"I CAN SAY CONFIDENTLY THAT I HAD TWO PARENTS WHO WOULD PICK ME UP

AND PUSH ME FORWARD": SUCCESSFUL BLACK UNDERGRADUATE MALES'

CHARACTERIZATIONS OF THEIR PARENTS' ENGAGEMENT

by

JOSEPH-EMERY KOUAHO

(Under the Direction of Walker Swain)

ABSTRACT

Parent engagement is the process by which a person's biological parents or caretakers become active participants in their education. Parent engagement can constitute direct contact with their children's school, engagement in the home, or other educational activities that occur in other settings. Scholars who have focused on how Black parents engage with their children's educators, administrators and schooling processes have contributed important findings that enhance our understanding of how a parent's racial background can impact their engagement experience. While all those perspectives are crucial to our view of the relationships that parents have with their children's educations, we continue to have limited information on how children, the beneficiaries of these efforts, make sense of their parents' engagement. This research study of 7 undergraduate African American males attending a selective public university in the Southeast examined how they described their parents' engagement practices during their primary and secondary schooling years. Using semi-structured interviews as the primary mode of data collection, findings from a thematic analysis of the data collected are (1) that parents' expectations motivated participants to succeed academically, (2) that all parents were engaged during the participants' primary schooling years, (3) that students developed a sense of independence and became drivers of their own

education as they grew older, (4) that students experienced a shift in their parents' engagement as they transitioned to college, and (5) that students' racial identities as Black males impacted their schooling experience.

INDEX WORDS: Parent engagement, Education Policy, Narrative Inquiry, Student

                         Descriptions, Black Male achievement, Black male success,

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2023

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May 2023

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to all of those, including myself, who suffer from imposter syndrome. I

offer words of my own - written from the solitude of my mind.

Imposter

Am I the same to you as I am to me?
Impossible,
Because to me?
I'm sometimes cool,
And,
I'm sometimes not,
I'm as brave as I am fearful,
I'm as elated as I am tearful,
Sometimes I sing loudly in the shower,
Other times I retreat inside and cower,
While the doubts overpower,
And creep inside like two lovers in the Eiffel Tower,
Imposter

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Where does one, over the arc of a decades long post-secondary academic journey, begin to narrow down – into a few paragraphs - all the wonderful people that have helped them along the way? I begin this mammoth of a task with the acknowledgement that there are some important people who I will accidentally omit, and others who I will purposefully omit – those on both lists remain on my heart and in my mind though, believe me.

To Dr. Swain – I am forever indebted and grateful to you for seeing things in me, that I did not envision for myself – you are a pivotal mentor, friend, and colleague. **To Dr. DeBray and Dr. Spencer,** thank you for agreeing to serve on my committee, your counsel, and your dedication to seeing me through this process was tremendously helpful.

To my classmates Shuyang, Rebecca, and Sarah – you three made this doctoral experience worthwhile – thank you for your continued support throughout it all, I hope that you all learned from me, as much I learned from you.

To my parents! The foresight that you all had, to leave your country of birth – in your 40's – to come to another country, just so your children could have a future that you, yourselves, could not have imagined. Thank you for your courage.

To Melissa and Lyvan – You two challenge me to be better, and to always strive to see the world from someone else's perspective.

To my dawgs – Jeremy, Parker, Caleb, Noè, Ike, Jerome, and Kendall – you all have kept me grounded over these years and I cannot thank you enough, as you all were key to me maintaining my sanity – I am eternally grateful!

To Whitney – you are still the coolest person that I know. You served as my primary phone call through all my woes, and that says enough about what I think of you. Honored to be your brother.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Black educational experience, due to the history of past and contemporary racially adverse policies, is one that for some Black males and their parents, can be a mentally and emotionally arduous process (Dixon & Anderson, 2017; Reynolds, 2010; Allen & White-Smith, 2018). Decades of attending severely underfunded schools, combined with a lack of access to adequate schooling resources, and the effects of restrictive, and harmful educational environments, have impacted how generations of Black families engage with the American schooling system and subsequent Black student academic achievements (Wei et al., 2018; Boyce et al., 2018). Indeed, Black families are still searching for the equal opportunities that were advertised in the *Brown v. Board* decision, and other, Civil Rights era, racially forward education policies (Carter et al., 2017; Reardon & Owens, 2014; Bonilla-Silva, 2013). Despite these policies' shortcomings, Black parents, have always been certain of their responsibilities to be active participants in their children's education. Through their son's narratives, this parent engagement study, highlights the efforts of thirteen such parents.

Problem Statement

Parent engagement scholars, policy makers, school administrators, and educators understand that active parent engagement can positively impact a child's educational attainment. Some studies find significant positive connections between a parent's engagement in their child's schooling and

their child's subsequent educational attainment (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Hill & Craft, 2003). Indeed, Henderson and Berla (1994) in their metanalysis of family engagement research, cite that the benefits that students receive from increased parental engagement can include:

- Higher grades and test scores.

- Better attendance and more homework done.

- Fewer placements in special education.

- More positive attitudes and behavior.

- Higher graduation rates.

- Greater enrollment in postsecondary education (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Parent engagement also improves children's social skills and contributes to them having more impactful interactions with their classmates (Hill & Craft, 2003; Izzo et al., 1999; Marcon, 1999). Students are not the only beneficiaries of increased engagement, through nurturing a healthy relationship with their children's schools and teachers, parents also benefit by being more informed about their children's daily educational activities (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Henderson and Berla (1994) find that schools and teachers also benefit from parent engagement. The school and teacher benefits are improved teacher morale; higher ratings of teachers by parents; more support from families; higher student achievement; and better reputations in the community (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Parent engagement occurs in many forms, and some researchers conceptualize parent engagement to include these activities:

- Volunteering at school.

- Communicating with teachers and school personnel.

- Assisting in academic activities at home.

- Attending school events.

- Meetings of parent-teacher associations.

- Attending parent-teacher conferences (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

While these activities do signal engagement, there are factors that can impact a parent's ability to be engaged in those specific ways. These factors include a parent's race, ethnicity, income, marital status, and their educational attainment – these characteristics can impact engagement in the following ways. First, nonwhite parents could be less likely to engage with their children's educators due to a lack of, perceived or actualized cultural competency, from the majority nonwhite teaching workforce (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Marschall & Shah, 2020; Hornby & Lafaelle, 2011). Second, working class parents with minimal postsecondary attainment may feel less comfortable engaging with credentialed educators and school administrators, and this could impact their engagement in the activities listed above (Hamilton et al., 2018; Christianakis, 2011; Lareau, 1996). Third, some single parents, particularly some single nonwhite parents experience more difficulties when engaging with their children's schooling when compared to married parents (Epstein, 1984; Marschall & Shah, 2020). Conceptualizing parent engagement to include the activities above signifies the perfunctory ways in which parents can be engaged. Attending school-based events, and regularly volunteering at school does signal engagement, but, conversely, does it mark a lack of engagement if a parent is unable to perform those activities?

Purpose of the study

The process of learning, in a traditional public-school setting, is one that for many, if not all, school-aged children is informed by factors, and experiences that happen outside of school. Due to the impact of racism, and structural inequality, some Black students, and their parents have had lived, and educational experiences that differ from persons with different racial backgrounds.

These potentially different life and educational experiences have influenced how generations of Black parents have interacted with schools in this country. This study explored how currently Black undergraduate male students at Public Selective Southeastern University (PSSU), described their parents' engagement activities during their primary and secondary schooling years. This study singularly focused on currently enrolled Black males to contribute to the growing literature of how successful Black males transition from primary and secondary schools into selective universities. Due to the structural impact of racism, discrimination, and criminalization, the dominant narrative that centers Black males, more often discusses their difficulties with schooling rather than their successes (Henfield, 2012; Koppie, 2017; Allen, 2015). Thus, focusing on Black male students that are thriving at a selective university, disrupts the constant research that narrowly focuses on their lack of achievement when compared to their peers from other racial subgroups. By highlighting Black males and their perspectives, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how race informs the educational decisions parents make in their children's schooling.

Research Question

The research study examined the following question:

1. How do Black male undergraduate students at Public Selective Southeastern University (PSSU) characterize their parents' engagement practices during their primary and secondary schooling years?

Conceptual Framework

This research study's conceptual framework is constructed from Harris and Robinson's (2016) stage-setting framework and an adaption of Annette Lareau's (2011) parental practices framework.

Stage-Setting Framework

Harris and Robinson (2016) constructed a parent engagement framework that moved beyond the rigid ways in which other scholars conceptualize parent engagement. The authors found, through their own focus group interviews with high achieving college students, that some of the students' parents were not engaged in the perfunctory ways that parent engagement is conceptualized in the literature (Harris & Robinson, 2016). Harris and Robinson (2016) describe that the stage-setting framework,

> […] reflects parents' messages about the importance of schooling and the overall quality of life they create for their children [it] is closer to the intangible type of parenting […] that is more about cultivating or enriching the child than effecting a particular outcome. Stage-setting is a conception of parental involvement with two components: (1) conveying the importance of education to a child, and (2) creating and maintaining an environment or life space in which learning can be maximized. (Harris & Robinson, 2016, pp. 188-189)

The stage-setting framework can be a new way for scholars to conceptualize parent engagement. The authors offered a nuanced understanding of parent engagement by centering parents' abilities to create learning environments and deliver messages to their children regarding the importance of education. This framework is culturally responsive and inclusive to parents who have been historically marginalized. Indeed, applying the stage-setting framework, in this qualitative narrative inquiry is unique with its dual focus on Black male success and their parents' engagement practices. Parent engagement scholars who are examining the engagement practices of minoritized parents and their students' experiences could benefit from how Harris and Robinson's (2016) framework is utilized in this study

Parental Practices

In *Unequal Childhoods,* sociologist Annette Lareau examined the different parenting practices of working-class and middle-class parents. Lareau's (2011) concerted cultivation model centers cultural capital, and social class, as the primary drivers of the parenting practices of middle-class and working-class parents. Lareau's (2011) concerted cultivation framework argues that middle-class parents, by involving their children in various curated enrichment activities (art, music, sports, drama, dance, choir) centered on increasing their intellectual and social development, see their children as projects. Working class parents, in comparison, display what Lareau (2011) calls the 'accomplishment of natural growth' parental practice. In Lareau's (2011) accomplishment of natural growth parental practice, working-class parents' efforts focus more on providing their children with the necessities required for survival (food and shelter) than involving them in various enrichment activities. The different parenting approaches are tied to differences in social class, income, and wealth rather than working class parents' unwillingness to involve their children in enrichment activities (Redford et al., 2009; Lareau, 2011).

Harris and Robinson's (2016) stage-setting, and Lareau's (2011) parental practices, combine to form the most appropriate conceptual framework for this Black parent engagement study. Harris and Robinson (2016) show that parent engagement cannot be reduced to perfunctory activities and argue instead that parent engagement should encapsulate the efforts that parents make to place their children in educationally enriching environments, and to convey the importance of education to their children. Lareau's (2011) parenting practices complements Harris and Robinson's (2016) stage-setting framework because parental practices can impact how parents deliver education related messages to their children. Additionally, the cultural and social capital concepts that underlie Lareau's (2011) framework

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contextualizes parents' abilities to provide their children with the necessary home and neighborhood environments - a centerpiece of the stage-setting framework.

Methods

This study was a qualitative narrative inquiry of how currently enrolled Black undergraduate males characterized their parents' engagement practices during their primary and secondary schooling years. I conducted individual interviews to answer this research question. Each interview lasted between 45–60-minutes and used a semi-structured interview protocol. The interviews focused on participants' experience in primary and secondary school and their characterizations of their parents' engagement practices. The interview protocol was portioned to discuss three key aspects of participants' educational journeys: (1) their characterizations of their parents' engagement practices during their time as primary and secondary school students; (2) their personal experiences as primary and secondary school students; and (3) their experiences with the college application process as they transitioned to PSSU. All the interviews were conducted via Zoom and were analyzed in Dedoose which is a mixed-methods analysis software.

Significance of the Study

This research study examined how Black males, currently enrolled at PSSU, characterized their parents' engagement practices during their primary and secondary schooling years. Focusing on how children characterized their parent's engagement was a departure from the general scholarship on parent engagement which usually centers parents' experiences (Anderson & Minke, 2017; Elbaum & Rodriguez, 2016; Hill et al., 2018). Scholars who examined how parents engage with their children's educators, administrators, and education have made major contributions to

the parent engagement scholarship. Scholars who have focused specifically on how Black parents engage with their children's educators, administrators and schooling processes have enhanced our understanding of how a parent's racial background can impact their capacity to engage in their children's education (Love et al., 2021; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016; Curtis et al., 2017). While those perspectives are crucial to our view of the relationships that parents have with their children's schooling, we continue to have limited information on how children, the beneficiaries of these efforts, make sense of their parents' engagement.

Focusing on children's descriptions adds a new dimension to the parent engagement scholarship. Indeed, a research study that examines how children described their parents' engagement efforts, adds a more nuanced and balanced understanding of engagement that is inclusive of both actors' experiences, because studies that focus solely on how parents navigate their children's educations do not capture how they interpreted those efforts. For example, scholars have found positive associations between certain forms of parent engagement activities and children educational attainment, as some parents concentrate their engagement efforts in specific areas to maximize their children's achievement (Jeynes, 2010; Tan et al., 2020). These parents may deem their engagement approaches effective if their children are demonstrating high proficiency in a subject area. This single story, gleaned from the parents' point of view, may not be all encompassing. Indeed, the children may perceive their parents' engagement to be overbearing, and non-constructive despite their observed high achievement. In this scenario, the parent and the child had different perceptions of the parent's engagement, and if the study focused solely on the parent, the child's perspective would not have been included.

Centering how children characterize their parents' engagement practices can help us gain another perspective on the effectiveness of the measures that scholars use to constitute parent

engagement. How do children describe their parents during parent-teacher conferences? How do children describe their parents' efforts when helping them with their homework? How do children differentiate between their parents' school-based and home-based engagement activities? Asking children to make sense of these engagement activities can provide a new framework for which to examine these activities and could challenge us to consider new ways to measure parent engagement.

I examined how successful Black male students, currently enrolled at PSSU, characterized their parents' engagement activities. By featuring their educational journeys, I aimed to disrupt the deficit-based narrative that is often attached to post-secondary Black male achievement. These young men should be celebrated, and have their stories uplifted, as their renderings could provide new perspectives that could inform future studies.

Key Terms

Schooling: In this study, schooling refers to the process of students receiving educational training at a school that is either public, private, or charter, in the home, or other educational activities that happen in other settings.

Success: For this study, success is defined as earning sufficient marks to complete the requirements needed to obtain a diploma and graduate from an institution.

Parent Engagement: The process by which a person's biological parents or legal guardians are active participants in their children's schooling, whether that means direct engagement with a child's school, or teacher, in the home or other educational activities that happen in other settings.

Black: Persons who identify with the cultural traditions and social, and racial categorization of "Black", and who are descendants of ancestors who were a part of the African diaspora.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This qualitative study examined how currently enrolled successful Black male undergraduate college students at PSSU described their parents' engagement practices. This literature review begins with a discussion of the benefits of parent engagement, and the various ways in which scholars have measured this phenomenon. Next, I highlight studies that examine how a parent's socioeconomic status impacts their capacity for engagement and show how scholars have begun using the word "engagement," instead of "involvement," as a more inclusive way to frame the parent-school relationship. This review also includes an analysis on the impact that race and ethnicity can have on a parents' ability and comfortability with school-based engagement activities. As this study examined Black families' experiences with engagement, it was important to highlight the historic and contemporary obstacles that this population has encountered with schooling in general, and with engagement specifically. This literature review concludes with an examination of the existing disparities in the Black male graduation rate; determinants of Black male success and college persistence; and Black parental engagement in their children's transition to college.

I describe my conceptual framework in the second part of this review - Annette Lareau's (2011) parental practices and Harris and Robinson's stage-setting formed the conceptual framework for this study. That section begins with a description of the stage-setting framework, followed by a detailed analysis of Lareau's parental practices.

Benefits of Parent Engagement

Parent engagement is the process by which a person's biological parents or caretakers become active participants in their education. Parent engagement could encapsulate "direct" engagement with a child's school, or their teacher for example, or it could encapsulate "indirect" engagement occurring in other settings (Wilder, 2014). Scholars find that parent engagement has positive impacts on child achievement (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Hill & Craft, 2003). Further, some studies also find that increased parent engagement positively impacts students beyond the classroom (El Nokali et al., 2010; McWayne et al., 2004). Increased parent engagement can improve children's social skills and help them have more impactful interactions with their classmates (Hill & Craft, 2003; Izzo et al., 1999; Marcon, 1999). Students are not the only beneficiaries of increased engagement, as parents benefit by being more informed about their children's daily educational activities by nurturing healthy relationships with their children's schools and teachers (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Children whose parents are actively involved in their schools can receive benefits that are not captured by standard measurements of achievement. Murray et al., (2019;2020), in recent studies that examined the effects of parent-teacher associations (PTA) involvement on parents' abilities to navigate school processes, found that the children of parents who were active PTA members received preferential treatment from their teachers. The authors write,

> […] by bringing parents into schools, PTAs provide a setting for parents to informally track their children's educational progress, get to know one another, and learn about the institutions' day-to-day operations (p. 43).

This increased access to information can be attributed to the social capital that both parents and students build from active parent engagement. Social capital is conceptualized as

the "connections," that can result in economic gain and that can also improve societal standing (Bourdieu, 1986). This type of capital that parents receive through their organizations and relationships can be, and indeed is, often extended to their children. Their children accumulate this benefit of "know-how," in addition to the preferential treatment that they receive from their teachers (Murray et al., 2019;2020). Cultural capital - which in this study is operationalized as the resources, and experiences that families have which facilitates their children's schooling experiences - can also impact how parents are able to provide for their children, as well as their parenting practices (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau, 2011).

Different Conceptualizations of Parent Engagement

Scholars measure parent engagement differently, and these different measures impact how the field understands the impact that engagement has on achievement. In their study, Sui-Chu, and Williams' (1996) conceptualized parent engagement to be (1) discussing school activities, (2) monitoring out-of-school activities, (3) contacts with school staff, (4) volunteering and attending parent-teacher conferences and other school events. While Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) in their study, used three categories to define parent engagement – behavior, personal and cognitive/intellectual. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) define the "behavior" category as parents participating in activities that happen at the school. They define the "personal" category as parents creating a home environment that signals to their children that school is important and the "cognitive/intellectual" category as parents exposing their children to materials that are cognitively stimulating.

Marcon (1999) in their study conceptualized parent engagement as (1) parent effort, defined as parents engaging with their children's school, and their expectations of their children; (2) instructional support, defined as the time parents allot for outside learning activities; and (3)

environmental support, defined as the learning opportunities that a child experiences outside of school. Hill and Taylor (2004) conceptualize parent engagement as:

- Volunteering at school,

- Communicating with teachers and other school personnel,

- Assisting in academic activities at home,

- Attending school events,

- Involvement in PTAs,

- Attending parent-teacher conferences (p. 161).

While there are some commonalities in the selected authors' conceptualizations of parent engagement, the different definitions impact how scholars conduct studies and subsequently influences how readers interpret findings. Indeed, Fan and Chen (2001) write,

Despite its intuitive meaning, the operational use of parent involvement, had not been clear and consistent […] This somewhat chaotic state in the definition of the main construct not only makes it difficult to draw any general conclusion across the studies, but it may also have contributed to the inconsistent findings in this area (p. 4).

Differential Impacts

The evidence of the impact that parent engagement has on a child's achievement is inconclusive – some parent engagement scholars find that parental engagement is directly tied to child educational attainment, while others find that engagement alone does not influence achievement. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994), in their study, argued against a unidimensional view of parent engagement. The authors note that how parent engagement is conceptualized to only include certain activities is misleading, and that children are the most active agents in their schooling. Eagle (1989), who used the 1980 NCES High School and Beyond Survey to assess the

impact that socioeconomic status, parent attention, mother employment, and family structure had on achievement, found that parental education and family affluence were more significant than parent involvement or a person's home environment in determining a child's educational attainment. Fan and Chen (2001), in their meta-analysis of studies that used quantitative methods to assess the relationship between parent engagement and achievement, concluded that parental involvement had a "small, to moderate, and practically meaningful," relation to academic achievement (p. 1)." While scholars conceptualize and measure engagement differently, most find that any form of parent engagement can benefit students (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein, 2010; Sui-Chu & Williams 1996; Grolnick & Slowiaczek 1994; Marcon 1999; Hill & Taylor 2004).

Parent Involvement v. Engagement

Parent engagement scholars have used the phrases "parent involvement," and "parent engagement," interchangeably to define the process by which parents become active participants in their children's education (Warren et al., 2009; Auerbach, 2007). Some scholars have argued that the phrase "parent involvement," is not as inclusive both in theory and in practice (Warren et al., 2009). Indeed, Lawson (2003) writes,

> […] Much of the research on parent involvement examines a continuum of school centric
> parent involvement activities that are structured and defined for parents by schools. At one end
> of this continuum, parents have little power or influence over school decision-making
> processes, and their involvement in creating structured educational environments at home for
> their children is often the primary focus (p. 79).

Some scholars conclude that schools have, not only failed to nurture relationships with their students' parents but have also shifted the relationship-building burden away from themselves and onto the parents (Lareau, 1987; Lawson, 2003). Scholars have recently challenged this balance,

and "[…] have argued for a shift away from parent involvement to notions of parent, or family, engagement, and partnership that reflect a more dynamic relationship between parents and schools" (Love et al., 2021, p. 640).

Epstein (2010) who is often cited for her work on "parent involvement" revised her early parent involvement framework. In her article titled *School/Family/Community Partnerships***,** Epstein (2010) provides parents, educators, and practitioners with guidelines on how to move beyond the school-centric conceptualization. Epstein (2010) states that,

> If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs, and opportunities for students (p. 81).

Epstein (2010) intentionally uses the word "partnership" when discussing the parent-school relationship because she understands that a shift from "involvement" to one of partnership improves parental agency. Indeed, schools must intentionally engage parents if children are to receive the parent engagement benefits discussed earlier in the text.

I use the phrase "parent engagement" throughout this text because one phrase – "parent involvement" - centers schools as the main conduits of the parent-school relationship while the other phrase, "parent engagement," pins both schools, and parents as equal participants in the parent-school relationship (Auerbach, 2007; Lawson, 2003; Warren, 2009; Epstein, 2010).

Impact of Socioeconomic Status on Parent Engagement

While some studies show that middle-class, college-educated parents are more likely to be engaged in school-based engagement activities – parents, across the socioeconomic spectrum, want to be engaged in their children's educations (Chavkin & Williams Jr., 1989; Jeynes, 2007).

Indeed, statistics from the U.S. Department of Education show a connection between parental income and educational attainment, and higher observed parent engagement (Choi et al., 2015; US Department of Education, 2007). Statistics that show positive correlations between parental income and education and parent engagement should be critically examined, as there are many systemic reasons why observed school-based parent engagement activities can differ based on a parent's income and education.

First, working-class parents are more likely to be employed in jobs with fluctuating work schedules that could impact their ability to attend activities that occur during the workday (Chavkin & Williams Jr., 1989; McKay et al., 2003). Indeed, middle, and upper-middle class parents who tend to work in industries with defined schedules could be more likely to attend school-based engagement activities (Choi et al., 2015; Kim, 2020). Therefore, a parent's ability to attend school-based events could be more linked to their form of employment than their lack of care for their children's schooling (McKay et al., 2003).

Second, working-class parents may form a complex due to their lack of academic credentials. This inferiority complex may cause some working-class parents to become more passive when engaging with educators and avoid participating in school-based activities altogether (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Indeed, some studies show that working-class parents who do not have a college degree are oftentimes less likely to form a connection with their children's educators (Park & Holloway, 2018; Barger et al., 2019). Conversely, middle-class, college-educated parents, could be more engaged in school-based engagement activities due to their level of comfort with the educational system.

Parents that participate in school-based activities benefit from being seen as more engaged, and this impacts the type of communication that they have with their children's educators

(Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). Hill and Taylor (2004) find that working class parents may experience obstacles that could impact their ability to be active in school-based engagement activities. These obstacles are, but not limited to:

- Nonflexible work schedules,

- Transportation difficulties,

- Stress due to residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods,

- Limited capacity to provide educational resources (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

This study attempts to, through participants' retelling of their lived experiences, provide context to the obstacles to engagement that are listed above. Contextualizing barriers to engagement are important, because through critical dialogue on how socioeconomic status impacts the propensity to engage, scholars, parents and policymakers can begin collaborating on methods to mitigate the impact of these structural barriers The research presented here contributes to this ongoing conversation.

Impact of Race and Ethnicity on School-Based Parent Engagement

The traditional school-based activities that some scholars use to measure parent engagement is "white-centric" (Love et al., 2021). School-based parent engagement activities are "white-centric" because some scholars omit from their discussion, how minoritized communities' lived experiences, specifically Black persons' lived experiences, can impact their comfortability, ability, and ease of access when engaging with public school officials and educators. Indeed, some Black parents may be less active in school-based activities due to the biases that they perceive educators and school administrators possess.

Teachers' perceptions can impact the parent-teacher relationship as research shows that teachers tend to be more comfortable when engaging with parents that have similar goals and

values (Herman & Reinke, 2017). Some educators hold racially biased opinions that, unlike white parents, Black parents are less involved and interested in their children's educations (Love et. al, 2021). Hughes and Kwok (2007) write that, "teachers perceive ethnic minority parents as engaging in fewer involvement behaviors and as less cooperative than Caucasian parents (p. 3)." Teacher bias towards Black parents may influence Black parents' eagerness to participate in white-centric parent engagement activities. Racial differences between Black parents and the majority White and female workforce could impact these perceptions (Herman & Reinke, 2017; Hill & Taylor, 2004). As Lawson (2003), states,

> When schools do not recognize racial and cultural issues, especially when people are not treated equally, racial, and cultural boundaries and divisions between families and schools are reinforced (p. 82).

Black parents today may have adopted a more removed role in the school-parent partnership due to the pushback that they have received from school officials for generations. In example, Black parents may conceptualize parent engagement in a more school centric way and expect the schools to be the main conduits of the relationship, where they (schools) dictate how often and how much parents should be engaged. If this is how some Black parents conceptualize the parent-school relationship, then they would be more likely to be seen as removed from the schooling processes when compared to their White counterparts (Hill & Craft, 2003). Historically, schools have often been spaces where some Black persons, regardless of educational attainment and family income, have had adverse racial experiences (Henderson et al., 2019; Boutte & Brian, 2021). Black persons can have adverse racial schooling experiences due to the incidence of racialized student tracking, racially blind primary, and secondary schooling curriculum that renders them invisible, and discriminatory disciplinary policies. These adverse racial experiences

may explain why some Black parents are reluctant to participate in school-based engagement activities (McNeal Jr, 2001; Marchand, 2019).

A Historical Review of Black Parent Engagement

While some Black parents have encountered difficulties with contemporary school-based engagement activities, historically, Black parents have always been pioneers in their children's education. During chattel slavery, Black parents hoped for their children's freedom and education. Indeed, Fields-Smith (2005) writes that,

> […] African American parents' fervor in the pursuit of education was evident during slavery when slaves risked severe punishment and even their lives to learn to read because they equated freedom with literacy (p. 130).

Some Black parents, even under the strictest slave codes, where Black literacy was punishable by death, sought ways to educate themselves and their children - this is a level of parent engagement that goes beyond attending a PTA meeting.

Black parents' engagement in their children's education only increased after emancipation. Indeed, Black parents, across the deep South, with the help of investments from sympathetic philanthropists like George Peabody, established schools in their communities to educate their children (Kouaho, 2021). Black parents were the primary agents invested in ensuring that their children were educated in a deeply segregated Jim Crow South, where state-funded public schooling education did not exist, and formidable instruction was reserved for wealthy, landowning whites, and their relatives (Crouch, 1997).

Beginning in the early 20th century, and into the mid-20th century, litigators from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other organizations, exclusively recruited Black parents in their fight to legally challenge the "separate but equal"

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doctrine (Franklin, 2005). Black parents served as plaintiffs in the lawsuits that combined to form the Brown v. Board case that overturned the separate but equal doctrine - this is a level of engagement that goes beyond attending a parent-teacher conference (Franklin, 2005).

Black parents led efforts to integrate schools after some school districts disbanded, fired Black educators, and closed majority Black schools in protest of the *Brown* verdict. Indeed Cooper (2009) writes about the continued efforts of Black parents,

> African American parents' anti-racist efforts and activist involvement are rarely acknowledged by educators and mainstream scholarship. Yet, their activist tradition has been evident since the founding of public schools. […] African American parents [influenced] a host of reforms […] related to school desegregation, school choice, and community control (p. 382).

Black parents have been engaged in their children's schooling for centuries, and their efforts to seek educational equality for their children has helped improve the educational lives of all children.

Black Male Achievement

Figure 1

Dropout Rates Of 16- To 24-Year-Olds by Race and Sex: 2019
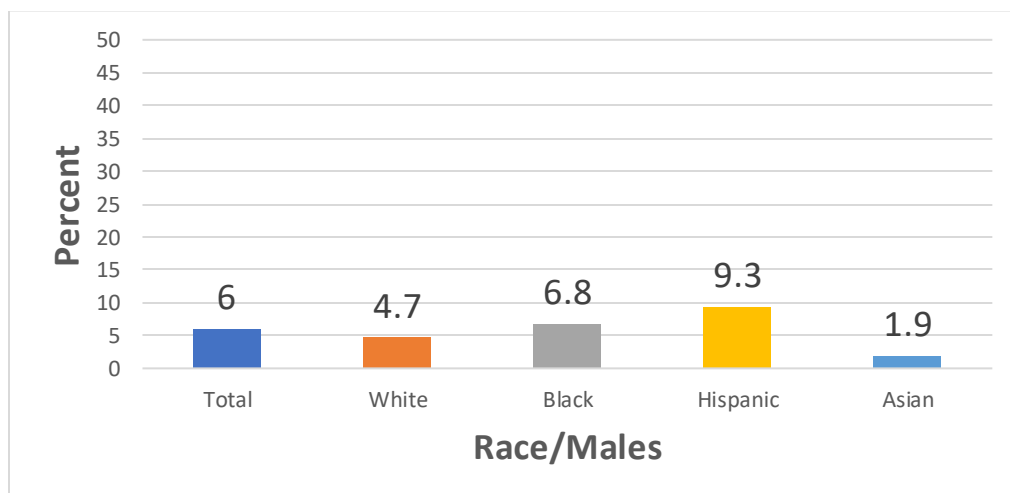
While I purposely chose high achieving Black males, who are currently enrolled in a selective university to participate in this study, they, for systemic reasons, are not representative of similarly situated Black males. This section highlights Black men's college going rates, with specific attention to high school completion, college attainment, and college persistence. I use a critical lens to contextualize the data and conclude with a discussion on how racially oppressive policies have contributed to the disparate achievement rates.

Figure 1 depicts the high school dropout rate for the year 2019 by racial subgroup for persons aged 16 to 24. The racial subgroup of interest is Black males, and this figure shows that the Black male high school dropout rate was 6.8 percent for 16- to 24-year-olds in 2019. This was second only to Hispanic males who had a dropout rate of 9.3 percent. The Black male high school dropout rate (6.8 percent) was higher than the White male high school dropout rate (4.7 percent), and the Asian dropout rate (1.9 percent).

High School Graduation by Race and Ethnicity

Figure 2

4 Year High School Graduation Rate 2018-19

The same disparities exist when we examine the 4-year high school graduation rate (2018-19) across racial subgroups.
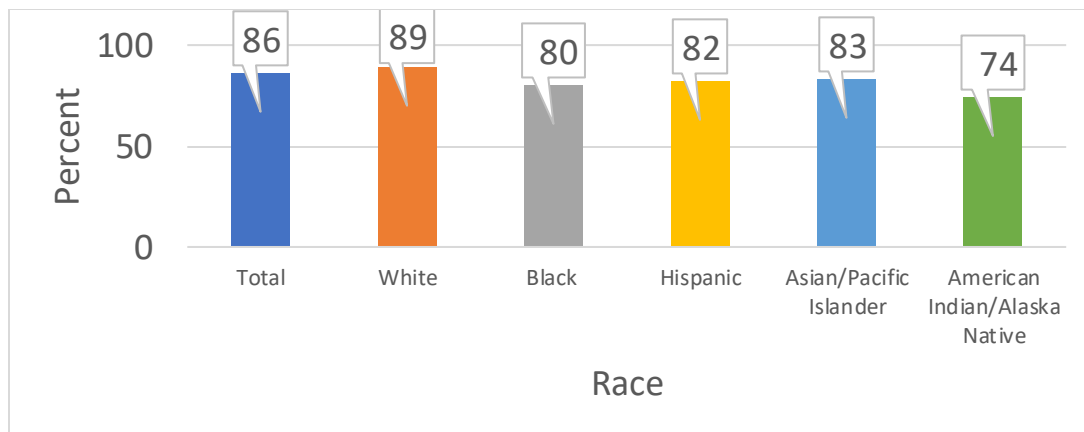
Figure 2: 4 year, "on time" high school graduation rates for school year 2018-19. Data retrieve from NCES: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/coi

Figure 2 shows the 4-year or "on time" high school graduation rates for all students in the 2018-19 school year. For the 2018-2019 school year, the high school graduation rate for students who identified as Black was 80 percent; the 4-year high school graduate rate for students who identified as White was 89 percent; the graduation rate for students who identified as Hispanic was 82 percent; and the graduation rate for students who identified as Asian/Pacific Islander was 82 percent. The high school graduation rates for Black students were among the lowest for that year - only their American Indian/Alaskan Native peers (74 percent graduation rate) had lower graduation rates.

Male High School Graduation Rates

Although there has not been consistent reporting on national high school graduation rates disagreggated by race and gender, the latest data from the National Center of Education Studies (NCES) show that the Black male graduation rates lag those of their male counterparts from other racial subgroups. NCES uses a measure called the average freshmen graduation rate (AFGR), which estimates the percentage of students who receive a diploma within their first 4 years of high

school (NCES), to determine high school gruadation rates. Their latest measures from the 2012-2013 school year is depicted in *Figure 3* below.

Figure 3

Average Freshmen Graduation Rate by Race and Sex 2012-2013
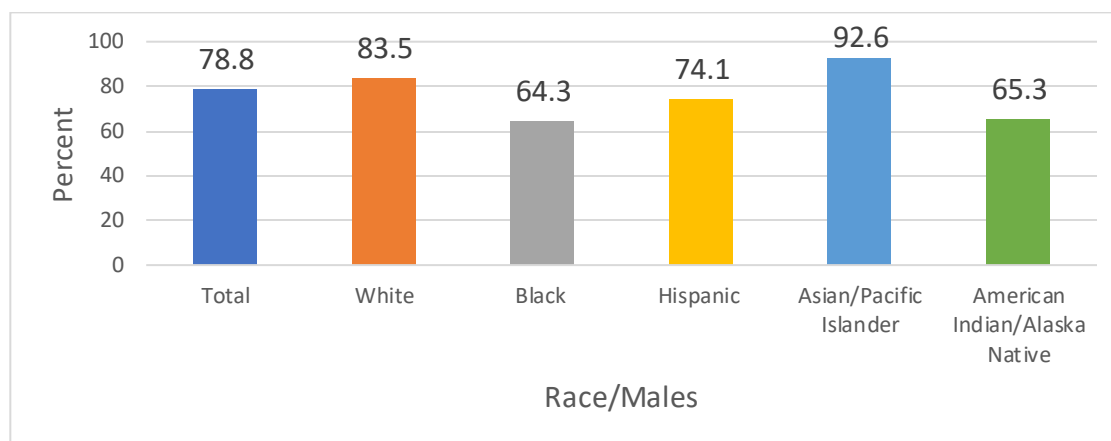
Figure 3: Average Freshmen Graduation Rate by Sex and Race 2012-2013. Data retrived from NCES:

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_219.40.asp

In the 2012-2013 school year, the high school graduation rate for students who identified as Black and male was 64.3 percent. The Black male graduation rate ranked lowest out of all the other racial subgroups. The four-year high school graduation rate for students who identified as White and male was 83.5 percent; the graduation rate for students who identified as Hispanic was 74.1 percent; the graduation rate for students who identified as Asian/Pacific Islander was 92.6 percent; and the graduation rate for students who identied as American Indian/Alaska Native and male was 65.3 percent.

Unequal Access to Wealth and School Discipline

Racially advserse policies could explain the observed disparate achievement rates for Black males. I highlight two of the potential drivers - unequal access to wealth, and racially oppressive disiciplinary policies - in the following section.

Figure 4

Access to wealth
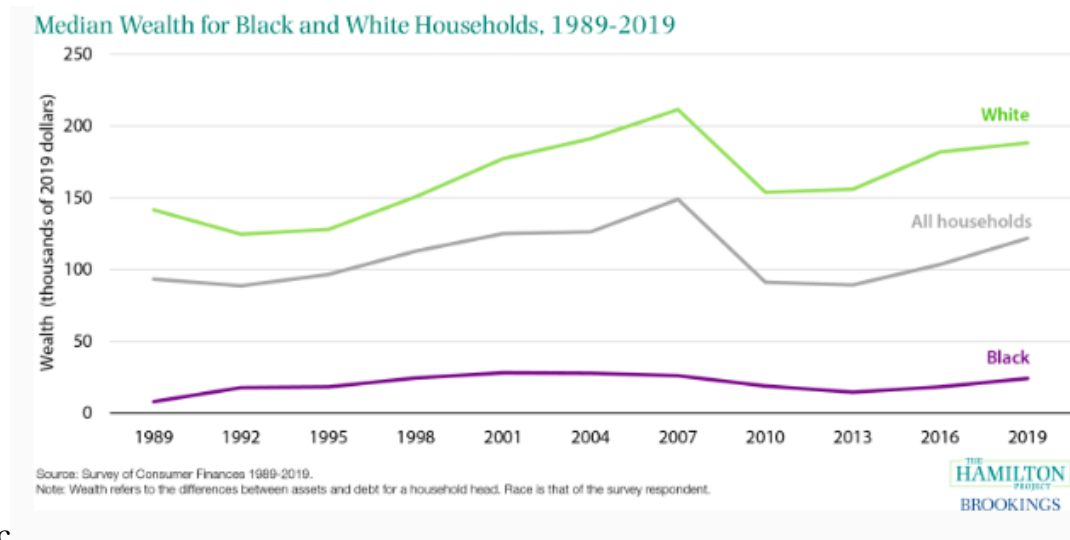
Figure 4. Median Wealth for Black and White Households, 1989-2019. Datat retrieved from:
https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/12/08/the-black-white-wealth-gap-left-black-households-more-vulnerable/

Due to the history of slavery, the impact of being barred from accessing benefits through the GI bill, and being excluded from accruing wealth through home ownership in the 20th century, Black families have lower household wealth when compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Shapiro et al., 2013). Indeed, as the figure from Brookings Institute above shows, the Black medium household wealth is the lowest amongst all racial subgroups in this country.

Household wealth often dictates a family's housing and neighborhood options. Focusing on household wealth is important because, in most school districts, neighborhood housing values impact school funding and access to schooling opportunities and facilities (Reardon et al., 2015; Keels et al., 2013; Chingos & Blagg, 2017). Students with middle class and upper middle class parents who live in neighborhoods with high property values, can attend better resourced neighborhood schools when compared with students with working class parents (Owens, 2020;

Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeijer, 2016). *Figure 4* shows the disparities in median household wealth, which as identified above, could impact the quality of education that Black students can access. Black males' lower observed achievement could be impacted by the schooling resoures they have at their disposal.

Zero-tolerance policies and disparate school discipline rates

Schooling can be a traumatic experience for some Black students who are often targeted by teachers, administrators, and school resource officers for behaviors deemed problematic (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011; Dutil, 2020; Joseph et al., 2020). Federal policies enacted by Congress in the 1990s, created zero-tolerance policies and they, in conjunction with state and locally mandated discipline policies could impact a student's likeliness to graduate (Raffaele Mendez, 2003; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Balfanz, 2007). Congress ratified the first wide reaching law on school safety in the mid-1990s with the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1993 (GFSA). The GFSA of 1993, was ratified as part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This Act required that schools who receive federal funds create policies that mandate automatic expulsions for students who bought violent weapons (guns, knives) (H.R.987) to schools.

The offenses denoted under the GFSA have been reinterpreted since its passing, to a current ideation where, now, students are automatically expelled for offenses that are not related to dangerous weapons. Indeed, Heitzig (2009) writes that,

> While the original intent of the GFSA was to require these punishments for serious violations involving weapons, they have frequently been applied to minor or non-violent violations of rules such as tardiness and disorderly conduct […] some students have been suspended or expelled for nail clippers, Advil and mouthwash (p. 9).

While the automatic expulsions mandated by zero-tolerance policies impact students of all racial subgroups, they disproportionately impact Black students, as data shows that Black students are likelier than their White counterparts to be suspended or expelled from schools (Heitzig, 2009). Being suspended or expelled from school decreases the likelihood that a student graduates from high school, matriculates into college, and increases that student's likelihood of becoming involved in the criminal justice system (GAO, 2018). A 2018 U.S. Government Accountability Office Report (GAO, 2018) on school discipline concluded the following:

> Although there were 17.4 million more White primary and secondary school students in the 2013-2014 school year, approximately 176,000 more Black students were suspended (GAO, 2018).

Serving in-school and out-of-school suspension has negative ramifications for a person's educational and economic prospects (GAO, 2018). Students that are suspended for a one-time offense are more likely to be suspended again because school administrators are less likely to seek other restorative justice options for students they deem disruptive (Heitzig, 2009). When students are suspended from school, they miss critical instructional time that they are not likely to get while at home (Raffaele Mendez, 2013). Some students, Black boys specifically, who are suspended from school may not serve their suspensions in safe environments, which may cause them to fall further behind (Morris, 2016).

Each additional suspension decreases a student's likeliness to graduate high school by 20 percent (Gonzalez & Epstein, 2019). Being suspended also decreases the connection that students have with their schools and educators. School connectedness is defined as a student's belief that the adults in their school buildings care about their learning, their health, and their future; students who feel connected to their learning environments show improved health as well as academic

outcomes (Gonzalez & Epstein, 2019). Black students are also disproportionately disciplined during preschool. Statistics from the same GAO disciplinary report show that, while Black children make up 19 percent of the preschool student population, they constitute 47 percents of the students suspended (GAO, 2018). Black children are targeted from preschool until their secondary schooling years. This cycle could cause some students to feel, and become disconnected from their schooling environments, which could increase their likeliness to drop out (Raffaele Mendez, 2013; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Balfanz, 2007).

Scope

Although I have chosen to disucss how a lack of access to wealth and school discipline contribute to disparate achievement rates for Black males, there are other policies and mechanisms that can also impact achievement. Additionally, it is important to note that there are many Black male students who have excelled, and continue to excel despite the phenomena that have been discussed. Black males today are graduating from high school and enrolling in college at a higher rate than they ever have in American history (Allen et al., 2018; Comeaux et al., 2020). Further, there are Black male students who do have access to high quality schools, and who have not had to contend with racially adverse schooling policies.

Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework

Race, gender, and equity expert Shaun Harper introduced the anti-deficit achievement framework to disrupt the deficit narrative associated with Black males and their achievement. Harper (2010) writes that one motivating factor behind resisting this deficit narrative is to "[understand] why Black men excel instead of adding to the already well-understood reasons why they fail." Harper's theoretical motivation is captured in the excerpt below from his 2010

qualitative study that examined the characteristics that enabled Black STEM students to persist during their time as undergraduate students,

> Understanding what compelled them [Black males] to become actively engaged, both inside and outside the classroom, was chosen over the popular approach of trying to discover all the reasons why Black men are so disengaged on college campuses. And instead of focusing on the resources, social and cultural capital, and precollege educational privilege that some participants lacked, efforts were devoted to understanding how they managed to acquire various forms of capital that they did not possess upon entry to their respective colleges and universities (Harper, 2010, p.66).

Dispelling deficit-oriented thought processes and adopting anti-deficit approaches is critically responsive because castigating persons who have been negatively impacted by oppressive policies shifts culpability from the oppressors to the oppressed. In education specifically, only attaching deficit-based narratives to Black male achievement is harmful in two specific ways. First, these narratives obscure the realities that some Black males are achieving at levels that are consistent with their peers. Second, deficit-based narratives as it pertains to Black male achievement, do not actively recognize how disparate discipline policies, lack of neighborhood schooling resources, and access to other social services for some members of this community could impact their performance. Indeed, Perez et al., (2017) write that adopting an anti-deficit narrative is critical because "deficit perspectives obscure how educators and systemic oppression undermine the success of minoritized student populations (Perez et al., 2017, p. 6)."

Patton Davis and Madeus (2019) in their policy brief, provide scholars with a framework for identifying deficit-based narratives in scholarly research. The authors reviewed relevant

scholarship to better understand how to detect these narratives when engaging in research. They write that:

- Deficit thinking blames the victims of inequalities for their circumstances.

- Deficit thinking is a symptom of more systemic contexts and ideologies.

- "Deficit thinking is historically grounded in dominant classist and racist ideologies that frame oppressed people as deficient (Bruton & Robles-Piña, 2009; Menchaca, 1997)."

- Deficit thinking is widespread and covert.

- Deficit thinking has ramifications that impact policy.

- "Deficit thinking prevents policy makers, educators, and communities from focusing on the actual root causes of the challenges that people of color, low-income populations, and other minoritized groups face."

Patton Davis and Madeus (2019) identify the characteristics above to help scholars avoid these pitfalls in their research on minoritized students.

Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework Applications for Institutional Support of Black Males

In their participatory action qualitative study, Perez et al., (2017) exposed four graduate and professional students in student affairs to Harper's Anti-Deficit framework. The authors examined how exposure to Harper's framework would impact their participants' perspectives on student success and student outcomes. The authors focused on student affairs professional to "broaden anti-deficit discourses on K-12 teachers to educators who work closely with students in different higher education contexts" (p. 8). The authors found that being exposed to Harper's anti-deficit achievement perspectives helped students confront their biases and motivated them to be more intentional when fostering student success.

Cooper and Hawkins (2016) used institutional theory and the anti-deficit achievement framework to examine how an HBCU's institutional practices positively contributed to the educational experiences of their Black male student athletes. The authors found that through faculty, coaches, and friends, the institution facilitated a family-like environment that ultimately ameliorated the student athletes' educational experiences. The authors note that although the institutional benefits were only relevant to the student athletes they observed, the practices of this HBCU – especially as it pertains to mentorship – could inform how other institutions implement support for their black male students generally.

Goings (2016) employed Harper's anti-deficit achievement framework in his phenomenological study of high achieving Black undergraduate male students at an HBCU. The author found that while the students in his study were intrinsically motivated to succeed, they still maintained that the on-campus institutional decisions aided their abilities to succeed. Like Cooper and Hawkins (2016), Goings (2016) finds that institutional-led efforts to cultivate success for Black males could positively impact the educational experience of students at other institutions. The author writes that increased on-campus support could be impactful because, "[...] educational institutions generally and higher education institutions specifically continue to grapple with how to best support Black male students (p.249)."

Determinants of Black Male Collegiate Success

Scholars note that the incidence of high Black male college retention, persistence, and success can be achieved when institutional, familial, financial, peer and mentorship support are present (Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Harper, 2010). Kim and Hargrove (2013) offer more guidance in their conceptual paper on the determinants of Black male collegiate success at PWI's and HBCU's respectively. The authors highlight that educational resiliency, or "students' ability to succeed

academically despite difficult life circumstances and potential risk factors that could impact their likeliness to succeed (p. 300)," is important to college persistence for Black males. They further note that a major component of having educational resiliency is, "the process and results that are part of the life story of an individual who has been academically successful despite obstacles."

Kim and Hargrove (2013) discuss that for Black males at HBCU's and PWI's, students' interpretation of institutional support could impact success, and the differences in those feelings of support could be one reason why Black males at HBCUs have outgained their counterparts at PWIs. They write that, "Black students at PWI's experience microaggressions that impede their achievement, in comparison to the supportive HBCU campuses that cultivate Black collegians' success." In those instances, where institutional support is not present, Black male students rely on positive peer and familial support, a prove-them-wrong attitude for Black males at PWIs, and faculty mentorship (Harper, 2010).

Fisher (2015) used the anti-deficit framework in his qualitative study of high achieving Black males who were part of a summer leadership program to identify the characteristics that contributed to their success. Fisher (2015) found that familial factors such as parental support, or parental educational attainment, student out of class engagement through campus organizations and clubs, and in-class experiences all contributed to Black male collegiate success. Fisher (2015) concludes with institutional level recommendations that could serve to further aid the success of Black males. The author writes,

I.   Institutions must create well-informed, well-resourced materials for improvement.

II.   Institutions must create student-engagement experiences that allow students to find cultural solidarity, academic support, and guidance.

III.	Institutions must acknowledge structural racism and its effects on Black men (Fisher, 2015).

In their qualitative study of 22 Black males who successfully attained their bachelor's degrees from undergraduate institutions, and who subsequently served as mentors for Black high school males, Wright (2013) highlights the themes that emerged from the participant interviews. The author's research questions engaged participants to describe factors that contributed to their educational experience and propelled them to graduation. The author writes that,

> "The men [study participants] described in their own words how family support, precollege programs, guidance counselor involvement, relationships with faculty, internships, other cognitive factors influenced their progression, persistence, and success in life."

The authors' findings mirror some of the conclusions that other scholars find in their examinations of the factors that contribute to Black male success.

Similarly, in their qualitative study of high achieving Black male students at a public California university, Anumba (2015) found that those students persisted by (1) relying on familial and peer network support systems, (2) accessing on-campus network and other engagement opportunities, and (3) through their own sense of intrinsic motivation. Indeed, the author notes that,

> The factors that facilitated the retention of African American males identified by the participants were the need for support, the critical nature of establishing networks, and connections, time management, staying focused, and self-determination (p. 133).

Anumba (2015) finishes by providing recommendations that institutions can implement to further enhance Black males' educational experiences. A few of these are reproduced below:

- Strategically connect African American students with available resources

- Establish policies that set conditions for students to develop relationships and build connections with faculty and staff within the institutions.

- Recognize the role of collective socialization and establish and promote opportunities for students to engage in group networks.

Parents And College Choice

Students seldom make post-secondary schooling decisions without the input of an adult whose opinions they value. Education scholars have explored parent engagement during the college decision process and have concluded that, while most parents do provide input, parental income and education does influence the level of parental support that students received during this process (Han, 2014; Smith, 2009). Indeed, Han (2014) on the impact that parental socioeconomic status has on the college selection process writes that,

> Parental education, another component of socioeconomic status, has a strong influence through the college selection process, although it is often correlated with income. [...] Parents' expectations, experience with of financing their own college study, involvement in information search, knowledge and understanding of college cost and aid, and willingness and ability to provide financial support to colleges had a strong effect on students' college decisions (p. 122).

Smith (2009) in his qualitative study of low-SES African American parents' engagement efforts during their children's post-secondary choice conceptualizes this process. The author states that,

> I define parent involvement in postsecondary choice as parent-generated school and home-centered activities that collectively contribute to a student's ability to prepare for life after high school all contingent on the parent's experience and appreciation of the relationship between educational preparation and work (pp. 173-174).

Smith's conceptualization of the college-decision making process is appropriate as it properly accounts for how family socioeconomic status can impact how engaged parents are in this stage. This is the lens that I will use during this discussion. Smith interviewed five African American single mothers to examine how they experienced the college choice process. The author found that the mothers motivated their children to complete high school and earn their diplomas through a "don't be like me" narrative (Smith, 2009). Indeed, the mothers advocated that their children obtain their high school diploma, but did not promote college attendance, because they were unfamiliar with the benefits of college attendance. The author noted that the mothers' insistence on high school completion as opposed to college completion was a consequence of their socioeconomic status.

Smith (2009) urges The Academy and financial aid counselors specifically to aid first-generation families as they navigate the college application process. The author concludes that through intentional outreach, The Academy could impact how working-class parents with minimal post-secondary experience make sense of the college application process. The author writes,

> To shift expectations from high school to college completion requires unified and coordinated efforts from the Academy to pull parents into the college pipeline as early as middle school. The Academy must assume parents support their child's education and work with them to aggressively deliver critical college knowledge in the form of co-constructed maps that chart the course to college completion (p. 171).

Hossler's College-Choice Model

Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) in their article provide a summary of Hossler's college choice model as a significant framework that describes parents and students' experiences during the college choice process. The authors write that, according to Hossler's model, college-choice can

be conceptualized as a three-stage process that begins during primary school and finishes with student college enrollment. Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) write that each specific phase builds on one another.

> In undergoing each phase of the college-choice process, high school students develop predispositions to attend college, search for general information about college, and make choices leading them to enroll at a given institution of higher education (p.5)

The authors break down what occurs at each phase of Hossler's model. They write that,

> *Predispositions*: The predisposition stage involves the development of occupational and educational aspirations as well as the emergence of intentions to continue education beyond the secondary level (p.6).
>
> *Search:* The search stage involves the accumulation and assimilation of information necessary to develop the student's short list of institutions.
>
> *Choice:* Students and their parents make choices regarding which institution to attend based on economic and sociological factors. The authors note that, "the economic perspective regards enrollment as the result of a rational process in which an individual estimates the economic and social benefits of attending college and the sociological aspect is the extent to which a students' socioeconomic status impacts the type of school, they enroll in their subsequent educational attainment ambitions.

Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) note that family socioeconomic status does impact how universal this model is.

> In their conceptual paper, Hines et al., (2014) use the predisposition phase of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model to aid high school counselors who work with African American families. The authors centered African American families in their discussion to highlight

how culturally responsive practices can positively impact the college going and completion rates for this population. Hines et al., (2014) discuss the various ways that African American parents circumvent the structural barriers they face when motivating and preparing their children for post-secondary success. They write that faith communities are important mechanisms that families can draw on to engender a college going mentality. They state that,

> Leaders of the church are often consulted by African American parents for advice and information concerning the academic, behavioral, career and college welfare of their children and thus are key resources for forming a predisposition to attend college (p. 253).

Black parents rely on college educated family and kinship groups, because they serve as examples to their children, of Black persons who have circumnavigated the racialized higher education system. Further, Black parents also critically engage with their children on the positives of attending college by doing cost and benefit ratios. All these factors are important for counselors to consider when servicing African American students and families. Indeed, the authors conclude,

> When working with African American parents and families, school counselors need a knowledge base of African American culture and family dynamics, as well as the racial socialization of black students, to strategize ways for these parents to assist their children in developing interests in pursuing post-secondary pathways (Hines et al., 2014, p. 256).

Smith and Fleming (2006) use the second - "search"- phase of Hossler's college choice model to examine how the African American families in their study experienced the college choice process. According to Hossler's college choice model the search phase, "[...] involves students (with parental input) searching through a myriad of postsecondary options to prepare for the choice stage that takes place in the 12th grade (p. 78)." The authors specifically investigated if the parenting practices of African American families during this search phase impacted the college-

going choice of their male and female children in this sample. The authors found that the parents in this sample were more likely to frame college as a realistic and expected destinations for their daughters. Parents in this sample were cognizant of the incidence of prison involvement for Black males and were more concerned about their son's interaction with the criminal justice system than they their completing and attending college.

Chapman et al., (2018) conducted a mixed method study with Black families whose children who declined admission offers to UC system colleges. The authors examined how the parents' engagement practices influenced their children's college choice. The authors found that (1) parent perception of the schools' cultural competency as it pertains to race and racism; (2) the parent-child relationship; and (3) parents' own experiences impacted how children navigated the college choice process. Chapman et al., (2018) write that,

> What makes African American parenting somewhat unique is the dual emphasis African American parents cultivate by seeing their child as both an individual and a member of a racially underrepresented group in the USA. Throughout the college choice process, African American parents explicitly discuss rationales for acquiring a college degree, as a means for personal success and combating American racism (p.44)

Flaster (2018) uses data from the High School Longitudinal Study (HSLS) to examine the extent to which parents' abilities to finance their children's undergraduate college expenses impact their children's college enrollment decision. Parental income and education do influence the post-secondary schooling options that students have at their disposals, as scholars note that parents who have attended college, and can understand the positive impacts of college attainment show a higher willingness and are more capable of financing their children's educations (Chapman et al., 2018; Kotrich et al., 2018; Comeaux et al., 2020). Flaster (2018) finds, after controlling for parents'

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ability to pay, that social class does impact students college choice and because of this "[...] it is likely that socioeconomic differences in parents' pledges of financial support to adolescents contribute to postsecondary stratification (p. 980)."

Conceptual Framework

Stage-Setting

Angel Harris and Keith Robinson (2016) develop a new parent engagement framework in their article titled, *A New Framework for Understanding Parental Involvement: Setting the Stage for Academic Success.* Harris and Robinson's (2016) stage-setting framework is a theatre metaphor. The authors note that in dramatic arts, actors and stage-setters must complement one another to create a captivating show. The actors must remember their lines and deliver the script as the playwright intended, and the stage-setters must create a performance space that inspires an actor's performance. The stage-setters are integral members of a production because it is their detail-oriented work which provides actors with the physical environment conducive to a formidable performance. The authors explain that, in this stage-setting metaphor, parents are the stage setters, and the children are the actors. Harris and Robinson (2016) connect this to parent engagement. They state,

> […] Many parents construct and manage the social environment around their children in a manner that creates the conditions in which academic success is possible. In our view, this analogy captures what many parents do to position their children for academic success (p. 188).

Harris and Robinson (2016) formed this framework after conducting focus group interviews with high achieving students at a large university in the Southwest. The authors were investigating the students' parents' engagement activities, with a focus on determining how their engagement

impacted their children's academic journeys. The authors write that the themes that emerged during their data collection convinced them to reexamine how they conceptualized parent engagement. The authors note that, during the interviews, some students could not describe specific activities that their parents engaged in during their primary and secondary schooling years. The students, however, did highlight that the importance that their parents placed on education served as an indicator that academic success was important. The authors found that the students had high educational attainment despite their parents not being engaged in the perfunctory ways some scholars conceptualize parent engagement.

Harris and Robinson (2016) created their new framework with a focus on the environments that parents can create, beyond strict participation in school-based engagement activities, that instill the belief that education is important. Thus, the stage-setting framework centers the "intangible" ways that parents become engaged in their children's education.

Below is an illustration of the stage-setting framework:

Figure 5:

Stage Setting Diagram
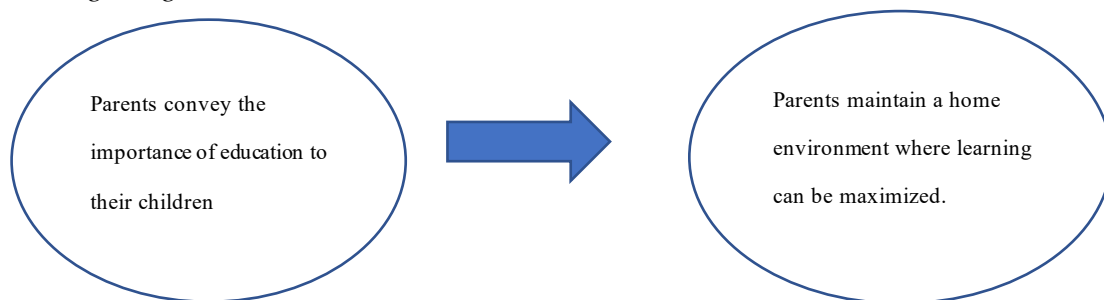
Parents convey the importance of education to their children:

The authors note that while it is essential for parents to emphasize the importance of schooling in their messages at home, the stage can only be set if children internalize the message;

academic success should be the child's own belief. The authors acknowledge that a family's economic and racial background can impact how this message is transferred. They state,

[…] whereas most parents convey the importance of education to their children, socioeconomic status partially determines the extent to which the message becomes a feature of youth's self-definition (p. 191).

Parents maintain a home environment in which learning can be maximized:

Socioeconomic factors can impact a parent's ability to provide educational resources to their children, and their capability to place their children in safe learning, home, and neighborhood environments. The authors write that,

Parents' ability to secure spaces conducive to learning is not entirely driven by personal choice; social class is a major determinant of the extent to which parents can influence their children's life space (p. 191).

Harris and Robinson (2016) emphasize that parents' socioeconomic status can impact their ability to set the stage. Indeed, middle-class, or college-educated parents can better serve as examples to their children on the benefits that continued educational attainment can have in adulthood. Further, according to the authors, these same parents (middle-class, college-educated) can more easily create home environments and reside in communities that facilitate learning – college-educated parents can more easily set the stage than parents without post-secondary credentials.

While working class, non-college educated, parents value education, they are less likely to serve as examples to their children of the returns that educational attainment can bring in adulthood. Additionally, some working-class parents without postsecondary credentials, due to limited access to lucrative employment opportunities, may not be able to afford to reside in

communities that are conducive to their children's learning development - these parents may have more difficulties setting the physical stage. Indeed, the authors write that,

> […] identical academic messages from two different sets of parents can result in different levels of academic identity [in the children] if they live in different types of neighborhoods (say, Beverly Hills versus inner-city Detroit) (p. 191).

Parental Practices

Annette Lareau (2011), in her book titled *Unequal Childhoods,* explores how cultural capital impacts the parenting practices of working-class and middle-class parents. Lareau and her team of researchers conducted "intensive naturalistic" observations of a dozen families with children aged 9 to 10. Lareau embarked on this study to examine how parents and their children experienced the modern school day. The author states,

> It is a lot of work to get young children through the day, especially for their parents. When I embarked on this study, I was interested in understanding that labor process. In choosing to look at families, rather than just at children or parents, I hoped to capture some of the reciprocal effects of children and parents on each other (p. 8).

The study included six white families, five black families, and one interracial family who were either middle-class or working-class.

Lareau conceptualized cultural capital as the "skills individuals inherit that can then be translated into different forms of value as they move through various institutions for the future." The author found that middle-class, college educated parents had more cultural capital (which children benefited from) and exhibited different parental practices. Indeed, Lareau notes that, as cultural norms around child rearing have shifted, from the sterner practices of past generations to

the warm and empathetic contemporary parenting style, middle class parents have adapted to the newer "concerted cultivation" parenting practice (Lareau, 2011).

Concerted cultivation, according to Lareau is a parenting practice where child development is pursued in a specific, concerted, manner. In concerted cultivation, parents cultivate their children's development by involving them in various carefully selected activities that combine to give their children a holistic and activity-filled childhood. The middle-class, college-educated parents in Lareau's study were more likely to display this parenting style because the activities that constitute a concerted cultivation parenting style are facilitated by parental income, access, and education. Working-class parents in Lareau's study had a different *achievement of natural growth* parenting style. The author writes,

In the accomplishment of natural growth [parenting style], children experience long stretches of leisure time, child-initiated play, clear boundaries between adults and children, and daily interactions with kin. Working-class and poor children, despite tremendous economic strain, often have more "childlike" lives, with autonomy from adults and control over their extended leisure time (pp. 3-4).

The parenting styles had different impacts for the families in this study. Lareau (2011) theorized that parents who had a concerted cultivation parenting style in this study had an easier time navigating relationships with teachers and administrators because it has been societally determined as the most effective parenting strategy for promoting children's intellectual and cultural growth.

Lareau found that children whose parents had concerted cultivation parental practices were more likely to advocate for themselves in different settings and were more comfortable engaging in conversations with adults in schools. The comfort level that the middle-class children in this study showed could relate to the cultural capital that their parents possessed. In contrast, working-

class children whose parents had an achievement of natural growth parenting style were timid when engaging in different settings and were less likely to advocate for themselves in conversations with adults.

Lareau addresses how structural inequality, different access to resources, and the adverse effects of systemic economic instability, can compound to negatively impact working class parents. The author writes,

> The families in this book created their lives within a specific social context. They did not build the roads they rode on, hire the teachers who taught in the school their children attended […] nor did they determine the availability of high-paying jobs in the area, set the education and skills required to fill those jobs, pace the growth of the national economy, or guide the position of the United States in the world economy (p. 25).

Lareau makes a poignant argument in her analysis on the lack of direct influence that the families in this study had in choosing their circumstances. What Lareau omits, in this part of her argument though, is that racially oppressive policy choices did influence many of these families' circumstances. I highlight in other parts of the text how racially oppressive policies have impacted the educational experiences of Black persons in this nation. In an analysis on parenting practices, and specifically of concerted cultivation, where parents must be able to financially afford the various development activities - race can and does impact their propensity to exhibit this parenting style.

Parental Practices Literature

Irwin and Elley (2011) analyzed survey data and conducted semi-structured interviews with parents who involved their children in various organized activities. The sample included working-class and middle-class parents. Irwin and Elley (2011) examined responses from 564 survey

respondents and interviewed 22 mothers and fathers who were evenly spread into "middle," "intermediate," and "working-class" categories. The authors examined the impact of social class (middle-class versus working class) on parental practices. Indeed, Irwin and Elley (2012) write that,

> The aim was to explore motivations, and rationales behind having children involved in such activities, and to research values in parenting, parents' perceptions of what matters, if and how things have changed across generations, and expectations for their children's education and for their future (p. 482).

The authors found that parents in each income category cared about their children's and were purposeful in shaping their educational experiences. They conclude, similarly to Lareau (2011), that any observed differences in parental practices and motivation is due to "complex contextual factors (p. 493)."

Vincent and Maxwell (2015) analyzed studies that centered on how social class, ethnicity, and family disposition influenced middle-class parents' decision making. The authors argue that in recent years, more focus has been placed on parental practices that resemble Lareau's (2011) concerted cultivation, and that these practices are seen as more effective than others. Indeed, Vincent and Maxwell (2015) state that "although parenting is a personal, intensive, and intuitive experience, it is also infused with class [behaviors], values, actions, and dispositions (p. 270)." The authors write that this widely accepted view that a concerted cultivation parental style is the most effective parenting approach is problematic and may cause unintended consequences. They conclude that,

[…] Moving towards the normalization of concerted cultivation as a parenting strategy for all, [could run] a risk that parents not able to or wiling to engage in such activities will be positioned as offering inadequate parenting (p. 278).

Redford et al., (2009) used the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) to quantitatively measure the impact of concerted cultivation on children's achievement. The authors used the 1988 NELS data to approximate the age group (9-10) that Lareau (2011) used in her qualitative study. The sample included survey responses from students, parents, teachers, and administrators. The dependent variables for their study were self-reported GPAs and standardized test scores, and the authors used the four concerted cultivation components (cultural capital, habitus, parental involvement, organization of daily life) to create a concerted cultivation index. The authors found that their concerted cultivation index significantly predicted student GPA and standardized test scores with parent and student habitus being the biggest predictors.

Dumais et al., (2012) used data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey (ECLS) to quantitatively measure concerted cultivation. The authors also examined how race and education impacted how teachers evaluated students in language and literacy, approaches to learning, and interpersonal skills. The authors examined parent responses of students who remained in the dataset from the first round of collection until the third follow-up. Dumais et al., (2012) used teacher reported evaluations as the dependent variables and parental practices as the independent variables. The authors limited their sample to include only Black and White students and parents. The authors found that White children with well-educated families received higher marks in all teacher categories when compared to their Black classmates with similarly educated parents. Additionally, they found children with parents with lower comparative educational attainment received lower evaluation scores even if their parents attended more parent-teacher conferences

than their better credentialed counterparts. The authors conclude that, while concerted cultivation parenting styles can be a conduit to a more lucrative educational experience for children, race and parent educational attainment still impact the intergenerational transfer of cultural capital.

Lee and Bowen (2006) quantitatively measured the impact of parent cultural capital on student achievement. The authors examined how cultural capital differed by race, ethnicity, economic background, and parental educational achievement. The study sampled 415 third to fifth grade students and their parents. The authors used six types of parent involvement measures as their independent variables (three home-based activities, and three school-based activities) and used children academic achievement as their main dependent variable. The authors found that the types of involvement and parental practices of middle-class parents had the strongest association with children's achievement.

Carolan and Wasserman (2015) use longitudinal data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), Child Development Study (CDS) and Transition to Adulthood (TA) study to examine the intergenerational transfer of cultural capital. The authors write that,

> Specifically, we use a structural equation modeling approach to estimate the indirect and direct influences of concerted cultivation and educational expectations on adolescents' academic achievement to examine how it contributes to the intergenerational transmission of educational advantage.

The authors found a direct relationship between parental expectations and subsequent children's achievement.

There is inconclusive evidence regarding the impact that parent engagement had on child achievement (Sebastian et al., 2017; McDowell et al., 2018; Anthony & Ogg, 2019). While Lareau's (2011) findings are important for an exploration of how cultural and social capital impact

the access that parents have to the various resources, and know-how that inform a concerted cultivation parenting style, parents who do not have this parenting style can still have high achieving children.

Contextual factors impact parents' abilities to obtain the requisite level of social and cultural capital that facilitates their capacity for school-based and home-based engagement activities. This study contributes to the parent engagement literature and advances Lareau's framework by being inclusive of how these structural factors, as described by the direct recipient of parent engagement efforts, impacted participants' own schooling experiences and their subsequent characterization of their parents' efforts. Socioeconomic differences exist, even when focusing on the experiences of a population that has been historically, and structurally, handicapped in their pursuit of educational and professional careers. What does not differ, however, when conducting a study that focuses on Black persons, is how their racial designation and that of generations before them, has impacted their capacity to accrue the social and cultural capital that is at the core of what Lareau explicitly and implicitly deems good parenting that facilitates academic achievement. This research advances Lareau's framework and contributes to the parent engagement literature by explicitly discussing how participants' and their parents' racial designations impacted their engagement and their children's academic journeys. Indeed, accruing the requisite cultural and social capital to positively impact their children's educational journeys is what most parents dream of. Unfortunately, for generations of Black parents and families that dream has been a dream deferred.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study was a narrative inquiry of how currently enrolled Black male students at PSSU described their parents' engagement practices during their primary and secondary schooling years. A narrative inquiry is an exploration of how humans experience the world, and this discipline has a long-standing tradition in education research. Indeed, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) write that narrative inquiry has been used in educational research because, "education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories, (p. 1)," and that those who collect these stories are the narrators. The data for this narrative inquiry were collected through semi-structured one-on-one interviews with participants, because the open-ended format proved to be the most appropriate for a conversation on how participants characterized their parents' engagement practices.

Research Site

Public Selective Southeastern University (PSSU) was chosen as the site for my study. PSSU is a large flagship public predominantly White institution located in the Southeast. A predominantly white institution is an institution where "[...] more White students are enrolled at the institution than are students who are members of underrepresented racial groups (Bourke, 2016, p. 13). PSSU is a very selective college wherein less that fifty percent of applicants gain admission into the university each Fall (College Transitions). I chose PSSU as the research site due to my current affiliation with the university. Indeed, by participating in several Black male focused initiatives at PSSU, I shared a commonality with other students who shared my racial and gender

identity. I believed that this commonality would assist me during the recruitment process, therefore PSSU was the most appropriate choice due to the existing network that I had at this institution.

Participant/Data Sampling

I used a multi-pronged method to recruit participants for this research study. First, I conducted a search of, on-campus undergraduate Black student affinity groups, that were represented on PSSU's student organizations website. While PSSU has an array of Black student affinity groups, the two groups whose members I recruited from were Georgia DAZE, and the Black Male Leadership Society. I selected these groups because I was familiar with their missions, and because – amongst the minority affinity groups - they had the highest number of publicly available registered members listed on the PSSU student organizations website.

I conducted a LinkedIn search, in private mode once I collected the list of names from the PSSU student website. This search was conducted to ensure that the students who were included on the list I created, were still enrolled at PSSU. I sent recruitment emails to the student addresses of the thirty-one names that remained on my contact sheet after my corrective LinkedIn search. Seven students replied and agreed to participate after a second-follow up email.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants for this study. In purposive sampling, "[…] the researcher intentionally selects participants who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon being studied (Gil 2020, p. 580)." Using this sampling method allowed me to recruit participants that have the most knowledge about the topic that I am examining. Indeed, Coyne (1997) states that in the beginning stages of the sample selection process for purposeful or selective sampling, "researchers will go to the groups which they believe will maximize the possibilities of obtaining data and leads for more data on their question (p. 625)." Specifically focusing on

identifying Black males who were currently enrolled at PSSU aligned with the central focus of my research study.

Data Collection

Interviews were the primary method of data collection, and I conducted them via Zoom. I conducted my interviews via zoom for several reasons. To begin, as a remote learning student, who resided 3.5 hours from PSSU, conducting in-person interviews with my research participants would have been costly and challenging. Second, I assumed, when I made the decision to conduct my research online, that my research participants were unlikely to experience major internet usage issues. This proved to be the case as most of the participants relied on PSSU's broadband network and did not experience major interruptions during the conversations. Third, Zoom has built-in features, which I utilized, that help researchers analyze the data that they collect. Indeed, the video upload feature allowed me to have a secure audio and video recording of my participant interviews that I downloaded prior to transcribing. The ease of access to broadband connectivity, along with the cost-effectiveness associated with using Zoom, made this online platform the most appropriate to use for this research study.

The interviews used a semi-structured format. Conducting semi-structured, one-on-one interviews was the most appropriate choice for this narrative inquiry because participants, in an unstructured private setting, were more encouraged to shed light on their lived experiences. Indeed, Cypress (2018) writes that,

> A major advantage of interviews is that it permits the respondent to move back and forth in time to reconstruct the past, interpret the present, and predict the future. Interviews are likely to provide a more complete and in-depth picture than other forms of inquiry (p. 304).

Interview Procedures

The first step in my data collection procedure was to recruit participants. I sent participants whose names I had collected from the PSSU student organization website a recruitment email that included a (1) description of the project, (2) two Qualtrics links - one that included a consent form, and another that included a pre-interview questionnaire - and (3) dates and times for interviews (I reminded participants that each interview would last between 45-60 minutes) that spanned a two-week period from September 15th to October 1st, 2022. Once a participant expressed interest by replying to the email, and selecting an interview time, I replied with a calendar invite for the agreed-upon time, which included my personal Zoom link, and an attachment of the interview guide.

I entered the Zoom room 15 minutes before each participant interview to ensure connectivity and monitor security. I thanked participants for their willingness to participate in this study and sought verbal consent to proceed with the interviews once participants entered the virtual Zoom room. I began the interview after receiving verbal consent by using the interview guide (Appendix E). Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. I thanked participants again and outlined next steps after each interview. I sent each participant copies of the finalized transcripts three to four weeks after the interviews for member checking purposes.

Data Analysis

I saved the audio and video files to a folder on a portable disk once each interview was completed. I wrote memos after each interview to note my thoughts on how the interview progressed, the energy that I felt and received from participants, and on potential themes that I might apply during the coding process (Cypress, 2018). I used the Zoom live transcription feature to obtain a raw transcript at the end of each interview. I transcribed each interview after I obtained the raw interview transcripts. I read the full transcripts several times to

familiarize myself with the interviews, and to ensure that the transcripts accurately represented the topics covered in the conversations. I contacted each participant after I completed a thorough review of each transcript for member checking purposes. Member checking is defined as, "[…] systematically soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the people you are studying, (Maxwell, 2012, p. 168)."

I developed codes, guided by my conceptual framework, before I examined the finalized transcripts. Qualitative researchers can develop their codes before interacting with their data (a priori coding), or as they are coursing through the data (emergent coding) (Elliot, 2018). Codes that are developed before data analysis are informed by a researcher's theoretical or conceptual framework. Developing codes from the data is inductive coding, while developing codes from theoretical frameworks is deductive coding (Xu & Zammit, 2020). I used both methods during my analysis. I created codes that were inclusive of my conceptual framework and developed codes that were informed by the data I collected.

I uploaded my transcripts into the Dedoose data analysis platform before coding. Dedoose, is "a cross-platform app for analyzing qualitative and mixed methods research with text, photos, audio, videos, spreadsheet data and more (Dedoose)." I have used Dedoose for previous qualitative analysis projects. The themes that I developed were informed by my conceptual framework. I developed 25 to 30 codes, that informed the 6 themes that were included in this study

I coded each transcript several times. I did this to ensure that each code matched the data that it was attached to. Elliot (2018) suggests that doctoral researchers do multiple iterations of coding. The author writes that,

Coding is usually an iterative process for the doctoral project at least; as you develop your understanding of the data and your codes, you return to earlier data and recode, or refine codes and combine them, requiring a revalidation of earlier coded material (p. 2859).

Coding interview transcript multiple times helps to establish researcher reliability.

I used a thematic analysis approach to construct the themes from my participant interviews. Bennett et al., (2019) state that, "thematic analysis is a commonly used qualitative method that focuses on the content of participants' statements: identifying, analysis and reporting patterns (themes) within data (p. 10)." Thematic analysis was the most appropriate method of analysis to use because I was not forming a new theory with the data that I gathered. I instead incorporated the tenets from my conceptual framework to organize my themes. Xu and Zammit (2020) note that selected themes must collaborate with one another to portray a cohesive narrative that is supported by the data. The themes that I selected were representative of the general findings across all participant interviews.

I wrote my findings section after I finished coding and identified the relevant themes. My themes were constructed from excerpts from my interviews as Creswell (2018) notes that researchers present the themes in a narrative or discussion form that highlights the information gathered from the various interviews.

Validity

Ensuring validity is important in qualitative research because, "[...] while the credibility in quantitative research depends on instrument construction, in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600)." The two potential threats to validity for this study were researcher bias and reactivity.

Researcher Bias

Maxwell (2012) defines researcher bias as, "the selection of data that fit the researcher's existing theory, goals, or preconceptions, and the selection of data that "stand out" to the researcher (p. 166)." My familiarity with this scholarship impacted how I structured this study. Indeed, parent engagement is a research topic that I have been immersed in for the past two years, and as such, I have read many articles that describe effective parent engagement practices and define how those engagement strategies impact children's educational attainment. Additionally, I have engaged with scholarship on Black parent engagement, and the various difficulties that some persons in this population experience when engaging in their children's education. My own personal recollections could have surfaced as I conducted my interviews and engaged with my participants' descriptions.

I followed the interview guide strictly to account for this bias. During each participant interview, I ensured that the questions I asked about their experiences with their parents' engagement practices did not include any of my opinions. Further, I provided participants with the guide before each interview for their review and use during our conversations so that they could examine if my questions were authentic. Member checking is another method that qualitative researchers use to mitigate the impact of research bias. Maxwell (2012) defines member checking as "[…] systematically soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the people are you are studying (Maxwell, 2012, p. 163)." I solicited feedback from participants in the early stage of the data analysis process by sending them finalized transcripts for their own review. In that communication, I asked participants to directly edit the transcript as they saw fit. Remaining committed to the interview guide and conducting solid member checks were two strategies that I used to mitigate my own researcher bias.

Reactivity

Reactivity or reflexivity is the general influence that a qualitative researcher has on a participant's behavior, or answers as they are collecting data (Maxwell, 2012). Reflexivity could be more salient in qualitative studies that use one-on-one interviews as their primary method of data collection because, "[…] what the [participant] says is *always* influenced by the interviewer and the interview situation (Maxwell, 2012, p. 166)." To mitigate the influence that I had on participants, I limited the instances of verbal and nonverbal gestures that signaled approval or disapproval, and limited interjections of personal stories. I conducted my interviews in a removed yet engaged manner to minimize my influence on participants' recollections. Additionally, I asked open-ended questions, and limited the instances of leading questions, as that was another method to employ to reduce researcher reactivity (Maxwell, 2012).

Researcher Positionality

I pursued this research study for personal and scholastic reasons – both of which impacted how this study was conducted and subsequently presented. First, I, as a Black college-educated male, whose parents were not engaged in the perfunctory ways that engagement has been measured, sought to learn about other Black males' experiences with their parents' engagement practices. My interest in conducting this research were two-fold. First, I was seeking to obstruct the deficit-based narrative that is often applied to Black males in higher education, which highlight their disparate achievement and retention rates. While those aspects are critical to address, there are other narratives that we could construct regarding Black males in higher education. Second, I wanted to add to a counter-storytelling tradition that empowers persons from minoritized communities to author their own stories. I believe that this research study accomplished that. Indeed, Johnson (2017) on the power of counter-

storytelling writes that,

> […] counter-storytelling is utilized by people of Color […] to counter and disrupt traditional and dehumanizing stories that institutions and societies hold about people from different racial backgrounds and ethnic identities (p. 482).

The stories that these young men shared, both about their parents' engagement practices, and their own experiences in school, dispelled some of the deficit-based narratives that are popularized about Black parent engagement and Black male achievement.

My life experiences and identity influence my research agenda. I gravitate to topics, people, and conversations that are centered on the experiences of those, who through no fault of their own, have been pushed to the margins of society. The biases that I possess, due to my lived experiences, racial identity, and educational attainment could have, and likely did, impact this narrative inquiry of how currently enrolled Black undergraduate male students at PSSU describe their parents' engagement practices. Indeed, as Malterud (2001) writes, "preconceptions are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them (p. 484)." Addressing these biases in this positionality statement, the validity section, and the limitation section, helps to reduce how some of these biases influenced this study.

Limitations

There are several limitations in this study of how currently enrolled Black male students at PSSU characterized their parents' engagement practices during their primary and secondary schooling years. To begin, the findings from this research cannot be generalized to the population due to the nature of qualitative research, and because of this study's small sample size. Further, the Black male students that participated in this study may have had experiences that were atypical to other Black male students at PSSU. This could be due to either their familial backgrounds or their on-campus affiliations and group activities. Next, while choosing to interview students to

learn how they experienced their parents' engagement practices is a unique approach to studying parent engagement, the study could have benefited from having parental perspectives. Other researchers who are interested in learning about students' experiences should consider recruiting their parents as that could create a more holistic understanding of family engagement than is presented here.

The timeframe in which the interviews were conducted is another limitation. Indeed, to meet the demands of a challenging semester, I had to schedule all seven interviews within a 10-day period, which included instances where I had multiple interviews in a day. Although, I managed to complete all interviews in earnest, I did experience some interview fatigue. A further limitation is that all participant interviews were conducted via Zoom. While conducting interviews via Zoom has become a common practice in recent years, the benefit of in-person interviews where one can read body language, and better detect interview-participant energy is lost – participants and I could have benefited from in-person conversations. Another limitation of this study is that I was the sole researcher with expertise in a topic area that is personal to me. Because of this, I had to ensure that I reserved my comments and remained committed to the interview guide during conversations. Finally, because my questions focused on participants' experiences with their parents' engagement during their primary and secondary schooling years, these university-aged participants, had to provide answers about past experiences. Participants, by the time of the interview, may have had different perspectives on events that occurred in their childhood. All these limitations should be accounted for in future studies.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The central research question of this narrative inquiry was "how do successful Black male undergraduate students at a large selective public university in the Southeast (PSSU) characterize their parents' engagement practices during their primary and secondary schooling years." The data for this research question were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted online via Zoom. Prior to each interview, which lasted between 45 minutes and one hour, participants completed pre-interview questionnaires, read, completed interview consent forms, and reviewed the interview guide. The pre-interview questionnaire asked students several demographic questions, including their date of birth, class standing, undergraduate majors, place of birth, household income structure, both of their parents' educational attainment, and their household size.

I identified potential participants in two primary ways. First, I searched PSSU's student organization portal for students who were registered online as members of PSSU's several Black student affinity groups. Second, after gathering a list of names, I conducted a LinkedIn search in private mode to ensure that the students whose names I collected were still enrolled at PSSU. I sent the qualifying students a recruitment email to their PSSU student address following my LinkedIn search. Seven students responded to my email and agreed to participate in this research study.

Description of participants

Seven participants agreed to participate in this study, all seven are students that are currently enrolled at PSSU, and all seven completed the pre-interview questionnaire. Table 1 below is a descriptive overview of the participants gathered from their responses to the pre-interview questionnaire. All students were encouraged to select a pseudonym - those who did not were randomly assigned pseudonyms by the researcher.

Name	Class Standing	Major	Household Income	Household Structure	Household Size	Mother Education	Father Education
Benedict	Third year	Mechanical Engineering	Middle class	One-parent (Mother)	2	Associate Degree or Some College	Unknown
Charlie	Third year	Political Science and African American Studies	Low-income	Two-parent	More than 4	High School	High School
Frank	Fourth year	Health Promotion/Minor in Health Policy and Management	Working Class	Two-parent	More than 4	Associate degree or Some college	Bachelor's Degree
Donald	Second-year	Biochemistry, Math, Literature	Upper Middle Class	Two-parent	More than 4	Doctorate	Master's Degree
Lamar	Third year	Biology	Upper Middle Class	Two-parent	4	Master's Degree	Master's Degree
Sean	Third year	Social Work	Working Class	Two-parent	4	Master's Degree	High School

John	Fourth year	Linguistics	Working Class	One parent (Mother)	4	Associate degree or Some college	Associate degree or Some college.

Student Profiles

Benedict is a third-year chemical engineering major who was born in a Northeastern state and raised in a single-person household by his foreign-born mother. Benedict and his mother relocated to the Southeast where he spent most of his primary and secondary schooling years prior to enrolling at PSSU. Benedict described his household income as "middle-class," and his mother's highest level of education is an associate degree or some college.

Charlie is a third-year political science and African American studies major born and raised in the Southeast, where he completed his primary and secondary schooling years. Charlie identifies as a mixed-race person (White and Black) and was raised in a two-parent household by a Black/African American father and a White mother. Charlie described his household income as "low-income," with both of his parents' highest educational attainment being a high school diploma.

Frank is a fourth-year student majoring in Health Promotions and minoring in Health Policy and Management. Frank was born, raised, and educated in the Southeast. Frank was raised in a two-parent working class household. His mother's highest educational attainment is an associate degree or some college, while his father's highest educational attainment is a bachelor's degree. Frank's father also serves in ministry as a pastor.

Donald is a second-year student studying chemical engineering, math, and literature. Donald was also born and spent his primary and secondary schooling years in the Southeast.

Donald was raised in a two-parent, upper middle-class household. His mother's highest level of educational attainment is a doctorate degree, and his father's highest level of educational attainment is a master's degree.

Lamar, is a third-year student majoring in Biology, born in a Mid-Atlantic state prior to he and his family relocating to the Southeast during his primary schooling years. Lamar was raised in a two-parent upper middle-class household. Both of his parents' highest level of educational attainment is a master's degree.

Sean is a third-year student majoring in social work. Sean was born and raised in the Southeast in a two-parent working class household. Sean's mother's highest level of educational attainment is a master's degree, while his father's highest level of educational attainment is a high school diploma.

John is a graduating fourth-year student majoring in Linguistics. John was born in a mid-Atlantic state prior to he and his family relocating to the Southeast in his early primary schooling years. John was raised in a one-parent single mother household, where he still had constant access and frequent interactions with his father. Both of John's parents' highest level of educational attainment is an associate degree or some college.

Themes

Theme 1: Parents' expectations set the stage for academic journeys

Throughout the conversations, most interview participants, regardless of household income or household structure, noted that their parents' expectations set the stage for their academic pursuits.

Benedict, a chemical engineering major who was raised by his foreign-born single mother, when asked about his mother's expectations, stated that,

It was always - I don't know if we ever had a conversation. I just feel like this is a thing I just knew since birth almost like in [Jamaican] households. It's like education is on the forefront of importance [...] like my older cousins like joke around like, "that first degree is for you, but you gotta go and get another degree for your parents," like a bachelor's or a master's or something else because that one's - it's for you like parents, because like [Jamaican] households are so - like they expect a lot of you.

John, a fourth-year linguistics major, who was raised in a single-mother household, who described his household income structure as working class, when asked about his parents' expectations on homework, describes that the structure that his father set around homework completion played a role in his development. John states,

[...] They [parents] also helped a lot when it came down to the structure, and that's staying on top of us to make sure we were doing our work and that we had time to you know relax and decompress, but also that things got done. Particularly, like I said, my dad he worked from home um and so after school we would go to my dad's house [...] we'd get there about 3:30, my sister, my brother and I would just be at the house chilling for a little bit, we eat some snacks and about 4:30 that's when we would start work, like we all knew by 4:30 TV's gotta be off to do our work and we can turn it back on once we finish all the work. And so having that routine actually I think helped a lot and [it's] still [a] routine that I practice in college a lot today, like whenever I look at my schedule for the day, I be like "alright cool, this is my time," especially when I get home, this is my time to relax, I would give myself an hour or whatever, however much - however exhausted I am - and then I'll go back and be [like] cool now it's time to get to work.

Lamar, a third-year biology major from an upper middle-class family whose parents both have master's degrees, described a similar set of expectations from his own parents that was motivated by their upbringing. He states that,

> I mean, they [parents] came from families where their parents weren't formally educated, it was high school at most, and the lifestyle they lived... they like, they had um, you know, fun as kids, but like they really didn't want to have their kids go through what they went through, so they put a lot of emphasis on education.

Charlie, a third-year political science, and African American studies major from a low-income family, whose parents' highest educational attainment is a high school diploma, states,

> I think, with like neither of my parents receiving that college education, but with them, realizing what they could have did with it, it made them realize the importance of education, [...] they knew, since they didn't want to go to college, they wanted me to have that college experience and just that college education.

Sean, a third-year social work major from a working-class family, whose mother earned a master's degree, and whose father's highest educational attainment is a high school diploma, when asked to place on a scale of 1 through 10, the importance that his parents placed in education and schooling states that,

> Oh, because of my dad's expectations! Schooling has always been a 10. So, I think it was an unspoken expectation that you need to go to college,

Donald, a second-year student studying biochemistry, math, and literature, from an upper middle-class family whose mother holds a doctorate, and whose father holds a master's degree, when asked to place the importance that his parents placed on education on the same 1 to 10 scale states that,

Yeah, it'd be ten. I think part of it had to do with like where they were from, because my - like, I said, my dad was from the projects, and my mom is from a very rural part of South Carolina. So, their way out was through education, you know what I'm saying. And so, from there you see the thematic element of, "Okay, this is how you're going to achieve what you want to do. So, you might as well or you better like I don't know - get on it" basically.

Frank, a graduating fourth year student studying health promotion and health policy in management, who is from a working-class family, when asked to place the importance his parents placed on his schooling on a scale from 1 to 10 states that,

Okay, umm with everything, I would say a 7 and 8, somewhere around 7 and 8. I say that because I've never felt like the push like I – they, again graduating high school, yes. But there was never like a push like, you know, "you gotta go to college. Oh, you got to do this," it's like there was never that push like with me, so I felt like a seven and an eight, and also because they, you know, also allowed me to explore like other things where I don't need like a college education. So, like, if I wanted to just stay home and just continue with, you know, working in the ministry and stuff like that, like, yeah, that was on the table. So that's why I feel like a 7 and an 8.

Frank's parents, as he states above, did not place an emphasis on college as the sole source of educational success. He provided added context in our conversation by noting how his being raised in a rural area of the Southeast impacted his parents' beliefs about college. He states elsewhere in our conversation that people in his immediate network did not typically lobby for college as much as they would have for other avenues like commercial truck driving or logging.

Theme 2: Parents more engaged during primary schooling years

During our conversations, most of the students shared that their parents were more heavily engaged in school-based and home-based engagement activities during their primary schooling years. Charlie's parents, specifically his mother, was heavily involved in school-based engagement activities during his primarily schooling years. Charlie described during our conversation,

> She [his mother] was really involved, I would say, in our schooling during that time. So, in elementary school she was on the PTO. She would volunteer in classrooms to like, make copies for teachers, you know, maybe like, do extra help with teachers, with the readings and stuff like that, so I would say she was really involved.

Charlie continued to describe that his mother's engagement also went beyond school-based activities as she was up to date on his grades, and due dates for projects and assignments,

> So, from a very young age every time I had that report card, especially since my mom was involved in the PTO and stuff like that, she had dates of when we were supposed to receive our report card, and I was in elementary school at a time before, like Infinite Campus, which was like the virtual gradebook became a thing. So, at that point they were still only doing like the paper. Um, yeah, so and um, yeah, in elementary school. She always checked our report card. She would have meetings with our teachers if like we needed extra help and different things like that. She made sure she did everything that we could, so that she established a strong foundation for us in elementary school.

John shared similar reflections about his parents' engagement during his primary schooling years. He described that,

> Whatever we needed, assistance wise, they [parents] were always willing to help. Now, it was, it's very much still reminiscent of kind of how college runs in the sense that you've

got to ask. Like they're not they're not one, they wanted to make sure that we got our work

done, that we were on top of our work, that we were doing things that we've done. They

would always ask if you had any homework back, they would always ask that question,

you have anything coming up, but they weren't necessarily going to force the help upon it.

John's mother, who herself was an educator, furnished positive relationships with John's teachers,

I know specifically for my mom. Again, having been a substitute. A lot of the relationship

she developed were with teachers. And so, they knew her from substitute teaching. And

so, knowing that relationship they had and knowing that "oh, that's [Whitney's] daughter,

that's [Whitney's] son." There was like a bit of a sense of, "oh, well, let me just make sure

people are good."

Sean describes his parents' engagement during his primary schooling years,

And so, um, as far as like engaging like with homework and things like that, my mom

would be the one helping me like if it was a project, or if it was um, I don't know writing

my vocabulary words, multiple tables [...] [my father] he was always very present. It's just

that he didn't have the capacity to necessarily help me with my homework or be as hands

on with those projects because he was either at work or asleep.

Donald, whose father home schooled he and his brothers during his preschool and kindergarten

years, offered a unique perspective on his parents' engagement. First, he shared a heartwarming

story about a kind gesture from his mother,

One of my youngest memories is my mom reading to me, and we would go get books.

Even when she was deployed - I forgot to mention she's in the reserve. She's in the reserve

now. But she was deployed for a for a little bit, and even then, she would send me like

these um like voice recordings that I still have of "The Giver," Yeah. So, I mean, looking back, that's pretty special, right?

On a question about how engaged his parents were in his schooling, Donald answered that,

Yeah, I would say they were both involved, so they tried to take kind of a united front on that respect. Um, and this - I would consider this part of school, too, is that my dad would be the one to take us to or take me to my extracurriculars that I was doing at the time. I think that's kind of important to add too,

Donald states further that his parents were intent on ensuring that their children were challenged academically,

[...] I remember, actually, my mom had told my English teacher to go harder on us for some reason, I mean, not for some reason, obviously, that looking back, I can see why that is beneficial. But yeah, that just goes to show you how devoted they were to, you know what I'm saying - the academic aspect.

Benedict, whose mother could not be as engaged in the school-based activities due to her fluid work schedule as a postal worker, shared that his close family relatives, along with his mother were engaged during his primary schooling years. He states that,

So, I have a lot of family in my general [geographic] area. So, I would a lot of time, because I went to like - a lot of my cousins are around my age. So, we'd go to like school together, my aunts and uncles would pick me up. I'll go back to their house before my mom would finish with her work and that'd be a lot of what I do. Extra curriculars like my uncle would bring me there and everything like that.

Benedict continues to describe his family's support,

Um in those early years, yeah, um, before going to extra curriculars my uncle would always like - like, I said, [I had a] bunch of cousins all around the same age. So, it's like when he's telling them to do work, he is telling me to do work, so it's like I'm just like their surrogate child, because if I'm there they're just going to make sure I'm getting my stuff done, too.

Benedict's mother was helpful when he needed assistance with bigger assignments,

Hmm for the most part. That was - a lot of smaller things like just homework assignment deadlines or like small quizzes, I just - I keep up with myself when it'd be like a big physical project I had to do. My mom wouldn't like - that's the one thing my mom would really help me out with a lot - I remember also like going to Michaels like the craft store

Lamar, whose mother was an educator at a school he attended during his elementary years describes his parents' level of engagement,

Yeah, I mean, they were both pretty involved. My dad was more on like the uh kind of the tactical side of things. Like he would help me with like math and science and specific calculations but my mom, and I like the creative side, she'd take me to a store to get the poster board, and, you know, give me like creative ideas [and] stuff like that,

On his parents' school-based engagement, specifically with parent-teacher conferences, Lamar states that,

Oh, yeah and if they, you know, didn't have like a pressing, meeting, or [anything]. They made sure they were in there, because they - that was one thing like especially my dad liked to harp on - he loves talking to my teachers and finding out what I'm supposed to be doing what I can do to get ahead. That was like his [thing].

Frank, whose father served in the ministry, and whose mother worked in health and human services, describes his parents' engagement during his early schooling years,

Um! They were heavily involved. I would say my mom was more involved in the aspect

of like helping me with homework, and like helping me with projects and stuff like that.

But both her and my dad was involved, he was more just like checking in to make sure I

had did it and she was more of like helping me to get it done.

Frank further describes his father's engagement in another part of the conversation. He states that,

With like student counsel and all that stuff, my dad, he would be um he would serve as like

the chaperone when we had like our trips and stuff like that. So, he was involved.

Frank's father was also an active participant during county school board meetings,

But I know, my dad, he was involved in like going to the school board meetings, so he was

staying present there in that aspect.

The participants uniformly shared that their parents, or family members were engaged in some

aspect of their schooling during their primary schooling years. The support that the students

received from their parents helped them become more independent.

Theme 3: Increased Student Autonomy

Participants described that they experienced a different level of engagement as they

transitioned from their early primary schooling years to their secondary schooling years. The

students mentioned that as they advanced through their schooling, their parents had less influence

on their daily routines due to a combination of the increased difficulty of schooling assignments

and their own growing sense of independence. Sean and Donald are the two participants that most

displayed this growing sense of independence. Their independence allowed them to become the

primary drivers of their own education. For both participants this shift began in middle school.

Sean described how his transition from a charter school, where his mother worked as a

secretary, to another school changed the parent-engagement dynamic.

And so, I think when I got to when I went to the other middle school there, yeah, it kind of became hands off, [...] like uh if it came to homework or anything like that similar to how it used to be. If I asked, they would help, but it also got to the point where they were like, I don't really understand this either.

When asked about the post-charter school parent-teacher relationship, Sean stated that, "[...]honestly, I don't think they knew any of my teachers." I asked Sean to explain why his parents did not know any of his teachers. He responded that,

Um? Because well, okay, they knew my band director, because that was, I was most passionate in band [...] yeah, but as far as the other teachers, I personally, I never like. Like any time, they could have met them, I just don't think it was a conversation like I was kind of thinking, or like there was this stigma like, "Oh, like if your parents are talking to the teacher like that's not good." Something like that.

Sean states that one reason he did not bridge the parent-teacher gap was because of the stigma that he and his peers attached to such a relationship. He explains,

I think that was probably from my peers like stories about them, or like um like if I'm ever reprimanded by a teacher, which was not common of me like growing up, like my first fear was like, "Oh, they're going to tell my parents. They're gonna tell my mom," But then I was like "wait they don't even know my parents and my mom," so like I don't know I did like that boundary low-key [...] I think that I liked the boundary because um, I didn't feel as much pressure like I just. I kind of felt like, "Okay, like [if] you get in trouble. You get in trouble. You'll get reprimanded, like, it may not even make it to the principal's office."

Sean noted that his unwillingness to bridge the gap was not solely motivated by trying to circumnavigate punishment for wrongdoing,

And so, I think I guess it would be that independence factor of like me, having to be a little

bit more accountable,

Sean used this new agency to shape the rest of his schooling experience. The excerpt below, which

includes my speech in bolded text, highlights how Sean became the primary decision maker in his

education,

R: So, fifth grade, you got involved in band. Okay,

I: Yeah. But yeah, that was definitely my choosing. And then I ended up auditioning for a performing arts high school got in, and I did band and chorus.

R: Band and chorus

I: Yeah. Oh, and theater.

R: And theater, okay. Multi-faceted young man here. Um, okay. So, all right. So good - thank you for that, because that's a good segue to talk about your high school. You auditioned so why did you? How did that conversation come up? Where, "hey? I want to go to this high school." Was it like your parents were like, "Hey, school choice? We want you to go here," or was it kind of you leading that conversation.

I: Um, I led that conversation cuz -

R: Okay, why did you want to go to that school?

I: Um. Well, the other school would have been Morrow high, and I just I knew that like because band was like that biggest reason of me like wanting to go to school and wanting to do well like, cuz it was kind of like if I don't do well, I can't perform.

R: Okay, yeah.

I: And so, I was like, Okay, Um, my band teacher came to me and was like, "you need to audition." I was like, "Yeah, okay, cool."

R: Yeah.

I: And so, I would say that was the primary motivator. Also, my - the school I ended up going to was just a lot safer than Morrow High was, hmm and so I think me wanting to pursue like what I love doing, and also wanting to still be in like a safe environment. I think those were the two.

R: Okay. And then your parents were like, "Yes?",

I: Yeah, they were just like "Cool",

Sean's decision to take the reins of the parent-school engagement relationship may have contributed to his becoming the final decision maker in his own schooling.

Donald, like Sean, began developing a sense of independence in middle school, which influenced him to place a boundary on how much his parents knew about his schooling experience. Donald began talking about this growing sense of independence when I asked him if his parents were aware of report card dates, and other due dates,

> Yeah, I'd say generally they yeah, they knew. um. But then again in I would say middle school, I started to kind of like, be more independent in that, and I didn't necessarily want them to be all in that. So, I started to [...] I think like personally, I've always been kind of independent, and so I wanted that to be separate. You know what I'm saying.

Donald further describes that while his parents did remain interested in his daily activities, he often provided minimal information when they inquired about his school tasks,

> Yeah, they would ask, like my dad would ask every day, what are you doing in school, like what are you learning on the drive back because he drove me - he drove me from school right, and I'd just give a generic answer, because I didn't. I guess I was like I thought it was big shit at that point [laughs]

Donald's growing independence contributed to his seeking better educational opportunities as he transitioned into high school. Below is an exchange from the interview transcript that highlights this point.

> **R: So, the question I have here is um like, what did school choice look like? So obviously your parents chose for y'all to be the home school type. And did you attend public, private, charter, or like private schools? You already said public. But what kind of schools was it like, "oh, we want the boys to go to this school in the district because it's better or we want them to." Yeah, how was that conversation like?**

I: Yeah. So, I guess the school choice really came in in high school, because at that point we knew, or I knew. I didn't want to stay in Yuille County just because I saw the outcomes of people in - that would go to Hamlin [and the] school that I went to the and I wasn't really messing with it. Um, in some ways.

R: What do you mean by that? By like outcomes and all

I: Oh outcomes, I guess Hamlin is pretty prolific of having good like college decisions when I was coming up, and they're ranked pretty high in my city,

R: Okay,

I: And in the state as well.

R: Okay,

I: They took academics very seriously.

Donald's independence may have contributed to his ability to carve out an educational path that would provide him with the best opportunity.

While the other participants conveyed a sense of independence throughout the conversations, I selected these specific participants, Sean, and Donald because they mobilized on their sense of independence.

Theme 4: Students Experience Differences During College Transition

While interview participants shared some similar experiences, when describing their parents' engagement practices during their early schooling years, and with their growing sense of independence, their experiences diverged when the conversation focused on their parents' engagement practices during the college application process. Indeed, participants whose parents had not earned a 4-year degree at the time of their application experienced more difficulties during the college application process when compared to the other participants in the study whose parents were college educated. The following excerpts show that those students whose parents were not

as familiar with the college process relied more on their school counselors when applying to college.

Neither of John's parents earned a diploma from a 4-year postsecondary institution, and as such they were largely unfamiliar with the college application process. He describes,

So, college was a very big change and I'm talking up until the - even before college during the college process, applications were something, that was something that also changed drastically since either of them had applied to college. Um and so like a lot of this world, this realm was kind of separate from them and it was very weird in the, in the beginning, like, I don't even know who I can go to for this one, you know,

John described that his parents' engagement during the college application process differed from other times in his schooling years,

It was weird that I couldn't go to them and find an answer. Like that's the main thing - like this was something where I'm having to search, I'm having to do a lot more. Like I didn't even know about, let's look at the university website and then really break down what some of this means. The biggest thing I think was I didn't know I could call people on a campus before I was accepted to the campus. Like I very much figured out everything on the university campus was for university students and so being able to – here when I got to campus, like - no you can call like financial aid, you can call these resources, and these aren't things that I knew about.

John describes further that while he does understand now that he had other persons to reach out to for aid, during that time he struggled to identify the resources that were at his disposal because his parents were so pivotal to his schooling career up to that point,

I probably [had other avenues I] just didn't know where to go for em, like certain things

that was beneficial because like my mom knew, oh you can go talk to Ms. Patterson [...]

who was um our guidance counselor and it was, she was like I know there's something

about like a waiver that you can get as far as like because of the - that was something that

we could do. So, you know that things like that, like the opportunities that were afforded

in that regard, and I never thought about the utilization that might have been able to come

out of being [able] to ask them questions about college. Um but uh one of the other

counselors who worked at the school, she had, she had a college background. And so even

thinking about me not thinking about asking these people asking like my band teacher,

asking my counselor, it was very much me feeling like I was so used to either doing

something on my own or asking my parents about it, that when I didn't know it on my own

or couldn't ask my parents, that I felt like I just didn't know where else to go, so that was

the kind of hold that it had on me, you know, I'm not sure where I would go to ask questions

like that, but in reality they probably were there.

Like John, neither of Charlie's parents were college educated, in the next excerpts, Charlie

describes the difficulties that he had navigating the college application process as a first-gen

student. When asked about his parents' level of familiarity with the college application process,

Charlie described,

I honestly wouldn't say that they did understand it, to be honest like when it came to like if

I would have never signed up for the SAT or the ACT, like - they knew there was a test,

and they probably would have asked me. But they didn't know exactly like what it was.

You know and different things like that. So, when it came to the signing up for stuff I knew,

like I had to take initiative like the end of my sophomore year, I was like "Oh, let me sign

up for the SAT," I mean I had to, you know. And even when it came to the SAT, like I'm um, I qualified as low-income so like they gave me fee waivers. They gave me like two fee waivers I think to take the SAT so like I had to fill out the application for that myself. Of course, I asked my mom for help when it came to like the actual answers to financial questions and stuff like that, but um they didn't, I wouldn't say they necessarily knew the like process to like to the extent like you have to when you're doing college applications especially depending [on] what school you want to apply to. You need to start that like the beginning of like August, September, October, [...]

Charlie continues,

By the time it came to the point to do my college process, I kind of already had in my mind that like, "hey, you're going to need to like - make sure you take extra initiative on this," and like my parents had even already told me, it's not like my parents tried to avoid it, they were like, "yeah, we don't know the process like that. But, like, you know, it's up to you to like make sure you get it done and things like that." They always said, "we're here to support you anyway we can," and like If I really really needed their help, I probably like I know they would have sat down with me. But um, they had like other things going on. So, I just, you know I just knew like it was my turn to like really take initiative on this, and I knew, like even going to college like I knew I was going to live on campus and, like I knew I wasn't going to be like living at home and different things like that. So, I knew I was going to have to do that regardless, and it was just another step of life.

In this interaction from the transcript, Charlie shares how his family's lack of familiarity with the college application process impacted his chances of earning a lucrative scholarship,

R: Okay, and I mean, so there's more here, just a little bit more. So yeah, how do you feel, though? Like how did you - obviously you were self-starter, initiative - how did

you feel like if and if you didn't feel anything, that's okay. But how did you feel about like that, like, you know, your parents letting you know that "we're here to support you, but we can't be, you know, whatever we were earlier"

I: I felt frustrated at times, like one thing was. So, the first semester of my senior year I had applied for the [Policy?] scholarship, and I don't know if you know what the [Policy?] scholarship is. But basically, there's the [policy?] foundation, and they have different offices in different cities around the United States, and in each of those offices for that state, there's select schools so like Georgia's at the time was like Texas A&M, George Washington University, and then, like uh, Bernard College and a few other like few liberal arts colleges. And so, I was in that application process. It was a three-step process. The first process was a group interview like a really really big group interview. So, I passed that I got to second process. It was um. It was an individual interview - I passed that. So, I'm like at the last round, like I'm like I'm this close, it's me [and] twenty-four other students. They're selecting like 12 for the scholarship where you get [a] full tuition ride to like, and at the time my school I had narrowed it down to George Washington. So I was like this close, and my best friend Madison, her mom, has a PhD, and her dad is also college educated. She was in the same running, too, so hers was for Texas A&M though, so I find out I didn't get it, but she got it so like, I think like in that moment I was really really sad and depressed for that moment. But I was like frustrated because it was like. I feel like she had had extra resources, but I also feel like I was working hard, like harder to figure those things out versus like she was kind of just like going by, because I had watched YouTube videos I had, like, you know, was really like lurking on like Instagram pages and stuff like that

R: What kind of questions were they asking like? What kind of like? How, yeah, what kind of questions were they asking to where obviously the capital that she had with her parents was a difference. What kind of questions were they asking on that last round?

I: So, the last round it was it was like – I gotta really think back to that - it wasn't just like academic or like college questions. It was more so like, I guess it was like personality question, and like how your personality would like go with the group and stuff like that, so a lot of people in their interview, now that I think back to it like I remember sitting next to this one girl she was like my "dad's a doctor, and he had graduated from the University of Southern California, which you know," in my mind I'm thinking University of Southern California, and then this other person, their dad's a lawyer, their mom is this and their dad is that, and it's like you know I'm still appreciative of like what my parents did and stuff but when you hear that, like your other people's parents have that, and you're sitting in a room with people whose parents have like been through processes, and they're even their grandparents, might have went through the same thing [32:00], but, like you, don't like your grandparents definitely didn't go through that, your parents they definitely didn't go through that. So, like you're starting, it just creates frustration. So like in the moment I was like, you know I'm a very – I was "like you know it's okay Sammy, you know you're going to be all right. You'll get through the interview," but like afterwards, and then, even like I know you'll get to it, even when I entered college there was a moment where like I was just

frustrated because it's like, I felt like I was alone in the sense that everybody had an step up on me because like their parents had went to college, or they just had somebody close to them, who they could go to for that kind of advice.

While Charlie's parents could not provide him with the help he needed during the college application process, he was able to lean on his school counselor for some aid. He states in the interview,

Yeah. So that's where stuff like I was close to my counselor, so like they were able to help me like teach me the process.

Sean, as discussed in the previous section, took the reins of his schooling experience, and this continued during the college application process. Sean details his experience with the college application process in the following exchange,

R: Um, okay. So now let's talk about later high school. So um college going process were your parents aware of, like FAFSA, financial aid, all those various things like, how, how were your parents during your - as you were thinking about. "Oh, I may want to go to school." And did your parents ever talk to you about going to college?

I: So, I think it was an unspoken expectation that you need to go to college,

R: Unspoken – okay.

I: [...] When I think back to the college process of me preparing. It was very once again very similar to me, applying to go to my high school.

R: Okay,

I: Um, I think I was very like, I told them like, "Okay, these are the colleges I'm interested in," But I started my FAFSA, yeah, um. I started that and then handed it to them when they needed tax information, I figured out how to apply to colleges I like that was all led by me.

R: Okay, did you have any like school official or counselor or teacher that was helping you through that?

I: Yeah, my counselor. They, my counselors, were the ones who told me about what Common APP

R: Common APP yep

I: Yeah, they told me about that. Um, PSSU wasn't on Common App at the time, so that was real interesting, me finding out how to do that.

R: Yeah, but um, I feel like fee waivers, they told you about fee waivers and all that. How did you learn about those?

I: With fee waivers, Yeah, they told me about fee waivers, too, with common app. I don't think I had a fee waiver for PSSU, but my parents paid for that like willingly so,

R: Okay. Um. So, you said so. You I mean, you said you. How did you know to do all those things, though, as you were preparing for college,

I: That's the thing. Oh, I think it was really just a mix of my advisor saying, "like, okay, like, can you start applying to college," and me being like, "Okay? Well, this." Because common app was really easy to figure out

R: right.

I: Um. But when it came to figuring out all the moving parts. I think I figured that out when I, opened my PSSU application, and saw it had the little checklist of all the things you need. And I was like, "Oh, I did not know they needed all this." So, then that was me coming in, going everywhere I needed to go to get it.

R: Okay, um, including, including the FAFSA and all that. Um, how was the SAT then how was the SAT like signing up for that process and all that.

I: Um, the SAT that is something we did get fee waivers for Um

R: Interesting.

I: I - that was pretty simple I signed up for that, too.

R: All right.

I: And the ACT.

Due to his family's lack of familiarity with the modern college application cycle and process, Sean navigated his college application process through aid from his guidance counselor, and through trial and error.

Frank also received guidance from his high school counselor during the college application process. When asked about his experience he described that,

Um! I'll say, my counselor at school - the biggest help ever – like she was my like main person to like go to as far as like financial aid, SAT, ACT, like all of that stuff was through her, mainly because my parents didn't have like the best understanding of everything, like even with my older brother and sister, they had like saw them to like college, but they didn't even help, because they didn't know a lot about it, so it was mainly our counselors [who] helped us.

Frank continues,

Um. Well, I did most of the applications like on my own, like, with the help of my counselor, like my parents, didn't even know the schools I had applied for. My brother he was really hoping I was applying to PSSU because him and my dad are huge PSSU fans so that's the only reason PSSU was even on it.

Benedict, whose mother was not familiar with the college application process, received aid from family members who understood the process. He describes,

So, a big proponent of like college in general for me was, or just like researching and doing my like my own, like due diligence for college was my aunt, because she graduated from NYU. So, my mom graduated from [school in Jamaica], but my aunt graduated from NYU. So, she was very accustomed with the like US process, and everything like in that sense. So, she was very on me and my - her daughter - about like making sure we research colleges, research like majors and stuff like that and so like I was immediately put on stuff like that, when I was like a junior. So even though my mom wasn't like very aware of what like the necessary steps, when my aunt would be like telling me I'd be telling my mom. Just keeping her updated with what I'm doing. I think my aunt would also be telling my mom just certain things that my mom needs to know,

Indeed, while Benedict's mother could not directly help him during the process, he felt confident due to the support he received from other close relatives. Benedict described that he still felt empowered by his mother. He states,

> My mom really let me like start taking like the reins more. And understanding that I like I'm a very capable, kid, she raised me, and she knows who I am, and like with even like, just me, explaining things to her, I think she started to be more calm [in just different things] and not trying to like put too much pressure on me just because she knew that I would take the step I would need to take.

Both of Lamar's parents earned their master's degree, and he describes during our conversation that his father led the conversations about college as he progressed through high school,

> So, they - well, first it was my dad asking me "Where do you want to go?" And like I really didn't know at the time, but he brought it up to me like "start thinking from now on what you want to do where you want to go, where you want to live and what type of institute do you want a big school, small school, you know, STEM school?" He said to start thinking about that so when we get to Senior year and we want to go on tours and do applications, you know what their requirements are in those applications, and you can just send them straight in, so yeah, and that's when they brought it up.

Lamar continued to describe that while his parents did not have a "college or bust" mentality, they wanted him to formulate some plan for after high school,

> Yes, I'd say so. It was either for me it was either college or an organized plan of what I would want to do, if not college because they, because we talked about it, and they were

understanding that some people college is not meant for them, but they're like it's hard to make it if you don't have a degree or a plan, so they're like, "if you're not going to college, you need to have a plan,' I was like, "I agree with that. But I'm going to college so."

Lamar also describes that his parents were integral to his completing his college applications,

I really think it was like all him or my mom they're the ones that you know would go out, and they'll be like "Hey, Lamar, we found this app that helps you apply to colleges faster, here's the SAT, like they signed me up for SAT prep, took me to take the tests like they were a really big help, like because I was kind of a procrastinator [...] in high school, [sometimes they would be like] "sit down and like finish these applications, and don't come out of your room until you do," so you know. And but I like I needed to get it done so,

Lamar's parents, because of their familiarity with the college application process were more able to directly assist him and provide support with the mechanical aspects of matriculating into college.

Donald, whose parents had high educational attainment - his mother has a medical degree (MD) and his father has a Master's degree – explains in the following sequence from the transcript that, while his college application process was self-directed due to his independent nature, the school that he attended, and his parents' familiarity with the process helped propel him.

R: [...] So now we're going to transition to that last part and talk about your transition to college. So, the first question I have here is, did either of your parents ever talk to you about going to college.

I: Yeah. Um yeah. At that point I feel like I was pretty self-directed.

R: Okay,

I: I mean, yes, they were supportive in the process. But I especially remember the college application process, I was doing my own thing in applying to schools.

R: Why?

I: Why? I think,

R: Or maybe yeah, maybe why is not the question but like how did you know how to do that?

I: Uh, my school is pretty good with that. And in positive ways and negative ways like there was definitely pressure to go to these types of schools. You know what I'm saying,

R: Yeah,

I: Apply to these types of schools. Ah, but they definitely from the jump. They, like had workshops for - not workshops - but they integrated into class of how to search up schools, how to do your resume things of that nature.

Donald specifies how is parents helped him during the application process in the following sequence,

R: So, I know you mentioned that you were self-directed in the college process, but could you describe if either your parents knew or understood the steps that it took, like such as financial aid, SATs, FAFSA and all that good stuff, college board or what not.

I: Yeah, I guess my dad being a counselor that's a massive, a massive advantage that I had. That was a massive advantage, and my mother she was also supportive.

R: Right,

I: Whether it be taking me to the SAT like driving me to the test or making sure I was studying like even now! Even now, my mom asked, "are you studying for the MCAT on a consistent basis?"

Stark differences were present when participants began describing their experiences during the college application process. Participants who had college educated parents or family members, had more support during the college application process when compared with participants who parents or immediate close relatives were not.

Theme 5: These little lights of theirs: The impact of pressure and race

There were instances, during each conversation, where participants described personal experiences with pressure, and moments where they felt the consequences of their racialized identities. Throughout the interviews, as participants and I conversed about their respective

scholastic experiences, we began to uncover how their identities as Black males were informed by their experiences in their homes and in the various schools that they attended. Some participants shared their views on how their race impacted their experiences, while others spoke of pressures that they internalized from their parents, or from their want to excel scholastically. The following excerpts will detail some of those instances.

Charlie, described in our conversation, how his identity as a mixed-race Black male impacted his schooling experience. Charlie highlights that he noticed during primary school that he may have received preferential treatment from teachers because his mother was White. He spoke about this specifically in the context of school discipline. He explains,

> Yeah, I mean, I feel like I had privilege in my school discipline a little bit [...] my mom did go to open house every year, where you meet your teachers, and I do have a white mother, and a black father, so they would see my white mother, so I mean, obviously like. Could I have still done stuff to get in trouble? Yes, but would it have still been on the same effect as somebody as a male who was like a dark skinned or brown skinned male - no. Like it still would have been harsher for them, I feel like obviously due to colorism and things like that and so I feel like I had privilege in that sense.

Charlie centers his experience in the larger context of power and privilege. He states,

> Yeah, just like with thinking about like power and privilege and different things like that like I know I have privilege with, with my mom being present, but I think, even if she wasn't, just being like light skinned, and being able to like, you know, like I was able to code switch and things like that. So, I knew how to say the right things, or like, you know, do the right things in order to really like, I guess. stay on the good side of the teacher.

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Charlie understood that he embodied certain privileges that his other peers could not because of his skin complexion. When Charlie situates this preferential treatment in the broader landscape of power and privilege, he acknowledges and empathizes with other peers who did not benefit from this unearned privilege.

Donald described at various times in our conversation how his experiences as a Black male in largely white schools impacted him and contributed to the pressure, he placed on himself to succeed. He describes,

> I went to a like a pretty white school you know what I'm saying. So, there was that alienation with that as well [...] yeah, it was not very isolating at the time, but looking back um, that - it kind of sucked. You know what I mean, because I really had no, I mean, it's obviously easier to relate to people who can relate to what you're going through.

Donald, in the excerpt above shares how he could not relate to his white classmates at the schools that he attended. Donald also talked about an experience with school discipline that he felt was racially motivated. He describes,

> [...] I had one particular instance in mind. It was my first year in high school, and I was volunteering with this group [...] I was like working the food station, they were mad that - they had claimed that I didn't receive like permission, even though I like, there was this form that I had to sign out right, and I had my teacher of that period sign the form, and even she was like, "Oh, I just thought" I don't know, I don't even remember, but it was some - you know what I'm saying it was some stuff. I mean, my dad was like, "Okay, this is just how it's going to be," and like we took it as that. You know what I'm saying. There was always a mentality of you had to work like three times as hard and be twice as careful. And so that's just how it had to be.

Donald understood from that instance and other instances that he needed to remain vigilant of how he navigated his schooling. Donald also spoke on the added pressure to succeed that he internalized during his time in the majority white high school. When asked about how his school helped students navigate the college application process, he responded that,

> Uh, my school is pretty good with that. And in positive ways and negative ways like there was definitely pressure to go to these types of schools. You know what I'm saying. Yeah, um, the environment I was in. To be honest, a lot of it was internal as well, I guess, just trying to prove that it was possible. Because every year there's like one or two, one, one black person who gets into the group gets into the schools, and you know I'm saying like excels in schools like from [Hamlin High], and so, I just. I just like expected that to be me?
>
> Um, for whatever reason

Donald felt he needed to exceed expectations as a Black male student. This pressure may have impacted the alienation that he described experiencing in the excerpts above.

Sean, during our conversation, talked about internalizing the pressure to succeed because he viewed himself as a representation of his parents. Indeed, this following exchange highlights Sean's views on the pressure he experienced,

> **R: Okay, um, because you mentioned a word - I don't know if I wrote that every time. But you mentioned that word "pressure" about like three or four times.**
>
> I: Yeah.
>
> **R: So, um, where? So yeah, why, what do you feel like this pressure stemmed from? Was it self, self-pressure, was it' pressure from like parents or other like other external stimuli like, yeah, what did the pressure come from?**
>
> I: Um, I would say, Okay, this about to sound interesting. But um, I would say. The pressure came from me at the time, viewing myself as a representation of my parents.
>
> **R: Okay,**

I: And so, like even more, I always viewed myself as hey? Ooh! Okay, this is about to be interesting. I always because so like, I know, growing up, there was a constant theme of like my dad would like. Tell me my last name would be like, "Oh, you're [an Anderson]. And that means you, you know, like,"

R: Yeah, I see the four. You're the fourth of them – the 4ᵗʰ Anderson [laughs].

I: Yeah, like he was like you can do this you can do this like, just like [like always lifting me up and always being like that.

R: Okay,

I: Um. and so, I think that pressure mainly grew from him. But I kind of also associated with my mom, too, even though she never directly um like. Of course, she'd lift me up, but she wouldn't. With her it kind of felt like I had more room to create expectations versus with my dad. I already felt like as soon as I got the name, like the expectation was set.

Sean's experience with pressure motivated him to excel for his namesake, and while Sean felt weighed down by some of these expectations, he prided himself on being able to successfully navigate those moments and emotions. He states towards the end of our interview that,

[...] Like if I could change anything I wouldn't because I think every step of the way is what got me to knowing who I am, being confident in who I am. Shoot. It sounds so corny, but like wearing like my crown, like I kind of feel like I don't know, like looking back like I could see me having a lot of moments of insecurity.

In our conversation, John shared that he had to employ a major source of cognitive dissonance to successfully navigate spaces as a racialized person. In the excerpt below, John describes in detail how his parents helped him prepare for a world that was not going to resemble the one that he was familiar with in their homes. John's response was to a question on his experience with school discipline as a Black male,

I don't have a major sense, I think. And I think it's actually not even I think I know I very much learned code switching at [a] young age um again like with my dad instilling like this is kind of what it is to be to be black. Um this both my mom, my dad were very real

[with just] acknowledging the reality of what it means to be black in these predominantly white spaces in this yada yada yada. And so even though I didn't have a thing for at the time or know what it was. I think I had mastered code, mastered code switching a lot earlier than I probably even needed to um like I think for a while when [...] I was moving in different ways that set me set me apart from, just peers in general, not even just black peers, peers in general where it's like "oh [John] is going to give you X, Y, Z because that's just who he is,"

John describes his parents as instrumental to his being able to engage with the world as a Black man.

Lamar, Benedict, and Frank all described their experiences navigating predominantly white spaces during our respective conversations.

In the following interaction, Lamar recalled the same feelings of isolation that Donald shared elsewhere in the text.

> **R: Okay, let's talk about that. Let's talk about that a little bit thinking about it now, like, can you see yourself back in those times. How did you feel about, you know, going to schools that are predominantly white,**

> I: I mean looking like in the moment I didn't really think anything of it. And looking back on it now, it definitely influenced my behavior and mindset in a way like I was – I am trying to think of the word. I guess you can say insecure of who I was because like the things I did, you know things my family had like culturally, like just black people in general. I didn't see that in my classmates. So, I thought I was weird or like. I thought I was unnatural, but I didn't realize that like there was a whole population of people like me that like go through the same experience, so like the older I got the more I started realizing that, and I became more secure and confident with it but like in middle school like the very start it was like rough

Benedict, like Donald, and Lamar also understood that his identity as a Black male impacted how he existed in the predominantly White settings that he was navigating. In the

following excerpt, Benedict speaks openly about his experience as a Black male in a small, predominantly White private school.

Okay, that's interesting, um, one big thing about like the private school, is it's so small like my graduating class my - like the average class size they had back when I was in high school at the public school, seven hundred, whereas at the private school my class size was, I want to say, like 74 like it was a very big switch in just like sheer number. And along with that it's like demographics, are also like wildly skewed, because the private school is. I was one of probably five black students in my grade, and, like I think I was the only black male by the time I like left the school, and so that was a big thing, but I guess I grew up in a big suburban area so [with] just like the large [amount] of like white people everywhere. So, I've always been comfortable, being uncomfortable. But like you always get the looks, but it's something I just grew up around and like, learned to ignore that type of stuff

Benedict's radical acceptance of discomfort because of his Blackness is representative of other participants' general acceptance that their Blackness was at odds with the schooling spaces that they were navigating.

In the following exchange, Frank explains the racial dynamics that were present in his school district. His response was to a question that centered on his experience with school discipline.

R: Okay. So how was - how was it with the other students like between the black and the white students at those schools?

I: Um, we got along, but there were times when things would happen. You know your racial incidents and stuff like that. So, there were times for that, and I feel like us growing up. We heard the stories from our parents and stuff, so we knew who to deal with, who not to deal with. We knew the parents, not to be around So it was - it was just kind of we knew how - we knew how to do what we needed to do if you get what I'm saying.

R: Yeah, na, I'm with you. I'm with you. Wow, Thank you for that.

I: Yeah!

R: That changes a lot of the context I had regarding the area you lived in. Um moving right along though. So, it's actually interesting that we're talking about you talking a lot, because – that's not funny. But, um! The next question I have is on school discipline. Um. So that's why I was like it's ironic. Um. Research shows that some black males face unfair and disproportionate disciplinary actions from school officials at the schools they attend if you're comfortable, could you describe your experience with school discipline? And obviously this would be outside of... I guess yeah outside of the phone calls about talking.

I: Um I feel like in my district. It was very much a lot of things that like white kids did. It really depended on who your parents were like if administration knew your parents, and if they were in good with your parents, you were good, you were set, but like for those of us, for them like people who had like black parents who really the administration didn't know really didn't have a voice and a lot of the things that were going on like if they didn't know your parents. If your parents didn't come around to like meetings, school board meetings, and they didn't have like a presence like on campus and stuff like that. Then it was more easier for them to just like, give you the bad end of the stick to like show their force or something, so I've seen how discipline could be bad for other students, but I've never experienced that myself.

Frank details how his parents' experience in the same school district served as a template for how he subsequently navigated his time in primary and secondary school. Frank indirectly references generational trauma when he discussed how he and his other Black counterparts were warned about families to avoid. Further, Frank's description of how parental-administration relationships impacted students' experience with school discipline is a direct reference to the role that cultural capital can play in the student experience. Frank was able to successfully navigate potential pitfalls due to his father's prominence in the community, and his family's previous experience with the school district politics.

Participants' racial identities as Black males impacted how they experienced school. In our conversations, some students shared feelings of isolation, and pressure, while others explained that they had to code switch to survive. Their stories serve as a reminder that time and again, some

young Black males must mentally prepare themselves to enter spaces that at best tolerates them, and at worst strips them of their identities.

Theme 6: Student reflections on their education journeys

I asked each participant to reflect on their education journeys near the end of each conversation. The specific question from the interview guide read, "*what words and phrases come to mind when you think of your schooling experience, and that could be up until now [as students at PSSU].*" I posed this question to give participants the opportunity to describe their journeys in their own words. The following excerpts are the reflections that students shared.

Frank in his reflection used the word "independence," and the phrase, "finding my voice," and centered his experience at PSSU as the setting of his reflection. He states,

My schooling experience, I can definitely say one word is "independent." It has really like allowed me to be on my own, ever since I've like been here [at PSSU]. Um! I have their [parents'] support, they really do support me in a lot of ways like financially a lot but just being here [at PSSU] by myself, I really think of like independence as one. Another one, "finding my voice," and so I feel like ever since I've been at PSSU, I've really been finding my true voice, that's not like overshadowed by what they expect, what the people in the community [think]. You know coming from [a rural area] around like everybody where they think the same. And being a pastor's child, you gotta be this, you gotta be that. But really being at PSSU on my own it has really like allowed me to come into my own.

Sean, in his reflection, spoke about coming into his own identity and the challenges that he has experienced. Sean states,

I think of "challenging and rewarding." Um because PSSU specifically or like - no, all of it. I think I've always had. There's always been this theme of "Who am I?" Um, whether

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that's who am I in comparison to the three Sean's before me. Who am I as [Whitney's] son and she is working in the school? Um! Who am I in comparison to my peers, who look just like me. And who am I in comparison to this whole other race that I know nothing about. And so hm I think that has always been the challenge of setting myself apart and setting my like learning and growing and just figuring out who I am. But the reward like I would say that, like if I could change anything I wouldn't, because I think every step of the way is what got me to knowing who I am, being confident in who I am. Shoot. It sounds so corny, but like wearing like my crown, like I kind of feel like I don't know, like looking back like I could see me having a lot of moments of insecurity. But now it's kind of like, Okay, I know who I am - Humble.

Sean's worry that his reflection was "corny," was not how I perceived it – a point that I shared with him in our conversation. His ability to consciously reflect on his journey to finding himself at this stage in his life is admirable, and inspiring.

John centered his reflection on the notion that "knowledge is power" - a phrase that his parents repeated to him and his siblings throughout their lives. He also uses other words like "worrisome and confusion," when specifically discussing his transition to college. John explains,

Knowledge is power. Yeah. Yeah, that was a big one that came up because again [my] parents said them a lot. But then the other hand of things when it comes down to like for example my college transition. "Confusing and worrisome," but like I think the term is uh "eager" like it was an anxiousness but it was a positive anxiousness so I was very eager to experience college, but I wasn't sure what it would be [...] it's like that, that, that anxiety was legit, but it was more about, I don't know what colleges can provide, like, I don't know what's gonna come out of it, I don't know if this is like the best choice, but it was only me

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wanting to find out about, so I was eager to experience it but still in that space of anxiousness.

John's anxiety, and eagerness to experience college echoes some of the sentiments that other participants shared. John successfully managed his pre-college anxiety and is on the cusp of graduating this Spring.

Charlie's reflection encompassed all the pivotal moments in his scholastic journey. He eloquently states that,

"Experience" is one that comes to mind. Yeah, like the overall experience. So basically, like, I think, coming to college, I was looking at it as more of like – obviously I wanted an experience but um- but I was like. I need to have this GPA, I need to get into the Honors College, I need to get this LSAT score, so I can um go, and so I can go to like the go to Harvard, or something like Harvard Law School, so that I can like um have the best law job and like, do what I want to do in society. But like coming [to PSSU] like my mindset, has grown so much just like anybody else's should from like when I entered as a freshman to now, as a third year here at [PSSU] so like, just through the different experiences I've had, through the different friends I've made. Um. I recently got to study abroad this past summer in South Africa, so that was like a whole life changing thing within itself, like you just don't realize how much is truly out there until, like you go to college, and you meet different people talk to different people and different things like that.

Charlie continues,

I would say, um, I'm trying to think, I would say testing, not testing but like. You know where you go through multiple like you have a high point and a low point like I'm trying to think the word for it. But like kind of like - Yeah. So, like, just like going through the

waters, I guess it would be a good experience because, as much as like, you always want to have that high tide of an experience. It's not always going to be like that, and that's something I had to realize, because I would say I'm a very optimistic person. That's just how I work. I like to look at the high side of things, but I think college has taught me that it's not always going to be the high side of things, and sometimes you really have to evaluate like, if you're feeling this way, it's for a reason you can't just say, "Oh, things are getting better," like I need to question why I'm feeling a certain way, and then I need to try to do what I need to do to either like make myself feel better or figure out why I'm feeling like that.

Benedict spoke about the rigor of his school district during his reflection. He reflected that the constant healthy competition that he experienced motivated him to strive for greatness. Benedict states,

Words for my schooling experience? Like "what else?" because I feel like, especially in Titanic County. Everyone has a thousand - like Titanic County is a factory. They're always trying to make more and more successful students. I could name, like my friends, off the top of my head, who have, like all sorts of different things going for them. It was always like it's not exactly like you're competing with your friends. But it's always like you're trying to, you're trying to be able to like match, because you're always trying to like go up in whatever leadership position you're in, trying to be the top of your class trying to do whatever like it's, it's a very go, go, go, mentality and everyone just tries to be the best they can be.

I followed up this first part of the reflection by asking Benedict his thoughts on the competition he experienced. He continued by stating that,

It's, it's good and bad. It could definitely like you would definitely – it stresses some people out, I guess my, how I was raised. It's like I kind of thrived, and I love. I love to do stuff when I'm not doing stuff. I feel so unproductive maybe that's partly just because, like the "Go, go go" mentality [of] like Titanic it was like there's point. It's really helped me out in college in particular, [because, any - like I love, whenever I have like an opportunity, I can take on like I want to try it out. And it also comes with like I've had to learn while being here like I can't do everything just because there's a thousand clubs, I'm sure, I'd have a great time in, but I just don't have a thousand club time,

Benedict concluded by saying that while he enjoyed the competition, and the mentality that it instilled in him, he still places limits on his level of engagement for mental health purposes.

Lamar's reflection was divided into sections that corresponded with his time in middle school, and high school. He stated that,

Yeah. Um, I don't know. I feel like It's hard to give words or phrases overall. I feel like they're words or phrases for like sections. Uh middle school. Middle school to like sophomore year, it was really like it was, it was kind a "breeze" like I would. I didn't really study like I just, looked at classes and like did tests based off that. Junior year is when it started to get hard for real. That's when my - I'd say like challenging, as a way to describe junior year and then senior year was a mix of challenging and like [easy] like. It's a weird way to describe it but I had one class that, like absolutely terrorized me. I took calculus, it just, it was horrible, but like every other class, was like [snaps fingers] So it was like a real mix. So yeah,

Lamar, unlike other participants, exclusively focused on his experiences prior to enrolling at PSSU.

Donald used an array of words to describe his schooling experience. The following exchange from the transcript, explores his reflections.

> **R:So, what words and phrases come to mind when you think of your schooling experience up until now, and you can even break it down from the different stages. But yeah, what words or phrases come to mind.**

> I: I say, "rigorous, holistic, um, challenging" what words do I associate with my education?

> **R: Mhm. So, you would say "rigorous, holistic, challenging"?**

> I: Yeah, I would say that. Yeah. Competitive. Um, yeah, I would say that.

> **R: Okay. So okay, I'm gonna add something else to that, what words or phrases come to mind when you think about yourself.**

> I: Oh myself?

> **R: Oh, yes, yeah, no. The first part was right. You answered it the right way, so I'm just adding this like what words or phrases come to mind when you think of yourself and your identity during your schooling experience?**

> I: And this is, could you specify like a time period?

> **R: Yeah, I mean, I'm opening it up until now, and you can break it down if you want to. But I'm just saying like as a recap of like this is "me, Nicholas, now sitting before you," you know I'm saying like what words come to mind you know**

> I: Yeah, overall, I'd say, "curious, hard-working, and competitive" um yeah, "focused to a fault" at times, many times.

> **R: Hmm, okay, why'd you say focused to a fault?**

> I: Because there are certain elements of your identity that you need to bolster or broaden outside of school [there are certain things] that cannot be, you know what I'm saying, explored or expressed in school. You know what I'm saying. So, yeah, I was fortunate to start doing poetry, and I have movement and things of that nature. But imagine if I had just put all my stock in, you know I'm saying the academic aspect.

> **R: "Curious, hardworking, competitive and focused to a fault."**

> I: Yeah, I would say that.

In the exchange above, Donald shows some introspection when detailing his own identity and his feelings about his schooling experience. By taking ownership of his educational experience and by engaging in things like poetry, Donald, opens himself up to spiritually nourishing experiences.

The reflection portions of the interviews allowed participants to reminisce on their educational journeys through their own words. From the excerpts above, we see that each participant had their unique reflections. Some focused on middle school and high school, others focused on the personal growth that they have experienced, while others spoke on the conditions in their school district that motivated them to strive for greatness.

Summary

The themes that were selected captured the scope of participants' educational journeys. The first four themes show that all parents, regardless of socioeconomic status, were actively engaged in their children's educations, and expected their children to exceed academically. The parental expectations and the eventual children buy-in is supported by Harris and Robinson's (2016) stage-setting framework. The tenet of Lareau's (2011) parental practices framework, that states that parents' educational attainment and income impact their parenting and engagement practices, was not as prevalent until participants began sharing their experiences during the college application process. Participants' whose parents, or close family relatives, had earned credentials from 4-year post-secondary institutions, were able to directly benefit from their knowledge and experience when compared to participants with family members who did not have those credentials at the time of their applications.

Participants also described a growing sense of independence that coincided with a decrease in their parents' engagement practices. During our conversation on their racialized identities, participants shared various instances where they felt that their "Black maleness" was not supported

by the environments they were in, and that these experiences proved to be both disruptive and valuable – valuable in the lessons that these experiences taught them. Some participants talked about experiencing pressures that they described as both positive and negative. The last theme, which featured participants' reflection on their educational journeys, was included to ensure that readers engage with how these young men described their own paths.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Introduction

Children have seldom been the focal point of parent engagement scholarship, thus this study contributed to the parent engagement scholarship by investigating how currently enrolled successful Black males at PSSU characterized their parents' engagement. Using am adaptation of Annette Lareau's (2011) parental practices framework, and Harris and Robinson's (2016) stage-setting framework, I examined how participants characterized their parents' engagement practices, how their race and gender impacted their schooling experiences, and their experiences during their transition to PSSU. This study contributed to the growing literature focusing on Black male success in college. This chapter includes a discussion of the implications of the study's findings, recommendations for policy and practice, and the study's conclusion.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to understand how currently enrolled successful Black undergraduate male students at PSSU characterized their parents' engagement practices during their primary and secondary schooling years. This parent engagement study, centered students' perceptions of their parents' efforts, instead of their parents. This study's particular focus on children's perceptions of their parents' engagement practices is a departure from the parent engagement scholarship that usually centers parents as the primary agents. Indeed, if children are included in a typical parent engagement study they are usually paired with their parents or caretakers. This study contributes to the parent engagement scholarship in several ways.

First, by centering how they describe their parents' engagement practices, my participants use their own voices to define their own experiences. While it is important to give voice to parents who navigate school systems as they attempt to engage with their children's education, it is equally important to also include how their children interpreted those efforts. Second, by having children characterize their parents' efforts, scholars can have a more direct understanding of how parent engagement practices can differ from the typically constructed home-based versus school-based dichotomy. For example, Benedict, still described his mother as playing a pivotal role in his scholastic journey, even though she could not be engaged in many school-based activities. Benedict credited her presence as a primary motivating factor for him – this is a point that could have been missed if we failed to include children's perception in the parent engagement scholarship.

By selecting successful Black males, who are currently enrolled at a highly selective university, this study adds context to the too often deficit-based narratives that are attached to this population's capacity to achieve. Further, the details that some participants shared, regarding the hardships they experienced during their transition to PSSU, has policy implications for school officials. Indeed, officials ought to create more direct and active equitable college transition policies for students and families with minimal post-secondary experience. Additionally, students' descriptions of their parents as being primary motivators, and stage-setters for their eventual success supports the notion that effective engagement is not exclusive to school-based activities. Student noted that their parents' efforts during their primary schooling years helped engender a sense of independence, and confidence that allowed them to select extracurricular activities, and eventually a post-secondary institution that accommodated all their needs. This sense of independence was crucial to their development as Black males engaging in racially adverse spaces.

Last, students shared that their success often came despite the racial aggressions that they experienced at various points in their scholastic journeys. Participants credited their strong family foundation for their traversing those racially adverse waters.

Findings

Theme 1: Parent expectations set the stage for academic journeys

My interview guide included questions that asked participants to describe their parents' expectations. Every participant, regardless of parental income, education, or household structure, stated that their parents expected them to perform well in the classroom. In each conversation, participants shared that their parents verbalized these expectations at various points during their early schooling years. Participants shared that a primary motivator for their parents telling them to perform well in school was so that they, the children, could have flexibility as working adults. Indeed, Charlie, Donald, Lamar, Sean, and John each spoke to this, "I want you to have better than I do," message during our conversations.

Participants' description of their parents' expectations relates to a concept that is central to Harris and Robinson's (2016) stage-setting framework. The authors note that, for the stage to be set, academically, parents, through their expectations, must attempt to instill in their children, the belief that education is important, and that children must then internalize that for themselves. Some education scholars have explored the link between parent expectation and student outcome. In their study, Froiland and Davidson (2014) used nationally representative data from National Household Educational surveys and found that parental expectations were positively associated with children's schooling outcomes, - even more positively associated than the impact of socioeconomic status. They write that, "these findings suggest that psychologists and educators should be aware of the potential for parents to play a significant role (via expectations and

developing supportive relationships with educators) in children's education, even in middle and high school."

Theme 2: Parents were more engaged during primary schooling years

All participants shared that their parents, or close family relatives, were more engaged in their day-to-day schooling activities during their primary schooling years. Students recalled that their parents helped them complete homework, and school projects; drove them to extra-curricular activities; volunteered at their schools and were involved in their elementary schools' PTA. Some participants had parents who were educators, which increased their (the parents') engagement and familiarity with their sons' educational experience. Indeed, Sean, John, and Lamar's mothers were employed by their school districts. John's mother served as a substitute teacher at other schools in the district, Sean's mother was a secretary at his charter school, and Lamar's mother was a teacher at the elementary school that he attended. Further, Donald's father, who was a counselor in his school district, home-schooled Donald, and his brothers when they were preschool aged. Charlie described in our conversation, that his mother was so active in his elementary school that there would be days where he would not be surprised to see her in the school building. Frank shared that both of his parents were intent on ensuring that his homework was finished during his elementary years.

The descriptions that participants shared regarding their parents' engagement practices did not align with a tenet in this study's adaptation of Lareau's (2011) framework. While Lareau (2011) found that middle and upper middle class parents' level of engagement with their children's schooling differed from their working-class counterparts, the parents in this study, based on their children's descriptions, had similar engagement practices regardless of socioeconomic status. As

I analyzed the data, I found that these specific participants' parental engagement did not differentiate on parental income and education during their primary schooling years.

Participants shared that their parents' level of engagement decreased during their secondary schooling years. The changes that participants noticed in their parents' engagement is supported by scholars who examine the arc of parent engagement over time. Indeed, scholars conclude that observed parent engagement decreases as children become older (Gonida & Cortina 2014; Cooper et al., 2000; Green et al., 2007). Wang et al., 2014 in their study of parent engagement and child outcomes note the following on the trajectory of parent engagement. The authors state,

> In moving beyond static conceptualizations of parental involvement in education, parental involvement does, indeed, change over the course of secondary school. Whether it is because parents feel marginalized from school or are attempting to include their teens as active agents in their own academic development and mental health, communication between home and school (quality and prevention focused) declined across the middle and high school levels.

A decrease in observed parent engagement may be more attributed to an increased sense of accountability, and independence from children instead of a decrease in interest from parents.

Theme 3: Increased Student Autonomy

Participants in this study shared that they became more autonomous and independent in their own educations as the conversations transitioned to their experiences with their parents' engagement in secondary school. While this theme was present in every conversation, the two participants who embodied this the most were Sean and Donald. Sean became more active in his schooling when he transitioned from a charter school, where his mother worked, to a public school in the seventh grade. There, Sean described that he did not bridge the parent-teacher relationship,

and was more guarded with his grades, and his day-to-day experiences due to a growing sense of independence. Donald described in our conversation that he has always had a burgeoning sense of independence, and that he began embracing this as he transitioned to middle school. He comically mentioned in our interview that perhaps this sense of independence was furnished by his thinking he was, "hot sh*t" as he became an adolescent. Donald shared that while his parents were still vested in his education, he skirted their inquiries about his day-to-day experience. Both Donald and Sean eventually became the main drivers of their education.

Parent engagement scholars write about this ascent of student autonomy that usually coincides with the descent of observed parent engagement. Indeed, one of the conclusions that Ross (2016) found in their study, which examined the effects of parental engagement on student high school completion and college attendance, was that as students grow in confidence and maturity, they seek to be more independent in their schooling. Indeed Ross (2016) writes that,

> [...] research [...] shows a steady decline in parental involvement once children reach the middle and high school years. During this time, adolescents begin to express a desire for more independence and autonomy.

Wang et. al (2014), in their longitudinal mixed-methods study that examined the long-term impacts of parent engagement on their adolescents' academic, behavioral, and emotional adjustment across middle school and high school, had a measure for student independence that they called *scaffolding independence.* The authors, who administered questionnaires and conducted follow-up interviews with some of the adolescents' primary caregivers, defined *scaffolding independence* as, "[...] the extent to which parents provide opportunities for their child to take responsibility for schoolwork and to develop solutions to problems on their own (p. 2156)." The authors found that students' sense of independence, in their study, may have occurred because parents shifted their engagement

efforts, which subsequently allowed students to nourish their growing sense of autonomy. They note,

> Scaffolding independence, and enabling greater autonomy, responsibility and decision making are central parts of the renegotiation of the parent-adolescent relationship. As such, scaffolding independence is consistent with the changes that parents make as their adolescents' developmental needs shift (p. 2163).

Parents' shifting engagement practices, which Wang et. al (2014) conclude furnishes their children's sense of independence, could have impacted Sean and Donald's sense of autonomy during their adolescence. Indeed, as Donald and Sean explained how they took the reins of their own educational journeys, their parents, who could have sensed their son's growing autonomy, may have also shifted their approaches. Unfortunately, in a study which examined how children characterized their parents' engagement practices, I could not directly measure how parents' shifting engagement practices impacted their sons' sense of independence.

Theme 4: Students experience differences in transition to college

Participants had different experiences during the college application process. Students whose parents, or close family relatives, earned a bachelor's degree or higher at the time of their application, had less difficulties during the process when compared to participants' whose parents or close relatives had not earned those credentials. Those students, Sean, Charlie, Frank, and John described relying on their high school counselors, or on themselves, when they applied to college. The other trio – Lamar, Donald, and Benedict - recalled feeling supported by their parents or close family relatives. Lamar, during our conversation, shared that his parents presented him with various resources that could aid him as he applied for college. Benedict, whose aunt graduated from a highly selective university, described that he and his cousins were encouraged early on in

their high school journeys to consider potential majors, and careers and scholarship opportunities. Donald's parents motivated him through their expectations and guidance during his college application process.

The cultural capital component of Lareau's (2011) parental practices framework was most evident during this portion of the participant interviews. Participants from middle- and upper-class households, with college educated parents or close relatives, were able to rely on their immediate circles as they navigated the college application process. The capital that their parents accrued through their own experiences in college, and the subsequent network that they built, transferred to their children who did not have to seek outside aid. Participants from working class households, with parents who had not earned credentials from a four-year degree granting institution at the time of their applications, described feeling frustrated with their circumstances. Unable to rely on their parents' cultural capital, these participants sought aid from school counselors.

Scholars have written about the different college application experiences that students can have. Studies have found that those students who cannot directly benefit from their parents' cultural capital rely on their counselors. Indeed, Robinson and Roksa (2016), in their study of recent high school graduates and factors that led them to apply, found that seeing a counselor played a significant role in predicting applications to college. Similarly, Gast (2021) who used data from fieldwork observations and semi-structured interviews to investigate the college going norms at a large California high school, found that students from more affluent backgrounds, who knew persons who had gone to college, were more likely to use their networks. Bryan et al., (2011), in their study, analyzed the relationship between student counselor visits and a student's likelihood to apply to college. The authors used logistic regression analysis to find that students who reported

having more contact with their school college counselors were more likely to seek admission to college. Bryan et al., (2011) write,

> Contact of students with the school counselor for college information provides a positive advantage [contributes to their likeliness to apply for college] for students who see the school counselor by 10th grade and for less affluent students throughout their high school years (p. 196).

While all students successfully matriculated to PSSU, their paths to the university, especially during the college application process, differed based on their socioeconomic status.

Theme 5: These little lights of theirs: The impact of pressure and race

I dedicated the last portion of the interview to a discussion about race, and gender. In a study that specifically centers how Black males describe their parents' engagement practices, as well as their own schooling experiences, it was important to discuss how participants felt their race impacted their time as primary and secondary school students. This portion of the interview was guided by the critical race theory (CRT) tenet that, racism is a normal fact of daily life in America, and that its tentacles are so interwoven that it can be unrecognizable (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Participants described that their identities did impact their experiences in primary and secondary schools. Each participant spoke about being "othered", directly or indirectly, due to their gender and race by classmates, school officials, or teachers. While others described feelings of pressure, both internal and external, to succeed academically.

Being "othered" impacted participants' schooling experiences. Charlie, and John specifically mentioned code-switching as coping mechanisms that they employed, while others spoke about emotionally distancing themselves and just "dealing with" the reality. Some participants successfully matriculated into PSSU despite being educated in environments where

they may have felt that they didn't matter. Tucker et al., (2010) in their study of high achieving Black males' feelings of mattering concluded that for their students,

> The experience of feeling that they mattered at school, that their opinions were taken seriously by others, and that they were valued as individuals, helped them to weather academically difficult times and stay motivated (p. 142).

Participants' abilities to exceed despite these obstacles is a testament to their own grit.

The tenets of Shaun Harpers' Anti-Deficit Framework were also present during this portion of the conversation, as participants described their experiences as Black males striving to excel in settings that historically stereotyped them. Harper (2015) describes that his anti-deficit framework is,

> [...] guided by a belief that despite what is consistently reported in media [...] there are many Black male students who enter postsecondary institutions with high levels of academic preparation, support, and motivation, which enables them to succeed academically (p. 142).

Donald spoke at length about the internal pressure that he felt to be one of the few Black students in his predominantly white high school to matriculate to a highly selective university. And Benedict, during his reflection on his educational journey reflected on the pressure that he internalized due to the rigor of his school district.

I also asked participants to describe their experiences with school discipline. While none of the participants in this study received out of school suspension, they all described at least one instance where they were reprimanded for minor offenses, such as talking in class, being tardy, or roughhousing. Some of the participants felt that these disciplinary cautions were racially motivated. Participants' feelings that their disciplinary experiences were racially motivated is

supported by scholars who study Black students and their families' experiences with school discipline. Indeed, Bell (2020), in his qualitative study of Black families' experiences with out of school suspension, found that schools limited their voices throughout the adjudication process and that students felt that administrators targeted them due to their cultural differences. In their study of Black mothers' experiences with children who have been pushed out by their schools, Powells and Coles (2018) note that some participants worked tirelessly to mitigate the impact that negative stereotypes could have on their children. The following quote from a participant in their study, mirrors some of the things that Charlie, and John shared their parents did to mitigate the impact of stereotypes,

> What I've tried to do is develop relationships with the teachers and the administration because what's funny is I say, "Well, if they like me, they'll treat my kid better." Also, tried to make sure that my education level and all of that is known in some way, shape, or form so that they know that I'm not . . . [Pauses] Because I know that they're looking at me as a single mother, uneducated, poor, and so to try to dispel that stereotype. [Takes a deep breath] I'm upset. It makes me angry that I have to do that (p. 20).

Overall, by selecting high achieving Black males to be my participants in this study, I attempted to provide counternarratives to the stereotypes that society has attached to Black males. Unfortunately, as evidenced by the excerpts in the previous chapters, these Black males still could not avoid some of the pitfalls of the American caste system (Wilkerson, 2020).

Recommendations and implications for institutional policy and practice

Parent Engagement as Federal Policy

The first federally mandated parent engagement initiative was included in President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty era policies for civil rights which included the Fair Housing

Act, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Contained in ESEA was Title I which were funds allocated to school districts for the purpose of educating students from low-income families (NCES). Title I allocation, while small in comparison to state and local funding, provides extra financial assistance to schools who service low-income pupils. School districts and schools must follow the guidelines issued in Title I to receive the earmarked funds. Included in the guidelines for Title I is a mandate that schools actively nurture the school to parent, or caregiver, relationship (ESEA, Title I, part A). The policy defines parental engagement as, "the participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (SEDL, 2002, p. 13). More guidance from the parental involvement section of ESEA states:

- Parents play an important role in their child's education.

- The child's school should actively include parents in the education process.

- Parents are given full information regarding their children's education as well as the opportunity to serve on committees to assist in their children's learning opportunities (SEDL, 2002).

The first reauthorization of ESEA in the 21st century came during the George W. Bush administration through No Child Left Behind. This reauthorization continued the parent involvement function of ESEA by advising that,

School districts and schools that receive Title I, Part A funds must implement parental involvement efforts, [and that activities], programs, and procedures must be planned with the "meaningful consultation" of parents (SEDL, 2002, pg. 15).

The latest reauthorization of ESEA occurred during the Obama administration. In 2015, ESSA was ratified with as much controversy as its direct predecessor. The introduction of Race to The Top forced states to reorganize resources to compete for education grants from the Department of Education. Although many new policies were attached to ESSA, this reauthorization still included a significant portion of the original parent involvement language from ESEA. ESSA, in accordance with ESEA, required that local educational agencies receiving Title I funds plan and implement parent and family involvement tactics to ameliorate student academic achievement (ESSA, 2015).

Federal education policies have long recognized the "needs of parents and family members to assist with the learning of their children, including engaging with school personnel and teachers (ESSA, 2015, p. 69)," because as outlined earlier, parents' engagement in their children's education improves academic outcomes. Parent engagement is facilitated when schools and local education agencies offer programs and opportunities for parents to connect with the schools that their children attend.

Policy Implications

I asked each participant to recommend a policy that, if enacted during their years as primary and secondary school students, could have helped either them or their parents have a more positive experience. Below I highlight two of the most popular policy recommendations.

A More Dedicated School-Parent Partnership

Sean, whose independence during his middle school years, caused him to sever the link between his educators and his parents, recommended that schools and administrators do more to nurture the relationships with parents beyond the normal, "call home if a child is in trouble" dynamic that he and his peers were accustomed to. Sean described in our interview,

Oooh even though, I probably would have hated it. And looking back, I could see it being a huge benefit, definitely [a] higher emphasis on individual teachers reaching it out to both parents. Because I think that, and it doesn't have to be in a way of like. "Oh, you're not doing this," let me tell you. Yeah, it could be in a way of just like getting to know who the parents are, getting to know their personalities. So, when the child comes into the room like you can see, you can have more context as to why the child may act like that or why the child may not be doing that well in something.

Sean states later in our conversation, how this community building between teachers and parents can be facilitated through fun-filled and relaxing activities,

I would definitely say that like, if not, if not teachers, like reaching out like individually, I would definitely say, having more interactive things with like specifically parents, students, teachers, and it doesn't have to be academic like just something fun like a field day [...] Like I don't know bring your parent to field day, or something like that, like just something where y'all can all get out, be yourself and just have a good time.

One of Lamar's policy recommendations mirrored Sean's call for more dedicated school-to-parent communication – beyond moments when students are not performing. His response,

Yeah, I mean, I'd say more outreach from teachers specifically not waiting till the last minute you know when their students, you know, got a zero in the class, not waiting until then to email the parents like email when you see, like a trend forming. And then I feel like that would be a lot - that would be very helpful.

Charlie also echoed some of Sean and Lamar's thoughts. Charlie's recommendation adds a social justice context which has ramifications for school discipline and student push-out. Charlie describes,

[...] And I think that's the - I think that was part of the problem with like there might be like when you look at two students like. And let's say it's like a white student and a black student. You might automatically deem the black student bad because of some something that they did. But if you don't understand the context as to why they might be acting a certain way, why, they might be doing something, why they might even be talking a certain way, then it's like you're automatically like looking at them in a certain frame that's going to frame them for the rest of their education, and I've seen it happen to so many people, so many people that like could have did so much. But then it's like they didn't get enough attention from those teachers. So, I think if I were like to enact a policy I mean, this is like in a vague sense, like I would enact, you know, just understanding. And this is like for people to continue when they become teachers but just understanding, like honestly systemic racism, and how that plays into like our school system - school to prison pipeline.

Charlie, Sean, and Lamar's recommendation for a more collaborative union between parents and students indirectly cites the motivation that ESEA framers had when they introduced the parent engagement initiative in their policy. With a student population that is becoming increasingly diverse by the decade, educators and administrators must ensure that they remain inclusive in their approaches to bridging the relationship that they have with their students' parents. Luckily, over the past decade, school districts have become more intent on providing their staff with culturally responsive professional development opportunities. While these hour-long seminars that happen quarterly in some school districts are a positive first step, school districts and their officials must arm their teachers with more frequent opportunities to learn and understand the lives of the students and parents with backgrounds that are different from theirs.

Charlie's addition about the impact that systemic racism has on school discipline and life outcomes for children who are pushed out of school strengthens the need for more direct teacher and administrator professional development. School discipline rates differ by racial subgroups with Black males facing more severe punishment while also being forced out of school at higher rates than any other population. A more collaborative approach between schools and parents, and more direct professional development for teachers could help to reverse this decades-long trend.

Better aid for parents of first-gen students

The interview participants whose parents were not familiar with the college application process overwhelmingly recommended as their policy, for schools to act as conduits to show parents or families, with minimal higher education experience, how to apply to college. Benedict whose foreign-born mother was not familiar with the American college application process described in our conversation,

> I'd say definitely like, I think, a lot of what colleges and schools in general do to like to try to get more kids and like to like aim high or whatever, is they'll reach out to like the kids, and stuff. But I wish, like there would be like school policy to make, I don't know like a pre-college seminar for parents, because, like my mom, was like, I took a lot of the reins and all, although, I like it, [and like it] helped me grow as a person it's like. It was stressful at times, because, while other people have, like their parents, remind them to put like blank blank, blank in on time. But for me it's like I have to keep all that on my head while also dealing with like my classwork, and like the job I had during um high school like it was a lot of stress I'd put myself under because I was the one who had to like to reach out to my mom to [make sure she] understood.

Lamar, whose parents were college educated, also recommended that schools institute programs for parents who are not familiar with the college application process. He states,

> I was gonna say like, and you were talking about uh parents who didn't go to college? I feel like increased communication and outreach from the school would help and putting it in terms like putting it in layman's terms, trying to think of a way to describe it breaking down what they are doing with the student in a way so like you're kind of teaching them as well. I feel like that would be beneficial.

Frank whose parents had minimal experience with higher education, also recommends more aid for parents during the college transition,

> Yeah, I would definitely say, helping parents, not just helping students understand the process of like taking the SAT, college application, financial aid, but also let parents understand that entire process. And um, not just understanding the process of college, but also helping them - especially parents from rural Georgia where I come from, helping them understand the support and the resources that are available at these higher education institutions for their children [...] I feel like that was one thing that my parents struggled with, and a lot of parents from back home really struggled like, "Okay, I'm sending my child off here, but I really don't know a lot, because I haven't been in that space." And so, like a lot of parents where I'm from they haven't been to like college or anything. So, they've never been in those spaces to know what's in those spaces. So really just increasing the knowledge for parents like, "Hey? Yeah, this is what's available, and this is what students can do with those degrees," because like a [lot of] parents see it as worthless to be honest.

Schools provide much needed college preparatory options to their students via either specific course offerings, SAT prep opportunities, or through the help of trained counselors who help students navigate the college application process. Indeed, the students in this study whose parents were not familiar with the college application process all spoke on the crucial role their counselors played into their putting forth competitive college applications. However, some participants also lamented how their parents' unfamiliarity with the process contributed to some of the stressors that they experienced. Students and parents can benefit from school-led seminars that focus on providing families with the necessary information and materials to successfully navigate the intricate components of submitting college applications. There are national programs that already exist that equip schools with College Advisers who arm the students with the knowledge to appropriately complete their FAFSA, navigate the Common App, and apply for scholarships. Omitted from that equation are those parents who remain uninformed about the experience that their children – in the case of this study their sons – are having, with the children, as Benedict shared in the excerpt above, often taking on the responsibility of informing their parents as well as educating themselves. Mandating that schools, who receive Title I funds, contribute a portion of their parent engagement activities to developing college learning initiatives for families could ease the transition to college and relieve students of some of the stressors that are present during the college application process.

Parent Engagement School Based Policy Recommendations

Schools who receive Title I funds are mandated to administer programs whose goals are to engage the parents of the population who make up their student bodies. Some schools, in districts across the U.S, have worked diligently to include parents as active stakeholders in their schooling processes, while other schools have yet to engage parents at the levels that are mandated by the

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newest reauthorization of ESEA (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020). This section complements the previous, participant-led recommendations, by providing policy-based considerations that schools could implement in their parent-engagement strategies.

Leverage Local Community Stakeholders to Help Bridge Relationships

Schools that struggle to engage their students' parents may consider building relationships with local stakeholder groups in their efforts to improve their relationships with parents (Quezada et al., 2013; Van Roekel, 2008; Stefanski et al., 2016). These local entities could include eateries, churches, and other community staples that are located near the schools to better aid their parent engagement efforts. Reece et al., (2013) recognize how important leveraging neighborhood stakeholders can prove for a school who is focused on ameliorating the parent-school relationship. The authors write that,

> [....] Attention to neighborhood factors is important to consider in efforts to increase the engagement of lower-income parents in their children's schooling. The neighborhood in which parents live can affect the supports available to them. How long one has lived in a neighborhood is correlated with one's sense of attachment and belongingness to that community as well as social support ties in the neighborhood (p. 208).

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) provides guidance for how schools in their state can leverage local community stakeholders for their parent engagement endeavors. These strategies could be utilized by districts across the country. Some of those recommendations are reproduced below:

- Provide families with a list of free/low-cost recreational options (e.g., city parks, recreation centers, gyms, outdoor sports fields, etc.) in the community.

- Assist families in obtaining and using library cards.

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- Maintain a community resource handbook that identifies various support services (e.g., housing, health, legal assistance, domestic violence, etc.)

- Invite a different community organization to visit the prekindergarten program each month to share information with families and answer questions about available services.

- Regularly provide families with up-to-date information on community resources (e.g., adult schools that offer GED coursework, community health organizations, recreational options, resale shops, social service organizations, etc.) (TEA).

TEA's cost-effective suggestions to engage local stakeholders could impact the affinity that parents have with their schools and could strengthen the parent-school relationship.

Leverage Parents as Partners

Schools can leverage parents as equal partners in shaping the educational lives of the students who they teach. Oostdamn and Hooge (2013) write that, although parents and schools should hold equal responsibilities in this partnership, schools, because they have historically served as gatekeepers ought to take initiative when building this relationship. The authors write,

Although a partnership between parents and school is one of equality, both have their own responsibilities. Therefore, it is important that schools obtain a clear picture of the different types of parents and formulate an unequivocal policy vision with regard to active parenting. In forming educational partnerships schools need to seek a balance between their professional distance and autonomy versus a positive and open attitude towards parent involvement (p. 348).

Mapp and Bergman (2019) developed a framework for how the school-parent partnership model can be actualized. The authors were commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education to create a model that could help educators, families, and schools – referred to as "stakeholders"

in this paradigm – develop mutually beneficial partnerships to improve the home-school relationship. In the dual-capacity framework, Mapp and Bergman (2019) categorize the family-school partnership into four dimensions that, if observed by all stakeholders, could create an effective home-school partnership. The sections in the framework are titled, "The Challenge, "Essential Conditions," "Policy and Program Goals," and "Capacity Outcomes."

The first section of the framework highlights the obstacles that educators and families face when trying to form effective partnerships. The authors write, "the challenge helps us understand some of the reasons why educators and families may have struggled to build trusting and effective partnerships." In the essential conditions section, the authors provide guidelines for how stakeholders can progress beyond the challenges to build relationships. Mapp and Bergman (2019) write that the "essential conditions offer research-based guidance for best practices to cultivate and sustain partnerships."

The essential condition section is divided into "process conditions," - characteristics that stakeholder in a partnership should observe for an effective partnership - and "organizational conditions," which are characteristics that leaders of organizations - school officials and administrators - should try and implement in their organizational structures.

After the challenges and essential conditions are established, educators and stakeholders must work together to build policies and program goals. The authors write that, "the policy and program goals highlight the goals and outcomes that should emerge for educators and families when the essential conditions are met.

Figure 6

Dual-Capacity Framework
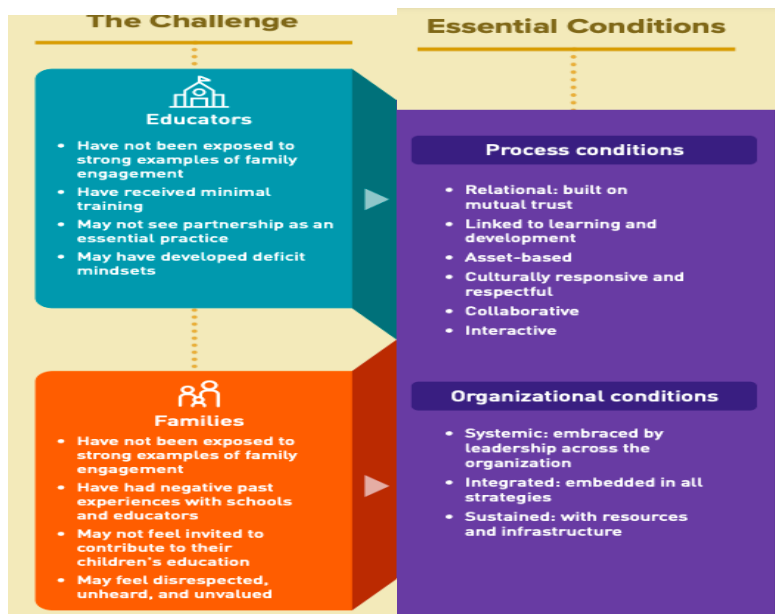
After the challenges and essential conditions are established, educators and stakeholders must work together to build policies and program goals. The authors write that, "the policy and program goals highlight the goals and outcomes that should emerge for educators and families when the essential conditions are met." This is when families and schools can begin setting a common policy agenda. The authors believe that when families and educators arrive at the last step of the framework, they should have built enough capacity as partners to "work in mutually supportive ways that result in student and school improvements." The steps outlined in the dual-capacity framework are fluid, and the authors note that this framework was developed as a general guide for how families and educators can form partnerships that benefit students. Schools that are intent on uplifting parents as partners can utilize the steps outlined in this model as guidance.

Figure 7

Dual Capacity Framework (cont.)

Learn The Parents

Schools and districts are now servicing a majority-minority student population. In the 2017-2018 academic school year, 51% of all public elementary and secondary school students in the United States were nonwhite while the overall percentage of nonwhite teachers rose just 1.2 percentage points - from 16.9% to 18.1% - from the 2003-2004 school year to the 2011- 2012 school year (Toppo & Nichols, 2017). These figures show that educators are now engaging with parents who are also culturally different from themselves. These cultural differences may impact how parents engage with their children's schooling, especially if educators and administrators do not have the culturally responsive elements to positively engage with parents from backgrounds that are different from theirs.

Moodie and Ramos (2014) write that outside of constant professional development and culturally relevant training, a good way for schools and school districts to manage these cultural differences is to be intentional when delivering messages and interacting with families from different backgrounds. The authors note,

Adapting communications to reflect both school and family cultural norms and priorities can make it easier for families to engage and help school staff build rapport and trust with families. In practice, the local norms to include or consider in communications may vary depending on the specific culture or community. For instance, many families in the black community engage extended family and friend networks, especially for childcare, so family engagement outreach protocols may have to be extended beyond parents or guardians, e.g., sharing information with aunts or uncles (Moodie & Ramos, 2014).

Further, cultural differences also inform parental practices, therefore a school's interaction with parents from other backgrounds should also respect families whose parental practices do not conform to the ways in which middle class, and upper middle class families parent their children. Albright et al., (2011) provide guidance on how schools can better address these cultural gaps,

Parents who feel welcomed and wanted at school are most likely to participate in their children's education. However, parents have different styles, skills, and schedules, so schools need to make a range of opportunities available to accommodate diverse parent interests and availability. Communicating to parents that their involvement is always valued at whatever level possible, encourages families to participate however, whenever, and wherever they feel comfortable. Teachers should attempt to engage parents and be

courteous and inviting in all their interactions—whether they occur in the classroom, hallway, or parking lot.

Educators and administrators must continue working diligently to learn the cultural aspects of the increasingly diverse schooling population, and their parents, because doing so can help further enhance the parent-school relationship.

Summary

This study contributes to the parent engagement scholarship by solely centering how their children experienced and characterized their practices. Placing children at the focal point of a parent engagement study can motivate future researchers to add these perspectives - as that could ultimately contribute to advocacy efforts and inform how parental engagement policies are constructed at the local, state, and federal level. Another important feature of this research study is that, by specifically focusing on Black males, that were currently enrolled at a highly selective university, this study rebuffed the deficit lens that is often attached to Black male achievement. While debunking societal myths is important, future research should also include the experiences of Black males who had pathways that did not lead them to post-secondary enrollment.

Overall, the narratives presented here, while specific to these seven brilliant young men, and their families, are dually attached to the narratives of millions of current-day Black families, and those of the million others who have come before. These persons, due to their assigned racial categories continue to traverse racialized waters in their pursuit to ameliorate their futures through education. Due to calculated, federal, state, local policies, some Black persons, and generations that lived before them were not allowed to pursue these ambitions. The racially adverse policies

and attitudes that Black families encounter are not a relic of the past, as some of the participants explained in other sections of this study. These trials and tribulations did not subserve the participants in this study who came from middle-class and upper-middle class households. These trials were not exclusive to participants from working class families with parents who had minimal post-secondary experience. The difficulties that students encountered on their journeys were strictly a result of their being Black, and male. Their narratives which, is at the core of this study, spoke of resistance, persistence, humility, fear, and despair. This study was a study of the human experience, and its critical engagement with highlighting the lived experiences of those whose voices have been discounted for centuries. This is the contribution.

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Parents Just Don't Understand (?)

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study. This study will focus on how participants describe their parents' engagement practices during their primary and secondary schooling years (Elementary, Middle, and High School). This survey contains a series of questions designed to gather participant demographic information and to learn more about participants' pre-collegiate educational experiences.

The first section of the survey will seek your contact and demographic information.
What is your full name?
What is your email address?
What is your date of birth?
What year did you graduate high school?
What is your major/course of study?
What is your current class standing?
Are you currently involved with any student groups or extracurricular activities on campus?
What student group or extracurricular activities are you involved with?
 Are you of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin?
        Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be
The second section of this survey will seek your regional affiliations and parental income and educational information.
What city, and state were you born in?
What city and state did you grow up in? (List all that apply).
Where did you attend high school? (City/State | List all that apply).
If you attended multiple high schools, please list them in order of dates attended, with the high school you graduated from listed first. (Write NA if this question is not applicable)
Which of the following best describes your household structure during your primary and secondary schooling years?
If other, whom were you raised by?
What is your mother's highest degree or level of education completed?
What is your father's highest degree or level of education completed?
If raised by a relative or non-parental guardian, their highest level of education attained:
What would you consider your family's socioeconomic status to have been growing up?
Including yourself, how many people lived in your household during your primary and secondary schooling years?

APPENDIX B

Dear _____,

My name is Joseph-Emery Kouaho, and I am currently a fourth year, PhD candidate in the Lifelong Education Administration Policy department at the University of Georgia's, Mary Frances Early College of Education. I am conducting interviews as part of a research study to increase understanding of how Black, college-educated males describe their parents' engagement practices in their education during their primary and secondary schooling years (elementary, middle school, and high school).

You as a Black, currently enrolled college student, are in an ideal position to provide valuable first-hand information about your experience from your own perspective.
The interview will take no more than 60 minutes, and I am primarily going to be focusing on how you describe your parents' involvement in your education. Your responses will be kept confidential to myself. Unless requested, I will not be reporting your name in the written analysis and will remove any potentially identifying information from quotations.

Please complete these following steps if you are willing to participate:

- Complete this pre-interview questionnaire by clicking this link.
- Read and review the informed consent form by clicking this link.
- Please respond and suggest a day and time from the dates listed below. If none of those days work, let me know and we can work to find a mutually agreeable time.

I am available on these following days and times:

- Monday 9/12 – 5PM-8PM
- Tuesday 9/13 – 11AM-8PM
- Wednesday 9/14 – 5-8PM
- Thursday 9/15 – 11AM-8PM
- Friday 9/16 – 12PM-3PM
- Monday 9/19 – 5PM-8PM
- Tuesday 9/20 – 11AM-8PM
- Wednesday 9/21 – 5PM-8PM
- Thursday 9/22 – 11AM-8PM
- Friday 9/23 – 12PM-3PM

You will be eligible to receive a $20 Amazon gift card for your participation in this study, as your participation will be crucial to this research whose findings could lead to greater public understanding, and support of Black college educated men and their experiences.

A potential risk that you may encounter, as a participant, is that you could have intense emotional responses to certain questions that center on the role that your parents played in your education as some of the questions included in the interview protocol are highly sensitive.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you _____!

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
Black Men and Parent Engagement

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator:
Joseph-Emery Kouaho
Education Administration Policy
Jlk94355@uga.edu
I am doing this research study to learn more about how you made sense of your guardian involvement during your primary and secondary schooling education.

You are being invited to be in this research study because you identify as an African American male and are in either your first or second year at this university.

If you agree to participate in this study:
- I will collect information about your time and experience as a primary and secondary school student, and the role that your parents played in your education.
- I will ask you to participate in an interview that will be recorded via Zoom. The interview will last between 45-60 minutes.
- I will follow up with a finalized transcript 1 month after your interview.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty.

There are questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can skip the questions if you do not wish to answer them. We will provide you with the themes of the interviews prior to your participation so that you are aware of the general direction that the interview will take.

Your responses may help us understand the challenges, obstacles, and the lived experiences that Black males have during their primary and secondary schooling experiences – and the role that their guardians played in shaping their educational experiences. The audience that will read and become familiar with your stories will be better able to understand the unique experiences of college educated Black men.

I will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk, I will not release your name in any of the final writing for this project – you will be assigned a pseudonym. I will only keep information that could identify you during the interview coding and transcribing part of this project – which will only be performed by the primary investigator.

The information will not be used or distributed for future research.

Audio/Video Recording/Photographs

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio and video recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____I do not want to have this interview recorded.
_____I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Internet Data Collection

This research involves the transmission of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed.

Withdrawal from the research study

If you decide to withdraw from the study or the investigator terminates your participation, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Joseph-Emery Kouaho at jlk94355@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB (Institutional Review Board) at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

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APPENDIX D

1. Demographic Information
   a. Name
   b. Year in school

2. Qualitative Interview Introduction
   a. Length – 45-60 minutes
   b. Script: Welcome. Thank you joining me virtually today, my name is Joseph-Emery Kouaho, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Georgia. This interview is part of a larger study that is examining how Black male students at this university who are in describe their parents' engagement in their schooling when they were in elementary, middle, and high school. Over the next 45-60 minutes, I will ask you some questions regarding your caretakers' engagement practices. If you feel uncomfortable answering any question, during the interview, please do not hesitate to voice your discomfort. Additionally, if you need to pause or take a break, please let me know.

3. Verbal Consent
   a. Given, what you have heard thus far about this study's purpose - would you still like to participate in this interview?
      i. Yes.
      ii. No.
   b. Are you comfortable with this interview being recorded? I am using an audio recorder and my laptop to record this interview. I will also use a pseudonym (or different name) in my interview transcript to protect your identity.
      i. Yes.
      ii. No
   c. Do you have any questions? If there are no questions, let's get started.

4. Background information
   a. Tell me more about yourself
      i. Confirm survey information

Interview questions:

1. Parent demographic questions:
   a. Could you tell me more about your parents' education? Are your guardian's college educated?
   b. Could you tell me a bit about your parent's work schedule growing up?
   c. Could you tell me about your parents' professions?

2. Parents' engagement during elementary school years

    a. How would you describe either of your parent's involvement during your elementary and middle school years?
        i. Did either of your parents read to you as a child?
        ii. Did your parents help you complete homework assignments or school projects?
    b. What were the rules in your family about homework?

3. Parent's ability to convey importance of education (stage-setting):
    a. Were your parents aware of the deadlines that you had for class projects, report card dates, or other school related dates?
    b. Could you describe report card day for you as a student? How did you feel on those days? Could you describe if your performance impacted your parents' mood?
    c. What did school choice look like in your households? Did either of your parents advocate for specific schools in the district?
        i. What types of schools did you attend, public, private, charter, catholic?

4. Parent's ability to structure home environments (stage-setting):
    a. Could you tell me if you had designated study spaces in the places where you lived?
    b. Could you describe the neighborhood environment in which you grew up in.

5. Parents' out of school engagement activities (Lareau's parental practices/concerted cultivation):
    a. Did you and your family ever take trips to the public library?
    b. Did you and your family ever go to museums and see exhibits?
    c. Growing up did you and your family have planned family vacations?
    d. Could you tell me if you were active in any extracurricular organizations throughout your schooling? If yes, could you describe your parents' level of engagement with those activities.

6. Parents' school-based engagement activities:
    a. Could you tell me if your parents were involved in school organizations or parent teacher associations?
    b. Could you tell me if either of your parents were present at your parent teacher conferences? If you could think of those times, how did you feel?
        i. How would you describe your parents' relationships with your teachers overall? Have you ever had moments where your parents and other school officials had disagreements?
    c. Research shows that some Black males face unfair, and disproportionate disciplinary actions from school officials at the schools that they attend. If you are comfortable, could you describe your experience with school discipline?
        i. IF YES:
            1. Could you describe your parents' engagement during those times?
        ii. IF NO:

<ol start="1" style="list-style-type: decimal;">
Could you describe then if your parents talked to you about, or set expectations for your behavior in school?

d. **If participant parents describe parents as not heavily involved in school-based engagement:**

    i. Could you tell me if any teacher/administrator/ counselor served as a mentor or advisor who helped you navigate some coursework, or opportunities for growth?

Transition to college:

e. Did either of your parents ever talk to you about going to college?

f. Could you describe if either of your parents knew or understood the steps that it took to go to college - things such as financial aid, SATs?

g. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being very important. How would you rate the importance your parents placed in education and schooling?

    i. Could you describe to me the role that your parents played in your transition to this university?

7. Parent engagement shift/Closing

a. What words and phrases come to mind when you think of your schooling experience?

b. Would you like to add anything about your parents' engagement practices that we have not addressed today?

8. Policy question:

a. If you could go back and establish policies that the school or school districts could have established to influence your parents' relationship with the schools, what would it be?

    i. Examples from research are better outreach from school to Black parents; more personal outreach from specific teachers and administrators; better community-school partnerships.