: “(1) Data are inadequate on school progress. The information unfairly punishes urban schools that serve students of color and students in poverty. (2) Standardized tests are usually an unreliable and invalid means of assessing student progress and have had negative consequences for student learning, (3) NCLB restricts curriculum by adding strict parameters that make it hard for teachers to connect classroom experience to students’ interests and culture” (p. 298). The Federal Government could provide resources for community development aid in communities with failing schools and if policymakers want to attain the dream of NCLB, they are going to have to use better testing instruments than what are in the current policy (Wenglinsky, 2004).

Less experienced teachers teach minority children (Barton & Coley, 2008). Teacher background characteristics or certification, education level, and experience are also important to helping close educational gaps (Jackson-Palmer, 2010). Success at school has been called a strong indicator of long-term developmental outcomes with implications to health, mental health, income, marriage, parenting and career (Grogan-Kaylor & Wooley, 2010). Horton (2004) found, “in an analysis of close to 166,000 tests taken by more than half of the state of Illinois full-time public school teachers (67,000), that children of color in the highest-poverty and lowest achieving schools are five times more likely to be taught by teachers who failed at least one teacher certification test than children of color in the highest-achieving schools” (p. 64).

Where there are expectations of success, children who don't have their basic needs met struggle through school (Leach & Williams, 2007). Due to the observation that children enter school with a variety of skills, attributes, and resources, they do not start with a level playing field. To impose the same merit on all children naturally causes a need to adjust the flow of resources in favor of those who are most in need (Constable, 2008). “The stressors of a big test or a difficult group project can elevate a student's desire to achieve higher results, but the stress of a dysfunctional or unpredictable home life can spoil a child's cognitive functioning permanently” (Sparks, 2012, p. 19).

While we hold a strong desire for children to succeed, teachers need to be aware of challenges they face before they step foot into a school building (Pallock, 2007). When teachers keep low expectations for select students based on their race and socioeconomic status, they are perpetuating the disproportionate numbers of children identified with specific disabilities and placed in more restricted environments (Jackson-Palmer, 2010). In a survey of math teachers on factors contributing to the achievement gap, with 379 responders, Bol & Berry (2005) found that most teachers attributed the deficit to differences in motivational levels, work ethic, and family support. More significantly, teachers from schools with a majority of White students attributed the gap to student motivation, work ethic and family support. Teachers in schools with higher percentages of minority students would attribute the gap to curriculum and structural concerns (Bol & Berry, 2005). For the United States to maintain being a respected, powerful country, not many other factors hold more consequential significance than congruence in educational opportunities and the chances of academic success (Barton & Coley, 2008).

Teaching about racism generates challenging issues for educators and students. Believing one can be color-blind is considered the “new racism.” Color-blind racial attitudes are a more subtle form of racism, which leads those in the majority to believe that inequities have been addressed and that skin color does not play a role in social interactions in the United States (Loya & Cuevas, 2010). To survey the historical elements, and more recently financial aspects, segregation has shown persistent gaps in the United States between the academic performance of White students and that of African American students (Richman, Bowen, & Woolley, 2004). Because the historic role of segregation in education has been so prevalent in America, Grogan-Kaylor & Wooley (2010) speak about the systematic re-segregation in education as follows:

Re-segregation is shown in the way we assign students to schools by neighborhood, how we finance public schools, largely based on local property taxes. This means schools in areas with lower real estate values have proportionately less money to spend per pupil to educate students while wealthier areas have proportionately higher per-pupil funding (p. 877).

In national research, overrepresentation of African American children in special education has been shown to cause long-term harmful effects on these children. Due to being mislabeled, some get services they do not need, they are denied access to general education curriculum and the effects are damaging to the child’s self-efficacy (NABSE, 2002). Schools without certified teachers, that don’t offer many courses to challenge students, disproportionately label children for special education. The schools have low economic stature and limited neighborhood educational resources. As an outcome, the students face more obstacles and are not equipped to be successful in school (Leach & Williams, 2007). Because of inherent biases and zero tolerance policies, African American students are also disproportionately punished for school behaviors. White

students who are singled out for the same behaviors get a more restorative consequence and are suspended at a lower rate (Lewis, Butler, Bonner III & Joubert, 2010).

Relevant training of teachers and administrators does not focus much on the socio-emotional aspects of child development (Sparks, 2012). Hopps, Tourse, & Christian (2002) said, “when children have many and constant stressors in life, the stress can deter development, positive capacity and adjustment. Stress is the ideation that a persons’ life is in danger so, the individual would need acclimation” (p.67).

Data has shown that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) play a significant role in a student’s complete mental health and school performance (Minnesota Department of Health, 2011). “While educators and psychologists have said for decades that the effects of poverty interfere with students' academic achievement, new evidence from cognitive neuroscience is showing exactly how adversity in childhood damages students' long-term learning and health” (Sparks, 2012, p.1). Another study stated that children, who have been victims of maltreatment, or neglect, physical, sexual and psychological abuse, have a higher expectancy of low academic achievement (Mallett, 2012).

In a longitudinal study of family type, from Kindergarten to ninth grade, researchers found that households with families lead by a strong mother-child bond were less academically inclined, more aggressive or inattentive, and more anxious, depressed or withdrawn at school by the time they reached ninth grade than children in more united father-child connected families (Johnson, 2010). There is significance to the role of family in student achievement. Literacy starts before school and child vocabulary increases by the parents’ level of education (Barton & Coley, 2008). Statistically, only

35% of African American families had two parents in the home and saw that parental involvement with teachers and school helped students perform more efficiently and maintain time in school much longer (Barton & Coley, 2007). Parents that homeschooled their kids held stronger individual ideals for being involved than involved parents in public schools (Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011).

Student satisfaction with family improves school outcomes both academically and behaviorally (Grogan-Kaylor & Wooley, 2010). School performance can flourish or be hindered by a stable or unstable psychological wellbeing and a positive or negative perception of their interactions with their parents. Psychological wellbeing and positive perceptions are evident in how capable an adolescent believes him/herself to be and how motivated he/she is to perform successfully in the academic arena (Shearin, 2002). The research found that African American students associate achievement with acting White, due to their own belief in school success, and these students also believe White American teachers have low expectations of them academically and socially (Ford, Grantham & Whiting, 2008).

### **Minnesota Education Statistics**

The research points out the dichotomous educational statistics that the state of Minnesota is producing. Minnesota's Black and Hispanic students are inherently three years behind academically and within the past five years, Minnesota has had the largest gap in the entire United States of America in this area (Kersten, 2012). Home residence or school changeability has a strong connection to academic problems in Minnesota. In data found on this dynamic, "82% of St. Paul students who graduate remained in the same school for four years, with only 1% dropping out. In contrast, 92% of dropouts

stayed a year or less in one school” (Hassan & Mahmoud, 2012, p. 3). 2011 statistics showed that 55 percent of white 11th grade students in Minnesota met standards in math, whereas 16 percent of black students scores met standards (Kersten, 2012). “Race often becomes a proxy for larger underlying social forces and factors that contribute to poor performance in school. Sadly, as an example, in the city of Minneapolis, “children in special education programs had a four-year graduation rate of only 22%. Of these, 73% were arrested within five years of leaving school” (Hassan & Mahmoud, 2012, p. 3).

Researchers believe there are five specific gaps that are causing the achievement gap for African American students. They are “preparation, belief, time, teaching and leadership” (Hassan & Mahmoud, 2012 p. 2). Today, the gap between Black and White students has reduced from where it was ten years ago, but the progress came to a standstill in 1990 (Ferguson & Mehta, 2004). Research suggests that, before 1990, reductions in the achievement gap happened because minority students were exposed to greater resources and academic content (Harris & Herrington, 2006).

Scholars are finding new trends in neuroscience that aim to bridge the gap between increasing basic cognitive and neurological understanding of learning and applying this knowledge in educational settings (Pallock, 2007). Scales & Roehlkepartain (2005) observed that, “students who get in-depth service-learning exposure appear to do better academically than students with minimal participation in service-learning and this involvement appears to contribute in reducing the achievement gap” (p. 10). From viewing achievement test results, research revealed, the Head Start program improved school readiness (Ferguson & Mehta, 2004).

Social workers assist in cultivating a climate to add efficiency to the education process. The main objective of the social worker approach is to be in collaboration with parents, student, as well as addressing the difficulties of school and home challenges (Constable, 2008). The NASW Center for Workforce Studies & Social Work Practice (2010) put out an occupational overview of the role of social work in schools and found that social workers working within school systems offer aid to students to raise their emotional health and increase educational success (NASW, 2010). Jones, Hopson & Gomes, (2012) say, “social work interventions are most effective when customized to address the specific needs of the target population. Approaches that foster resilience by fusing cultural values specific to the highlighted group assist in reducing psychosocial instability and elevate healthy coping and adjustment” (p. 37). School social workers are usually requested to assist the child, family, and teacher systems in correcting behaviors such as school absence, social alienation, conduct issues, defiance, and the outcomes of life stressors (NASW, 2010).

### **Research Question**

While there are so many causes of the persistent achievement gap, the research set out to answer the following questions: 1. Are there any significant differences in teacher and social worker attitudes toward factors of the achievement gap? 2. Does experience, or years in K-12 educational settings have an effect on attitudes toward the achievement gap? 3. Does race affect attitudes toward the achievement gap? If there are any significant findings, the research may provide another point of interest to addressing the disparities in Minnesota K-12 educational settings.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory**

Bronfenbrenner (1979) devised a theory based on a socio-cultural view of human behavior utilizing a model of interconnected processes and structures that influence development. The ecological model is comprised of four levels, termed the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, and Macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner's theory offered a framework for which we viewed and structured the research. As noted, the achievement gap does not only suggest issues in educational structure, but there are also contributing factors from the individual child (Microsystem), family relationships (Mezzosystem), school and community factors (Exosystem) and even more hierarchical (Macrosystem) political systems at work.

The Microsystem is considered the first place in which individuals develop. This system encompasses family, peers, school, and neighborhood, all of which have the most direct interactions with the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Due to the observation that children enter school with a variety of skills, attributes, and resources, they do not start with a level playing field. To impose the same merit on all children naturally causes a need to adjust the flow of resources in favor of those who are most in need (Constable, 2008).

The Mezzosystem is defined as the reciprocation between Microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Understanding how individual achievement is related to family relationships, school dynamics, and the informal cohesion of friendship affect each other are factors in viewing the entire scope of the gap. The relationships adolescent's form can either advance or inhibit their ability to brave the educational system and achieve

(Hassan, et. al., 2012).

The next piece of the eco-structure is the Exosystem, which encompasses larger social settings in that do not always directly involve the individual. Although these systems are less personal in inclusion, the influences of these settings still impact the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). To give consideration to neighborhoods and school characteristics, both could have a direct influence on academic success (Leach & Williams, 2007).

The final layer consists of societal norms and laws, attitudes, beliefs, and cultural ideologies, known as the Macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Similar to the Exosystem, individuals may not experience these events directly; however, such events play an integral part in academic success, especially personal beliefs and culture. Through the ecological perspective, we can explore the misfortunes and triumphs that children face systematically, when expected to perform at a successful academic level.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

This quantitative study examined attitudes of teachers and social workers. The format was an online survey using a program called Qualtrics. Data on teacher and social worker attitudes on causes of the achievement gap in Minnesota obtained was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The survey was conducted by an MSW student for purposes of furthering graduate social work research in the area of K-12 educational equity. The respondents were teachers and social workers. The objectives of the research were to inform the field of social work on teacher attitudes and further examine social worker beliefs in student educational success and to explore the level of concern Minnesota's teachers and social workers have toward this deficit.

### **Survey**

The Qualtrics survey operationalized variables with the use of scale scores. Licensed teacher and social worker attitudes were surveyed. Along with the scale data collected, there was a series of demographic and descriptive statistics gathered such as race, gender, length of time in profession and occupational identification. The first ordinal variable in the survey measured the participants' attitudes in individual causes of the achievement gap. The scale was operationalized with the heading: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:"

- (1) "African American students are treated differently than White students."
- (2) "African American students value learning."
- (3) "African American students are less connected to school staff."

- (4) "School funding is inadequate for academically struggling schools."
- (5) "African American students are suspended at a greater rate than White students."
- (6) "Being responsive to cultural differences is important."
- (7) "Teachers who work with the most difficult students have the least amount of experience."
- (8) "Family engagement is an important factor in closing the achievement gap."
- (9) "African American students have more family involvement than White students."
- (10) "African American children have higher risk factors that impact the achievement gap than White children (such as abuse, mobility, hunger, etc.)."
- (11) "Children in neighborhoods with higher risk factors can achieve academic success."

The possible response options ranged from (1) ("Strongly Disagree") to (5) ("Strongly Agree"). The second, nominal variable measured respondents' professional experience in K-12 educational settings. This variable was operationalized with the item: "How many years of professional experience do you have working in K-12 educational settings?" The response option was to fill in a blank indicating their level of experience.

The research question for the study was: Is there a difference between respondents with more professional experience in K-12 educational settings and respondents with little professional experience in K-12 educational settings on their Individual scale scores? The research hypothesis for the study was: There is a difference between respondents with professional experience in K-12

educational settings and respondents without professional experience in K-12 educational settings on their individual scale scores. The null hypothesis for the study was: There is no difference between respondents with professional experience in K-12 settings and respondents without professional experience in K-12 settings on their individual scale scores.

The next, nominal variable measured respondents' professional occupation. This variable was operationalized with the item: "What is your professional occupation" The response options are (1); "licensed teacher" (2); "licensed social worker"

The research question for the study was: Is there a difference between respondents who teach in K-12 educational settings and respondents who are social workers in K-12 educational settings? The research hypothesis for the study was: There is a difference between respondents who teach in K-12 educational settings and respondents who are social workers in K-12 educational settings. The null hypothesis for the study was: There is no difference between respondents who teach in K-12 educational settings and respondents who are social workers in K-12 educational settings.

The final, nominal variable asked for the race of each respondent. This variable was operationalized with the item: "Which of the following best indicates your racial or ethnic heritage?" The response options were (1); "White American" (2); "African American" (3); "Hispanic American" (4); "Asian American" (5); "American Indian" (6); "Other."

The research question for the study was, “Does race have an effect on teacher or social worker attitudes toward the achievement gap?” The research hypothesis for the study was: Race has an effect on teacher and social worker attitudes toward the achievement gap. The null hypothesis for the study was: Race does not have an effect on teacher and social worker attitudes toward the achievement gap.

### **Sampling method, collection process and analysis plan.**

The research sample was sent to approximately 500 respondents. 250 licensed teachers and 250 licensed social workers in Minneapolis and St Paul schools. Emails were collected through a search of publically available district email lists of Hennepin and Ramsey County Public Schools. Of the 58 respondents, 51 opted to complete the survey, for a total of 13 social workers and 38 teachers. The responses came in over a four to five week period. To ensure there was adequate response time after, the researcher kept the survey open for an additional two weeks and then closed the survey. The other portion of respondents was a convenience sample of five social workers and five teachers from Minneapolis and Saint Paul Public Schools and all were previously known to the researcher. Surveys were sent electronically by email, with a link from the researcher’s student account. The informed consent letter was attached to the email. The data was collected through the use of Qualtrics and operationalized for analysis using SPSS software.

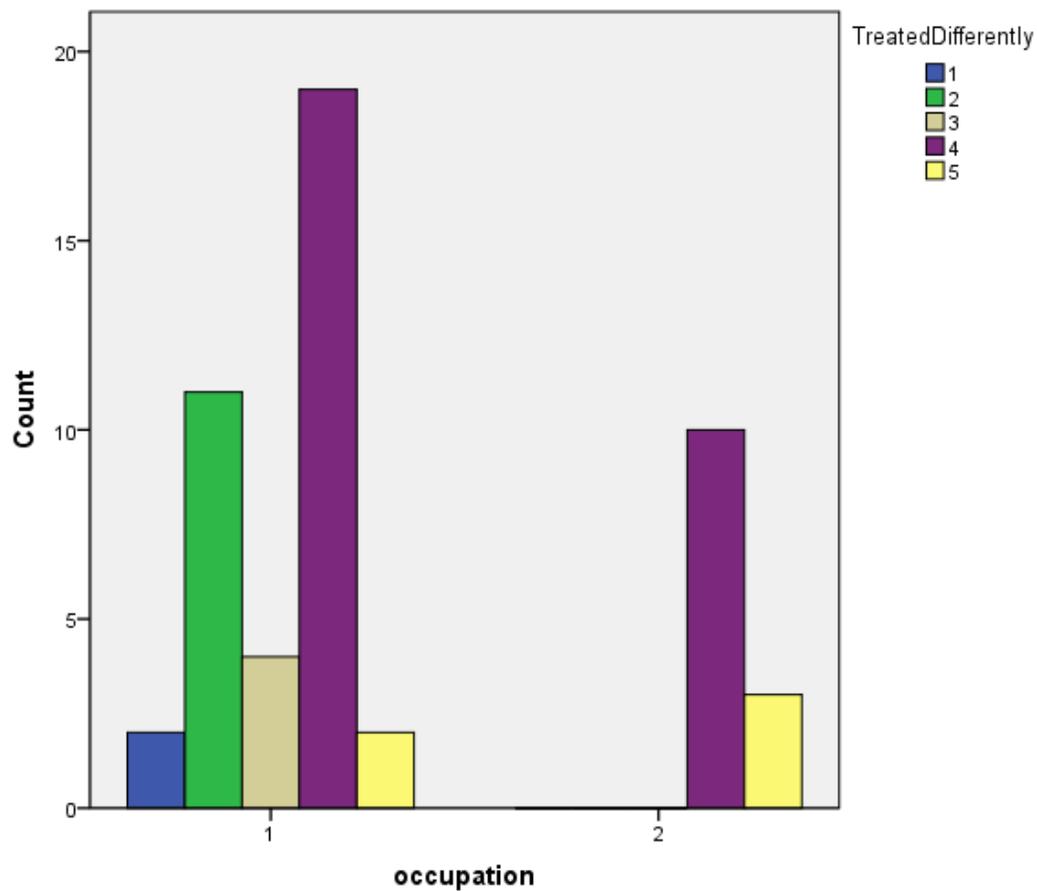
### **Measures for Protection of Human Subjects**

After approval from the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, the survey was ready for distribution. The informed consent letter discussed all known risks

or benefits to participation in the study, and participation was entirely voluntary. Subjects were invited to answer all, some, or none of the questions. The letter of informed consent was included within the survey. The message gave respondents the option to electronically sign and stated the purpose of the study in detail. Subjects were told of the confidential nature of the study in the email. The consent form gave the location of the surveys, plans for destroying the data in post-analysis, along with the contact information for questions, comments, and concerns.

### Results/Findings

The first variable was occupation. Occupation is a nominal variable, operationally defined by variable 6 (#Q6) in the survey: “Please identify your professional occupation: Licensed Teacher (1)/Licensed Social Worker (2).” Analysis of this variable answered the research question: Are there any significant differences in teacher and social worker attitudes toward the achievement gap? The statistical procedure used to analyze this variable was a frequency distribution. See Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Attitudes of how African American Students are treated differently by occupation. For occupation: 1=Teachers, 2=Social Workers; Responses ranged from 1 to 5, 1 signifying “Strongly Disagree,” 3 signifying “Neither,” and 5 signifying “Strongly Agree.”

This nominal variable measures the respondents' occupation based on the independent variable: African American students are treated differently than white students. This variable is operationalized with the item: "occupation." Responses ranged from 1 to 5, 1 signifying "Strongly Disagree," 3 signifying "Neither," and 5 signifying "Strongly Agree." The research question for the study is: Are there any significant differences in teacher and social worker attitudes toward the achievement gap? The findings of this study in Figure 1 show teacher responses (1) and social worker responses (2). These findings show that the large majority of the sample is teachers.

The second descriptive variable was experience. Experience is an interval variable, operationally defined by variable 7 (#Q7) in the survey: "Approximately how many years of experience do you have working in K-12 educational settings?" Analysis of this variable answered the research question: "Does experience, years in K-12 educational settings, have an effect on attitudes toward the achievement gap? The statistical procedure used to analyze this variable was a frequency distribution, displayed in Figure 2.

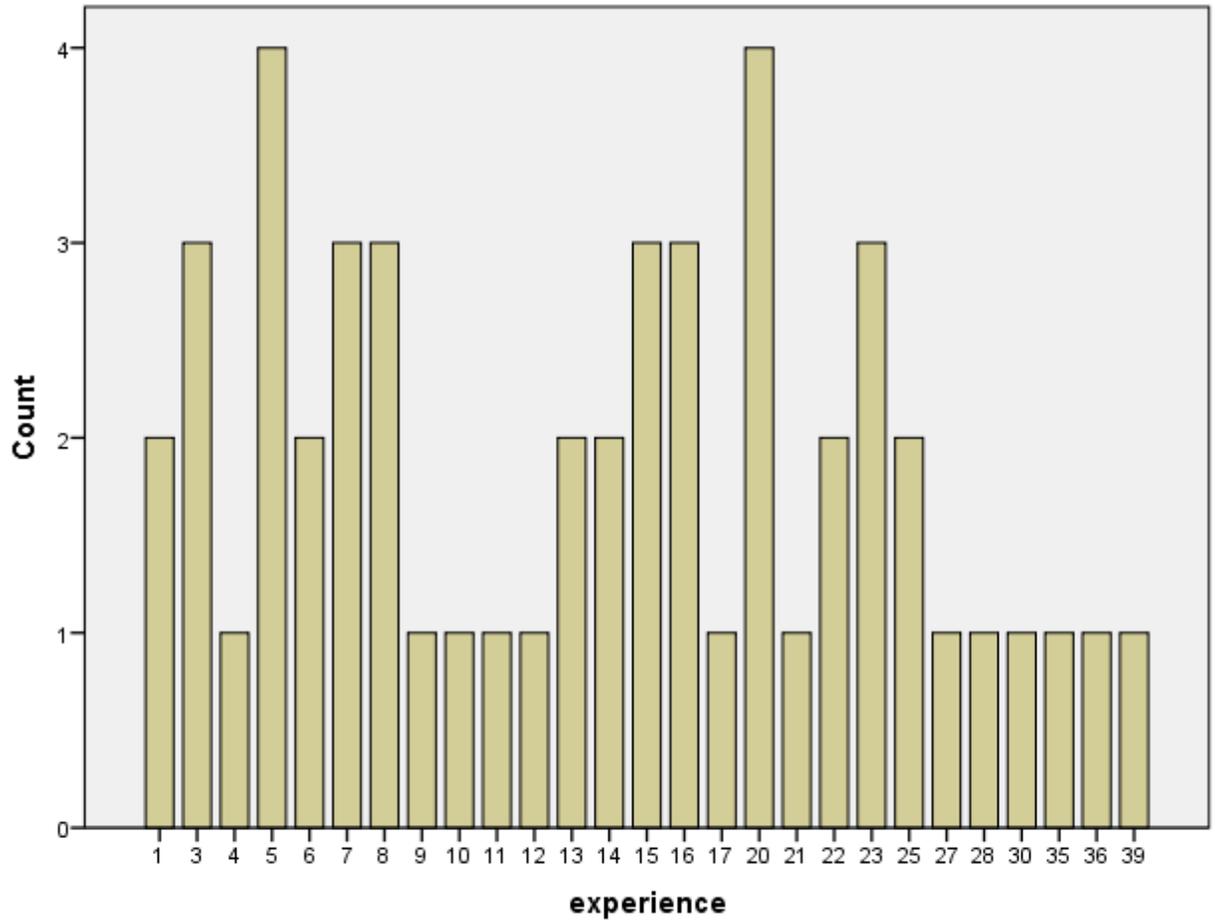


Figure 2. Years of Experience Distribution

This nominal variable measures the respondents’ experience. This variable is operationalized with the item: “experience”. The response option was to answer the question: “Approximately how many years of experience do you have working in K-12 educational settings,” by filling in a blank. The research question for the study was: Does experience, years in K-12 educational settings, have an effect on attitudes toward the achievement gap? The findings of this chart in Figure 1 show the respondents years of experience and the count of how many respondents share the same amount of years. These findings show that the majority of the sample has at least five years of experience or more.

The final descriptive variable was race. Race is a nominal variable, operationally defined by variable 3 (#Q3) in the survey: “Which of the following best indicates your racial or ethnic heritage?” The response options were (1); “White American” (2); “African American” (3); “Hispanic American” (4); “Asian American” (5); “American Indian” (6); “Other.” Analysis of this variable answered the research question: “Does experience, years in K-12 educational settings, have an effect on attitudes toward the achievement gap? The statistical procedure used to analyze this variable was a frequency distribution, displayed in Figure 3.

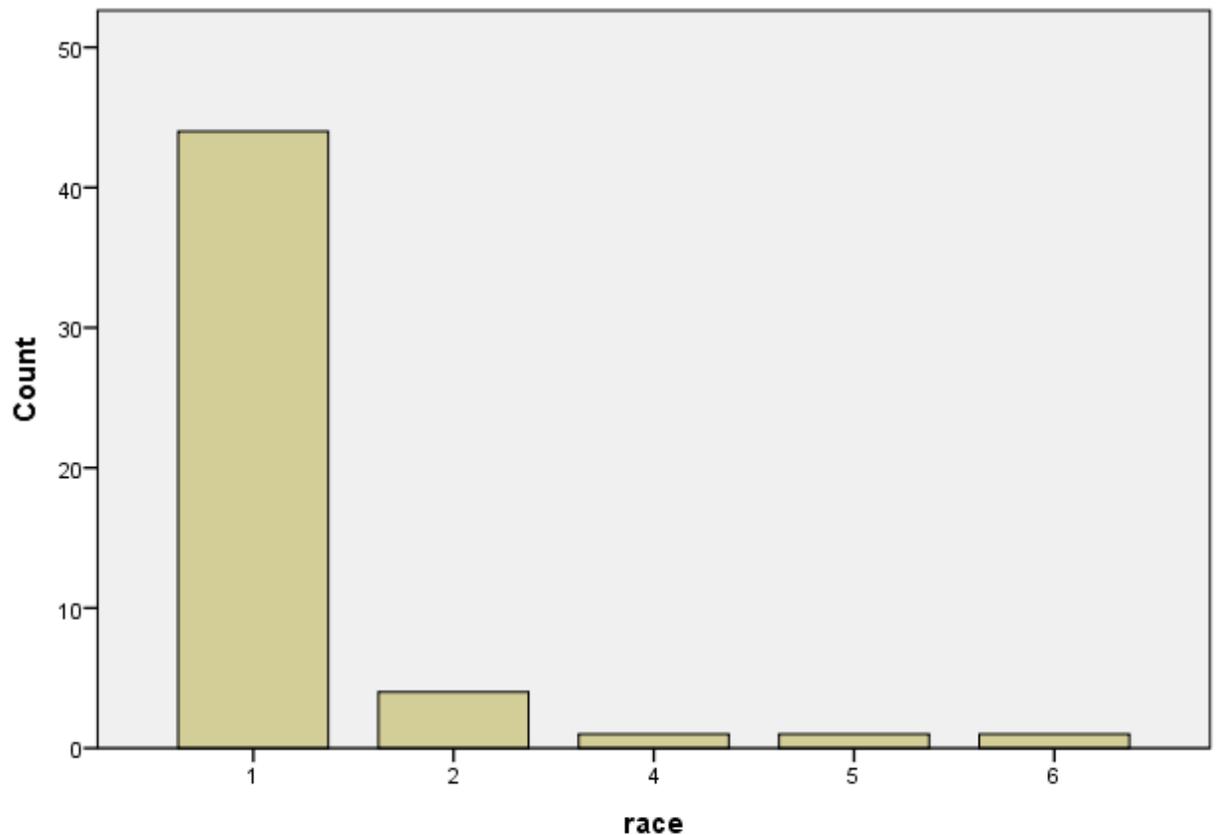


Figure 3. Race Distribution

1=White American 2=African American 3=Hispanic American 4=Asian American 5=American Indian  
6=Other

This nominal variable measures the respondents' race. This variable is operationalized with the item: "race:" The response options were (1); "White American" (2); "African American" (3); "Hispanic American" (4); "Asian American" (5); "American Indian" (6); "Other." The research question for the study is "Does race affect attitudes towards the achievement gap?" The findings of this study in Table 1 show that 45 respondents (85%) are (1); White American, 5 respondents (9%) are (2); African American, 0 respondents are Hispanic American, 1 respondent (2%) was (4); Asian American, 1 respondent (2%) was (5); American Indian and 1 respondent (2%) was (6) other. These findings show that the large majority of the sample was White American.

The next statistic tested the association between the independent variable of Macro level causes of the achievement gap, and the dependent variable of the respondents' experience. The Macro level cause is an ordinal level variable. Macro level causes were created by combining survey questions (3), (4), (6), (7) and (10). Responses ranged from 1 to 5, 1 signifying "Strongly Disagree," 3 signifying "Neither," and 5 signifying "Strongly Agree." A higher score on this variable indicates a stronger belief that Macro level causes of the achievement gap are stronger based on experience.

Analysis of these variables answered the research question: Is there an association between Macro level causes of the achievement gap and the respondents' experience?

The hypothesis was that an association exists between Macro level causes of the achievement gap and the respondents' experience. The null hypothesis was there is no association between Macro level causes of the achievement gap and the respondents' experience. These variables were measured for association using a Chi-Square.

Table 1. *Chi-Square of experience to Macro causes*

| Chi-Square Tests             |                      |     |                       |
|------------------------------|----------------------|-----|-----------------------|
|                              | Value                | df  | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square           | 302.681 <sup>a</sup> | 312 | .637                  |
| Likelihood Ratio             | 170.881              | 312 | 1.000                 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 4.832                | 1   | .028                  |
| N of Valid Cases             | 51                   |     |                       |

a. 351 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .02.

The nominal variable in this study measures how the respondent feels about Macro causes of the achievement gap, while the ordinal variable measures what effect the experience of respondents had on the outcome. The Macro causes variable is operationalized with survey questions (3), (4), (6), (7) and (10). Responses range from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 3 (“Neither”) to 5 (“Strongly Agree.”) along a Likert scale (1). Experience variable is operationalized with the item: “Approximately how many years of experience do you have working in K-12 educational settings,” by filling in a blank. The research question for this study is: Is there an association between Macro level causes of the achievement gap and the respondents’ experience? The hypothesis was that an association exists between Macro level causes of the achievement gap and the respondents’ experience. The null hypothesis was there is no association between Macro level causes of the achievement gap and the respondents’ experience.

Table 1 shows that the p-value for the Chi-Square of the variables Macro causes and experience is .637. Since the p-value is greater than .05, we accept the null hypothesis. Therefore, this data rejects the research hypothesis that there is a significant association between experience and Macro causes of the achievement gap. Because the

Chi-Square was not significant, we can conclude that teachers would not strongly disagree with Macro causes of the achievement gap. Additionally, we cannot conclude that more social workers would disagree with Macro causes. The findings imply that future research should not focus on the association between experience and the achievement gap. The research showed similarity in responses based on experience, so the need to test these variables again may be unnecessary.

The next statistic tested the association between the independent variable of Mezzo level causes of the achievement gap, and the dependent variable of the respondents' occupation. The Mezzo level cause is an ordinal level variable. Mezzo level causes were created by combining survey questions (5), (8) and (9). Responses ranged from 1 to 5, 1 signifying "Strongly Disagree," 3 signifying "Neither," and 5 signifying "Strongly Agree." A higher score on this variable indicates a stronger belief that Mezzo level causes of the achievement gap are stronger based on occupation. Analysis of these variables answered the research question: Is there an association between Mezzo level causes of the achievement gap and the respondents' occupation? The hypothesis was that an association exists between Mezzo level causes of the achievement gap and the respondents' occupation. The null hypothesis was there is no association between Mezzo level causes of the achievement gap and the respondents' occupation. These variables were measured for association using a Chi-Square.

Table 2. *Chi-Square of occupation to Mezzo causes*

| Chi-Square Tests             |                    |    |                       |
|------------------------------|--------------------|----|-----------------------|
|                              | Value              | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square           | 3.363 <sup>a</sup> | 6  | .762                  |
| Likelihood Ratio             | 3.998              | 6  | .677                  |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 1.146              | 1  | .284                  |
| N of Valid Cases             | 51                 |    |                       |

a. 11 cells (78.6%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .25.

The nominal variable in this study measures whether the respondent changes their response based on occupation, while the ordinal variable measures what effect the Mezzo causes has on the outcome. Mezzo causes are operationalized by combining the responses of survey questions (5), (8) and (9). Responses ranged from 1 to 5, 1 signifying (“Strongly Disagree”) to 3 (“Neither”) to 5 (“Strongly Agree.”) along a Likert scale (1). Occupation variable is operationalized with the item: “Please identify your professional occupation.” The response options are 1 (Licensed Teacher) and 2 (Licensed Social Worker). The research question for this study is: Is there an association between causes of the achievement gap and the respondents’ occupation? The hypothesis for this study is: There is an association between causes of the achievement gap and the respondents’ occupation. The null hypothesis for this study is: There is no association between causes of the achievement gap and the respondents’ occupation.

Table 2 shows that the p-value for the Chi-Square of the variables Treated Differently and Occupation is .762. Since the p-value is greater than .05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, this data rejects the research hypothesis that there is a significant association between occupation and Mezzo causes of the achievement gap.

Because the Chi-Square is not significant, we can conclude that teachers would not strongly disagree with Mezzo causes of the achievement gap. Additionally, we cannot conclude that more social workers would disagree with Mezzo causes. The findings imply that future research should not focus on the association between occupation and the achievement gap. The research showed similarity in responses based on occupation, so the need to test these variables again may be unnecessary.

The next statistic tested the association between the independent variable of Micro level causes of the achievement gap, and the dependent variable of the respondents' occupation. The Micro level cause is an ordinal level variable. Micro level causes were created by combining survey questions (1), (2), (5) and (11). Responses ranged from 1 to 5, 1 signifying "Strongly Disagree," 3 signifying "Neither," and 5 signifying "Strongly Agree." A higher score on this variable indicates a stronger belief that Micro level causes of the achievement gap are stronger based on race. Analysis of these variables answered the research question: Is there an association between Micro level causes of the achievement gap and the respondents' race? The hypothesis was that an association exists between Micro level causes of the achievement gap and the respondents' race. The null hypothesis was there is no association between Micro level causes of the achievement gap and the respondents' race. These variables were measured for association using a Chi-Square.

Table 3. *Chi-Square of race to Micro causes*

| Chi-Square Tests             |                     |    |                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|
|                              | Value               | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square           | 43.515 <sup>a</sup> | 32 | .084                  |
| Likelihood Ratio             | 27.964              | 32 | .671                  |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 1.308               | 1  | .253                  |
| N of Valid Cases             | 51                  |    |                       |

a. 42 cells (93.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .02.

The nominal variable in this study measures how the respondent feels about race causes of the achievement gap, while the ordinal variable measures what effect the Micro causes of the achievement gap has on the outcome. Treated Differently variable is operationalized with the item: “African American students are treated differently.” Responses range from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 3 (“Neither”) to 5 (“Strongly Agree.”) along a Likert scale (1). Occupation variable is operationalized with the item: “Please identify your professional occupation.” The response options are 1 (Licensed Teacher) and 2 (Licensed Social Worker). The research question for this study is: Is there an association between causes of the achievement gap and the respondents’ occupation? The hypothesis for this study is: There is an association between causes of the achievement gap and the respondents’ occupation. The null hypothesis for this study is: There is no association between causes of the achievement gap and the respondents’ occupation.

Table 3 shows that the p-value for the Chi-Square of the variables Treated Differently and Occupation is .084. Since the p-value is greater than .05, we accept the

null hypothesis. Therefore, this data rejects the research hypothesis that there is a significant association between race and Micro causes of the achievement gap.

Because the Chi-Square is not significant, we can conclude that teachers would strongly disagree with Mezzo causes of the achievement gap. Additionally, we cannot conclude that more social workers would disagree with Mezzo causes. The findings imply that future research should not focus on the association between occupation and the achievement gap. The research showed similarity in responses based on race, so the need to test these variables again may be unnecessary.

The findings imply that future research may want to give more focus to having more respondents of color participate in a similar study. While the p-value was not significant, the .084 score may be close enough to bring up curiosity in the minds of researchers to find a more valid representation of diverse participants in a future survey of the achievement gap.

The final statistic tested the association between the independent variable of “African American students are treated differently,” and the dependent variable of the respondents’ attitudes. The Treated Differently scale question is an ordinal level variable. Responses ranged from 1 to 5, 1 signifying “Strongly Disagree,” 3 signifying “Neither,” and 5 signifying “Strongly Agree.” A higher score on this variable indicates a stronger belief that African American students are treated differently based on the respondents’ occupation. Analysis of these variables answered the research question: Is there an association between causes of the achievement gap and the respondents’ attitudes? The hypothesis was that an association exists between causes of the achievement gap and the respondents’ attitudes. The null hypothesis was there is no

association between causes of the achievement gap and the respondents' attitudes. These variables were measured for association using a Chi-Square.

Table 4. *Chi-Square test of Occupation to how students are treated*

|                 |                             | TreatedDifferently          |        |        |        |        | Total  |        |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|                 |                             | 1                           | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      |        |        |
| 1<br>occupation | Count                       | 2                           | 11     | 4      | 19     | 2      | 38     |        |
|                 | Expected Count              | 1.5                         | 8.2    | 3.0    | 21.6   | 3.7    | 38.0   |        |
|                 | % within occupation         | 5.3%                        | 28.9%  | 10.5%  | 50.0%  | 5.3%   | 100.0% |        |
|                 | % within TreatedDifferently | 100.0%                      | 100.0% | 100.0% | 65.5%  | 40.0%  | 74.5%  |        |
|                 | % of Total                  | 3.9%                        | 21.6%  | 7.8%   | 37.3%  | 3.9%   | 74.5%  |        |
|                 | 2<br>occupation             | Count                       | 0      | 0      | 0      | 10     | 3      | 13     |
|                 |                             | Expected Count              | .5     | 2.8    | 1.0    | 7.4    | 1.3    | 13.0   |
|                 |                             | % within occupation         | 0.0%   | 0.0%   | 0.0%   | 76.9%  | 23.1%  | 100.0% |
|                 |                             | % within TreatedDifferently | 0.0%   | 0.0%   | 0.0%   | 34.5%  | 60.0%  | 25.5%  |
|                 |                             | % of Total                  | 0.0%   | 0.0%   | 0.0%   | 19.6%  | 5.9%   | 25.5%  |
| Total           | Count                       | 2                           | 11     | 4      | 29     | 5      | 51     |        |
|                 | Expected Count              | 2.0                         | 11.0   | 4.0    | 29.0   | 5.0    | 51.0   |        |
|                 | % within occupation         | 3.9%                        | 21.6%  | 7.8%   | 56.9%  | 9.8%   | 100.0% |        |
|                 | % within TreatedDifferently | 100.0%                      | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |        |
|                 | % of Total                  | 3.9%                        | 21.6%  | 7.8%   | 56.9%  | 9.8%   | 100.0% |        |

Table 5. *Occupation to how students are treated*

| <b>Chi-Square Tests</b>         |                     |    |                          |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|----|--------------------------|
|                                 | Value               | df | Asymp. Sig.<br>(2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square              | 10.186 <sup>a</sup> | 4  | .037                     |
| Likelihood Ratio                | 13.808              | 4  | .008                     |
| Linear-by-Linear<br>Association | 8.890               | 1  | .003                     |
| N of Valid Cases                | 51                  |    |                          |

a. 7 cells (70.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .51.

The nominal variable in this study measures how the respondent feels about causes of the achievement gap, while the ordinal variable measures what effect the occupation of respondents attitude has on the outcome. Treated Differently variable is operationalized with the item: “African American students are treated differently.” Responses range from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 3 (“Neither”) to 5 (“Strongly Agree.”) along a Likert scale (1). Occupation variable is operationalized with the item: “Please identify your professional occupation.” The response options are 1 (Licensed Teacher) and 2 (Licensed Social Worker). The research question for this study is: Is there an association between causes of the achievement gap and the respondents’ occupation? The hypothesis for this study is: There is an association between causes of the achievement gap and the respondents’ occupation. The null hypothesis for this study is: There is no association between causes of the achievement gap and the respondents’ occupation.

Table 4 shows that, of all respondents who were teachers (1), 2 (5.3%) strongly disagreed that African American students were treated differently, 11 (28.9%) disagreed that African American students were treated differently, 4 (10.5%) said neither on the

variable of being treated differently, 19 (50.0%) agreed that African American students were treated differently, and 2 (5.3%) strongly agreed that African American students were treated differently. Of all respondents who were social workers, 10 (76.9%) agreed that African American students were treated differently, and 3 (23.1%) strongly agreed that African American students were treated differently. This crosstabulation demonstrates that in the sample, those who were teachers were a little more likely than social workers, to believe that African American students were not treated differently, but less likely to believe that African American students were treated differently.

Table 5 shows that the p-value for the Chi-Square of the variables Treated Differently and Occupation is .037. Since the p-value is less than .05, we reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, this data supports the research hypothesis that there is a significant association between occupation and whether African American students are treated differently.

Because the Chi-Square is significant, we can conclude that more teachers would strongly disagree with African Americans being treated differently as unimportant than we would expect (actual count = 2, expected count = 1.5), that teachers who disagree with African Americans being treated differently than we would expect (actual count = 11, expected count = 8.2), or that teachers would agree with African Americans being treated differently less than we would expect (actual count = 19, expected count = 21.6). Additionally, we cannot conclude that less social workers would agree with African American students being treated differently than we would expect (actual count = 10, expected count = 7.4), that less social workers would strongly agree with African

American students being treated differently than we would expect (actual count = 3, expected count = 1.3).

The findings imply that future research should focus on those associations in the crosstabulation that showed differences between the two groups. For example, a larger percentage of social workers saw African American students being treated differently as a very important in the achievement gap than teachers. Future research might examine why social workers, when compared to teachers, may be more likely to believe that African Americans are treated differently as a cause of the achievement gap.

### **Discussion**

The research set out to answer three questions. The first question was to find out if there were significant differences in teacher and social worker attitudes toward factors of the achievement gap. The second question looked for significance in experience having an effect on attitudes toward the achievement gap. The final question asked about race and its affect on attitudes toward the achievement gap.

Each of the 11 questions used in the survey were based on findings in the research. When put into SPSS for analysis, the questions were coded as variables of measure for the analysis of responses. The questioned were then grouped into different ecosystemic groups based on the critical framework of the project. Each response grouping was then analyzed to answer each of the research questions.

What the research analysis found was that there were no significant differences between social worker and teacher responses when grouping the responses together by ecosystemic categories. Macro level variables to experience found that the agreement was stronger with causes of the achievement gap, Mezzo level causes were found to have a very similar outcome toward occupational factors and Micro causes of the achievement gap were much closer to being significant, but the validity may be skewed, due to the lack of diverse responses.

As recoding the questions into grouped classifications was insignificant, the researcher decided to test an individual question, to observe the main focus of the research, which was to compare the attitudes of social workers and teachers. To test the strength of the variables, the researcher chose to analyze one variable to see if there may be a difference in occupational agreement to a specific factor. The research found

significant results in a Chi-Square test of occupation and the specific Likert scale question, “African American students are treated differently.” There was an interesting outcome between teachers and social workers responses. Social workers unanimously agreed or strongly agreed that African American students were treated differently, while teachers had responses in all categories. The final analysis gave some accuracy to some of the findings in the literature review that did highlight the statement of African American students feeling that they are not treated the same as white students. Though the overall results of experience, occupation and race produced no significant results, the survey did bring up some implications for future research.

The reality of the achievement gap is staggering. The research suggests that the deficit is growing in Minnesota as well as nationally. Taking a critical investigation of an issue that has caused much controversy and question for decades had its positive and negative sentiments. While there was no intended offense, some was taken and answered to accordingly from the feedback received. The research was conducted to inform, engage and create an awareness of the state of education in Minnesota and the country as a whole. As technology, policy and innovation move forward, so needs the state of educational equity and concern.

Teachers and social workers are both responsible for educating children, just in different ways. Social workers have grown in their role in school settings. While the objective of the school is to get the children into the classroom for the purpose of learning, social workers focus their efforts on allowing students room to explore their own thoughts, experiences, behaviors and circumstances to arrive at conclusions through the use of connection and empathy. When a child is able to work through these factors,

social workers return the children to the classroom. Teachers are focused mainly on delivering new information to students with the hope that the individual can take in the new data and one day demonstrate their mastery of it on a standardized test.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The strength of the research design is that there is a limited amount of data that surveys teacher and social worker attitudes to the achievement gap in Minnesota. With the current academic inequality, this analysis has purpose and potential to add another element to the research knowledge about professional attitudes toward children of color. The perceptions of the educators could help districts looking for new ways to increase accountability in education. The majority of respondents were highly experienced, with only three respondents reporting less than three years of experience. The responses may hold more value in understanding the research question of experience and how it affects attitude.

There were a number of limiting factors. While the purpose of this quantitative study was to gain more knowledge of teacher and social worker perceptions/attitudes toward this growing disparity, there were a low number of respondents. In trying to find out if race was a contributing factor, the majority of responses for both teachers and social workers came from white women. We can only assume that each respondent gave honest answers to the survey. There were a smaller number of social workers that responded. Therefore, applicability to all social work was limited.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice and Policy**

The implications for social work practice are important to thinking about new ways to be effective. If teachers have a negative outlook on students, it may behoove

teachers to expand their knowledge of the students. There are challenges that come with changing old ways of thinking to newer, more progressive methods. If we create our beliefs through experiences, then sharing those moments could be a part of mending the understanding between teachers and students.

While the occupational foci of teachers and social workers differ, the main goal is a shared desire for children to arrive at positive outcomes for the future. Teachers focus on grades, whereas, social workers focus on reducing the occurrence of socio-emotional concerns in the classroom. Teachers focus on discipline, while, social workers focus on the cause of disruptive behaviors. Teachers focus on a connection to the educational material, social workers focus on a connection to the child. Teachers may see a child as lazy and unmotivated yet, social workers may see the same child as depressed, sleep deprived and or traumatized. While differences can separate, they can also be the reasons why educators can work together, to improve outcomes for the children they serve.

Social workers may need to take the initiative on bridging the communication gap between teachers and students understanding of each other. If there is a hope for change, then the most important voice should be the students. To know how to reach them is a key component in reducing the educational disparity.

### **Implications for Research**

In order to create meaningful research, there needs to be a more significant response. While this survey did not produce a large number of respondents, the potential of its effectiveness may be more meaningful if it were formally reviewed by school districts and reviewed by their boards to quandary an entire district. The number of

respondents by race in the sample nearly matched the racial composition of teachers in the state of Minnesota. This research may even be more effective as a national survey.

Diversity is not only the issue at hand for the educational outcomes, yet it may be interesting to find out why more college students of color do not become teachers and social workers both nationally, and in the state of Minnesota. Some other questions to ponder may include asking children what they need to do better in school, how do we change classroom culture, what is a culturally responsive classroom, or qualitatively studying what social workers and teachers would say about closing the achievement gap.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A**

APPENDIX A

SUBMIT TO: MSW Program Manager (SCB 201)  
DUE: Oct 4, 2013

St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas School of Social Work  
MSW Program

Request for Establishing MSW Clinical Research Committee

STUDENT NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ Student UST ID# \_\_\_\_\_  
I have discussed my research with and request that the following comprise my research committee

CHAIR: \_\_\_\_\_  
Faculty Chair Signature Date

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:  
By signing below, committee members acknowledge their responsibility to, at minimum, meet as a committee once each semester, to read and comment on student's written work, to offer support and guidance throughout the research process and to attend the public presentation of the paper in May.

1. COMMITTEE MEMBER:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (PLEASE PRINT) Signature  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Institution/Agency  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Email address to send Final Program and other communication – PLEASE PRINT clearly

2. COMMITTEE MEMBER:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (PLEASE PRINT) Signature  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Institution/Agency  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Email address to send Final Program and other communication – PLEASE PRINT clearly

APPENDIX H

SUBMIT TO: Hiyana Xiong - SCB 201

Qualtrics Student User Agreement

*Students in the School of Social Work may request access to the University of St. Thomas Qualtrics account with the authorization of a faculty member. After reading this agreement and completing the required tutorial, the signed agreement must be submitted to your professor to request access.*

- Qualtrics is web-based survey software available for use by the School of Social Work faculty, staff and students. The software is easy to use while at the same time providing survey techniques.
- Students in the School of Social Work are provided access to the school's Qualtrics account for the sole purpose of completing coursework. Student access will automatically be deactivated following completion of the course requirements. Use of the University of St. Thomas School of Social Work Qualtrics account for other purposes is prohibited.
- IRB Statement: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) assists faculty, staff, and student researchers in meeting the highest ethical and professional standards for the use of human participants in scientific research. The IRB reviews all research that involves human participants. Information about the IRB process on each campus can be accessed on the Internet at <http://www.stthomas.edu/irb> (St. Thomas) <http://minerva.stkate.edu/IRB.nsf> (St. Kate's). IRB approval must be obtained before beginning data collection. The IRB approval number must be included in the introduction to your Qualtrics survey.
- Email and SPAM Regulations: At UST, senders of mass email need to be aware of the policies governing the use of email and federal regulations regarding spam. Web and Media Services has created a document to assist UST email system users with understanding best practices and compliance regulations. Students requesting access to Qualtrics must review this document prior to obtaining access. <http://www.stthomas.edu/irt/about/irtpoliciesandstandards/masse-mailpolicy/#d.en.62968>
- All student Qualtrics accounts through the University of St. Thomas Brand are subject to review and may be accessed for monitoring by the Brand Administrators for the School of Social Work, or by a member of the Institutional Research and Analysis staff.
- Prior to submitting a request for access, students must complete the online tutorials in the following categories: [My Surveys](#) , [Create a Survey](#) , [Edit a Survey](#) , [Distribute a Survey](#) , [View Results](#) , [Panels](#) , which can be accessed at <http://www.qualtrics.com/university/researchsuite/learn-qualtrics-in-5-steps>

Please initial the following items, and provide the requested information and sign below:

\_\_\_\_\_ I have completed the online Qualtrics tutorial.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to the terms of use stated above.

Student Name (PLEASE PRINT): \_\_\_\_\_

Program: \_\_\_BSW \_\_\_MSW, Course #: \_\_\_\_\_

UST Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Name of Faculty: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### CONSENT FORM UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS GRSW682 CLINICAL RESEARCH PROJECT

#### Achievement Gap Survey

I am conducting a study about teacher and social worker attitudes toward the achievement gap in Minnesota and I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a teacher in a diverse school in Minnesota. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Paul W. Collier, a graduate student at the Saint Catherine University School of Social Work, and supervised by Dr. Rajean Moone.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is: to find out if there are any significant differences in the attitudes of teachers and social workers toward causes of the achievement gap. I want to look further into where problems exist or don't exist in relation to students and the feeling of those who work closely with them.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: answer any questions you would like and say yes to the consent at the beginning of the survey. This survey will take 15-20 minutes. Should you decide to continue, I thank you very much for your participation.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The study has no risks.

The study has no direct benefits.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. As a classroom protocol, I will not use any specific identifying information outside of your ethnicity, gender, experience and profession. Research records will be kept in a locked file on my computer. I will delete any identifying information (email address). Findings from the survey data will be presented to my peers and my chair as requirement for graduation. All collected data will be destroyed by June 1, 2014.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and may stop the survey at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Catherine University, or the School of Social Work. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected will not be used.

**Contacts and Questions**

My name is Paul Collier. If you have questions later, you may contact me at [pwcollier@stkate.edu](mailto:pwcollier@stkate.edu) or my chair, Dr. Rajean Moone at [moon9451@stthomas.edu](mailto:moon9451@stthomas.edu). You may also contact the University of St. Catherine Institutional Review Board at 651-690-6204 with any questions or concerns.

**Please save this letter for your records.**

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study and answer the survey questions.

## Appendix C

### Survey Questions

This survey will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Before starting, please review the informed consent letter. Again, this survey is voluntary and your participation is greatly appreciated.

**“Please indicate the school district you are working in.”**

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**“Which of the following best represents your racial or ethnic heritage?”**

- (1) White American
- (2) African American
- (3) Hispanic American
- (4) Asian American
- (5) American Indian

**Gender:**

- (1) “Female”
- (2) “Male”

**“Please identify your professional occupation”**

- (1); “licensed teacher”
- (2); “licensed social worker”

**“Approximately how many years of professional experience do you have working in K-12 educational settings?”**

---

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

- (1) African American students are treated differently than White students.
- (2) African American students value learning.
- (3) African American students are less connected to school staff.
- (4) School funding is inadequate for academically struggling schools.
- (5) African American students are suspended at a greater rate than White students.
- (6) Being responsive to cultural differences is important.
- (7) Teachers who work with the most difficult students have the least amount of experience.
- (8) Family engagement is an important factor in closing the achievement gap.
- (9) African American students have more family involvement than White students.
- (10) African American children have higher risk factors that impact the achievement gap than White children (such as abuse, mobility, hunger, etc.).
- (11) Children in neighborhoods with higher risk factors can achieve academic success.