PARENTING IN PREADOLESCENCE: IMPRESSIONS OF CHILD-REARING AND ACADEMICS AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES

By

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative ethnographic study presents an exploration of parenting practices among African American middle class families that positively contributed to the successful academic performance of their preadolescent children. I examined the question, "How do African American parents, identifying as middle class, perceive their engagement as influencing the academic outcomes of their successfully performing preadolescent children?" This research highlights under-explored forms of parental participation among self-ascribed middle class African Americans through focused analysis of activity and advocacy. The Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) framework provided a theoretical lens that facilitated study of parental engagement distinctly separate from traditional perceptions of parental involvement and deficit perspectives of African American participation in their children's educational experiences. Four Patterns of Parental Practice emerged (Support, Structure, Enlightenment, and Engagement), and related to preadolescent children's motivation, obedience, and academic achievement. Participants defined engagement in children's learning in accordance with access and activation of capital regardless of boundaries encountered in school institutions. The findings suggest that middle class participants remained highly involved, invested, and resilient, despite societal

barriers, a counterstory that challenges continual and prevailing deficit perceptions regarding academic achievement and involvement directed toward African American families.

INDEX WORDS: Parenting, Parental Engagement, African American, Middle Class, Capital, Preadolescence, Academic Achievement

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DEDICATION

This dissertation study is dedicated to every Survivor and those that love and care for them.

I hope that you believe in miracles and recognize your role in the manifestation

of miracles that you witness and experience every day.

I certainly do.

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To the almighty Lord and Savior, thank you for this unbelievable journey you set me upon from the moment I was born and for blessing me with the strength, love, and faith to see it through.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Children enter schools having been greatly influenced by parenting practices in their home environment and family network. According to Watson-Hill (2013), children spend an approximated 24% of their time with teachers, versus 76% of their time spent with parents. In this way, parenting represents a significant aspect of parental engagement in students' learning outcomes. Parenting encompasses a multitude of duties, challenges, assumptions, and perceptions from multiple sources, including other parents, family, society, and school. For African American families, this includes complexities associated with another factor—race. Gosa & Alexander (2007) identified a lack of research studies focused on middle class African American parenting and academic performance. Thus, studies with African American families have focused predominantly on at-risk students and from a school perspective. To address this huge gap in the literature, this study prioritized the perceptions and practices of African American middle class parents.

Statement of the Problem

Having worked with students and families as an elementary school teacher and counselor, I observed moments when school personnel undervalued hardworking African Americans by not including parents in their efforts to address academic and behavioral concerns. This resulted in the exclusion of parents in pivotal decision-making opportunities, and ignored the significant role and influence parents could have in their children's learning. Moreover, parenting viewed from a European American perspective further negates the cultural and racial differences that affect African American parents (Watson-Hill, 2013). In addition to between group comparisons, deficit perspectives of parenting contradict historical traditions of high educational

expectations among African American parents (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016; Watson-Hill, 2013). Further contributing to deficit perspectives, opportunities for school-based involvement based on preconceived notions of engagement restrict the contributions of African American parents (Abram & Gibbs, 2002). Therefore, research presented African American parents as uninvolved, rather than acknowledging their various means of participation in children's learning.

Inaccurate perceptions of African Americans surfaced in the literature and middle class African Americans represented an understudied population in research (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). In their examination of class identity among middle class African Americans, Hunt & Ray (2012) identified factors rarely discussed in participants' consideration of socioeconomic status, but found levels of income and education to be most associated with the social class identification of African American middle class participants. Employing a subjective assessment offered parents an opportunity to explore issues of class identity and empowerment, inspiring further examination of the intersectionality of race and class. Determinants of class notwithstanding, the experiences of middle class African Americans must be explored, particularly due to evidence that an achievement gap persists among this group, compared to middle class students of other races.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015) released a report documenting a 31-point score difference in eighth grade mathematics achievement between African American and European American students, taking into consideration socioeconomic variables, students' disabilities, measures of teacher qualifications/practices, and school resources/climate. Just one example of extant disparities in achievement for African American students, this data calls for an investigation of gaps in achievement for African American

students in general, and middle class African American students, in particular. If social class status purportedly equalizes school factors, then academic performance for middle class students should be more balanced.

Disparities in achievement might be attributed to assessment data for students in our country. Potentially, standardized testing predicted subsequent achievement; however, Mulvaney & Morrissey (2012) reported that standardized testing targeted competencies related to the schooling of European American children, rather than appealing to culturally specific schooling and learning experiences of African American child participants. Consequently, testing unfairly positioned students of color while perpetuating perceptions of disproportionate ability, aptitude, and achievement among these groups. Examination of antecedents to academic achievement from a family perspective created a counternarrative, inclusive of the voices of middle class African American parents and their preadolescent children. Through qualitative research design including adult and preadolescent perspectives, my research represents a strengths-based exploration of family dynamics in relation to school outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

Research about parenting among African American families incorporated participants' own recipes for success, amidst widespread misconceptions regarding their engagement. Particularly, my research examined and countered representations in the literature of middle class African American parents' practices and their engagement as they navigated building relationships and making decisions in support of their children's learning. I hoped to learn more about ways in which participating African American middle class families identified themselves socioeconomically, in support of their children's academics despite dominant discourses regarding a widening achievement gap (Bodovski, 2010; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Mulvaney &

Morrissey, 2012) and a perceived lack of parental involvement among African Americans in the middle class. In addition to a focus on African American middle class identity, the present study explored the relationship between parental perceptions, parental engagement, and educational outcomes.

The purpose of this study was to offer an alternative to the limited discourse regarding middle class African Americans by calling attention to self-reported achievement within this population. A family perspective of achievement empowered participants to acknowledge their impact on educational outcomes, rather than solely prioritizing school perspectives (utilizing standardized testing, for example). I designed my research to uncover ways that middle class African American families engaged in their children's learning, which might differ from what has been reported in the literature. To address this gap in the research, I argue that middle class African American families consistently utilize culturally and class specific parenting methods and believe in the influence of their parenting practice, which indelibly and positively affected the academic outcomes of their preadolescent children.

This study provided an opportunity to challenge the deficit perspectives of African American parenting in the literature. Specifically, I wondered how middle class African American parents perceived their parenting and beliefs as influencing school outcomes, and what could be learned from them to build on parental influence in schools while promoting academic achievement among preadolescent students (7-11). My research challenges dialogue and incites change regarding perceptions of and reactions to middle class African American parenting and engagement.

I approached this investigation guided by the following three research questions:

1. What parenting practices exist among a group of African American self-ascribed middle class families?
2. What are the perceived influences of these parenting practices upon the interactions and relationships they cultivate with their children?
3. How does this group of parents perceive the influence of their parenting and other factors (race and socioeconomic status, for example) to affect their children's academic outcomes?

To answer these questions, I employed ethnographic methods of inquiry and applied the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) framework.

Theoretical Applications

Theories provide a way to explain phenomena, which occur over time within a specific area or areas of emphasis (Aldridge & Goldman, 2002). No theory exclusively offers a method for thorough description or explanation of a phenomenon; however, applications of theory assist researchers in their interpretation of behavior in our society, while offering understandings of future occurrences. Born of propositions and generalizations, theories propose constructs of humanity's existence helpful in the establishment of relationships between phenomena in systematic ways. Cognitive processes and documented methods facilitate the compilation of ideas into theories applied in research. Offering a common lens for varied and complex fields of study, theoretical frameworks enable researchers to formulate questions regarding interactions—of a population or a process—and document outcomes as naturally as possible.

The application of theory in the exploration of family interactions and outcomes increased my understanding of parental engagement and academic achievement. Prior to examination of associations between parenting and achievement, I ruminated: What factors

qualify in the selection of an appropriate theoretical perspective? Which components of existing frameworks align with parenting research and academic achievement? I sought to understand beliefs, values, and perceptions related to parenting, which informed my decision to conduct qualitative research. Furthermore, believing the relationship between family functioning and academic achievement to be significant, I selected ethnography for its utility in family research, to make space for the individual telling of personal and cultural experiences. Just as ethnographic inquiry helped to explain cultural phenomena, the effectiveness of the EPE framework emerged in theorizing my research regarding parenting and academic outcomes with African American middle class families.

Ecologies of Parental Engagement Framework

The Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) Framework introduced a nuanced concept of parental engagement (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004), which conceptualized parents both as authors and agents in school. Barton et al. (2004) collected data from twenty parents regarding participation in their children's science education. Participants shared details of their involvement from which the researchers formulated an operational definition for parental engagement, "a dynamic, interactive process in which parents draw on multiple experiences and resources to define their interactions with schools and among school actors" (Barton et al., 2004, p.1). Study of the EPE framework's interpretation of engagement, orientation, and framing of parental presence in schools revealed an inherent paradigm shift. Barton et al.'s (2004) focus on *engagement* rather than involvement, symbolized a movement from attendance to *presence*, implying greater diversity of participation, contribution, connection, and meaning. The authors' examination of how participants engaged in their children's learning and their reasons for these decisions laid the foundation for EPE (Barton et al., 2004), including its applicability for work

with families in schools. Parents continued to engage in their children's lives to support them as students in multiple ways often invisible to schools. For this reason, I emphasize the valuable role of an EPE perspective to acknowledge parental engagement in its many less recognized forms. Similar to Barton et al. (2004), I envisioned parents as authors negotiating and establishing participation in their children's schooling, and agents advocating for their children through parental action.

The EPE framework began in the context of science education in high poverty urban schooling. Though the authors initially approached their framework from a science perspective in school, their consideration of involvement developed into notions of engagement beyond the school walls (Barton et al., 2004). The authors' applications of their ideas substantiated the versatility of EPE, and compelled me to explore its applicability in social science research specifically relating to parental action in support of children's academics in middle class African American families. Despite beginnings in an academic context of an urban setting, utilization of the EPE framework as a lens to view engagement enhanced my understanding of African American parents' beliefs and practices related to parenting, which occurred primarily outside of the school. Thus, the present research with a group of African American middle class families highlights parents whose supportive and beneficial engagement deviated from dominant notions of parental participation in school.

The EPE framework, represented in Figure 1, addresses issues relevant to minority populations in their struggle for equality by linking the following three theories into a single conceptual framework: Social Capital Theory (SCT), Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Social Capital Theory (SCT) highlights the fluid value of resources (capital) in different spaces (fields), while persons symbolically clothe representations

of class and capital (habitus). Ladson-Billings (1998) described Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a perspective that honors the unique influence of individual voices and narratives previously silenced by society. Offering a platform for these voices stands in opposition to power structures unresponsive or less attentive to the well-being and future of minority groups. In their theoretical examination of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), Roth & Lee (2007) acknowledged CHAT's emphasis on culture and history, the elucidation of interactions within networks of activity, and the powerful influence of individual culture upon the social organizations in which families participated. Each theoretical framework represents a different viewpoint; however, EPE incorporates all of them for use as a single lens—a single point of view to understand social, cultural, and historical aspects of parental engagement distinct from school perspectives of the phenomenon.

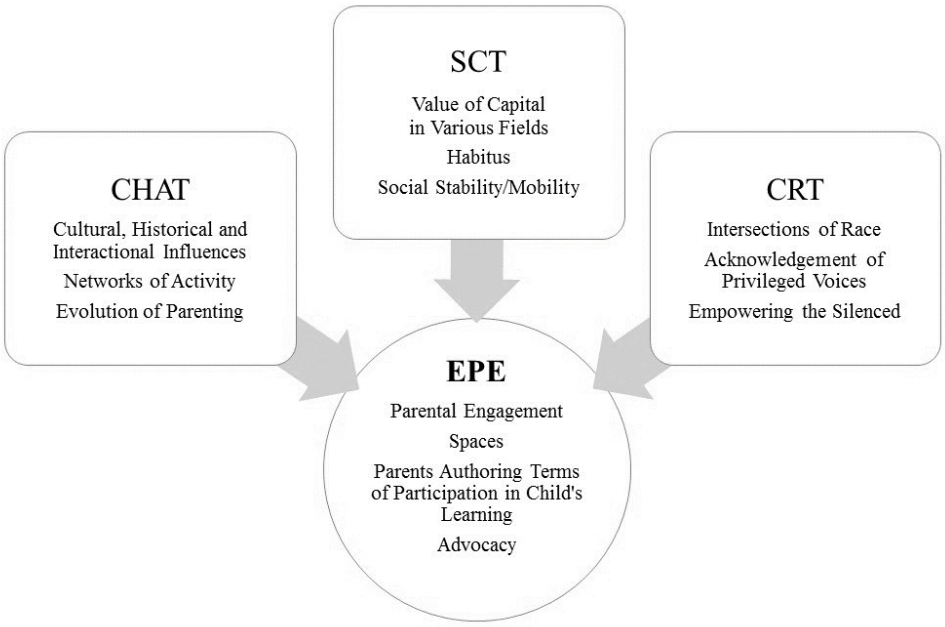

Figure 1. Theoretical Components of the Ecologies of Parental Engagement Framework

Space

For broader interpretation of parental engagement the EPE framework offers an explanation of the concept of space.

> Spaces, like fields, are constituted by underlying structures and resources, have weak boundaries, and are sites of contestation within which culture is produced and actors utilize a particular organization of resources. Furthermore, spaces, like fields, can be understood by the macro and microstructures that give rise to a particular place of interactions. We have identified the school-based academic spaces, school-based nonacademic spaces, and home/community space. (Barton et al., 2004, p. 5)

Barton et al. (2004) distinguished space from field, by describing space in three ways: school-based academic spaces, school-based nonacademic spaces, and home/community spaces (Barton et al., 2004). School-based academic spaces involved learning curriculum and teaching. Consistent with the social components of school, school-based nonacademic spaces included school bus transportation or preparing for school. When parents interacted with the community in the negotiation of nonacademic matters, they operated in the home/community space. However, academic, nonacademic, and home and community spaces might have interacted or overlapped (Barton et al., 2004). I employed EPE in my work to understand parental efforts to support their children's education in the various spaces, but in ways that differ from traditional school perceptions of parental participation.

Social Capital Theory (SCT)

Incorporation of SCT into the EPE framework included an acknowledgement of the influence of capital upon the interactions of 'actors' in a given space (Barton et al., 2004), connecting parents and their resources to their engagement and their children's school outcomes. Elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu, Social Capital Theory (SCT) focused on the ability of citizens to

capitalize on materials, resources, and influence to advance their interests. Described by Boone (2011) in his exploration of SCT in schools and communities, Bourdieu's framework elucidated benefits gained from community life in a social context. Concepts of field (spaces and places), capital (resources and access), and habitus (embodiment of class and capital) constituted a framework conceptualizing the influence of these elements on social class position (Reay, 2004). In her examination of the applicability of SCT in educational research, Reay (2004) described field to include the various settings in which power and influence evolved based upon the perceptions of the individuals present in that environment. Manifestations of capital (i.e., social, cultural, linguistic, and economic) within various fields become embodied habitus; thus, individuals possess or lack influence because of their habitus and its perceived influence within a field. The value of capital, as authored by those with influence, represented a key power structure prominent in discussions of SCT.

Discussion of the utility of SCT noted shortfalls regarding its applications for certain class and cultural groups. Approaching SCT from a feminist perspective, Alfred (2009) asserted that the framework failed to acknowledge lower and working-class citizens gaining access to economic resources, and their ability to utilize economic capital for social mobility. However, despite criticism, SCT remained applicable for my argument that all families access capital; although, varying forms of capital are often not valued in the same way as others (Reay, 2004). Moreover, as emphasized by Boone (2011), "Social capital theory contributes to our understanding of how families, communities, and school support the academic success of students" (p. 21). Access and application of social capital positioned students for success in socially biased institutions, by offering them a competitive edge over their privileged counterparts.

Morris (2009) applied SCT in the context of urban schooling for low income and working class families in his ethnography, urging readers to consider race in discussions of capital, culture, and history. The access and activation of social and cultural capital including the support of extended family proved beneficial for Morris' (2009) participants, then high school students, and their families. Through access and activation (recognition and utilization) of capital, families could potentially maintain class stability. Morris explained further.

> When applied to African American schooling, social capital theory can be greatly informed by a sociohistorical understanding of African American experiences, which takes into account the role of race and the permanence of racism in U.S. society. Furthermore, it becomes imperative that discussions of social capital theory and African American schooling also consider the agency and sustenance that are characteristic of African American people, culture, and institutions-apart from and in response to oppressive forces. (2009, p. 143)

His explanation of SCT and agency within a sociohistorical context accomplished a vital connection to each of the three arms of the EPE framework. Specifically, families accessing social capital possessed the means to secure necessary resources for the purpose of maintaining and even transcending class, despite social, cultural, historical, and structural barriers (Morris, 2009; Vorhaus, 2014). Social capital represented a valuable resource for the transference of knowledge and influence, for the promotion of social credentials through social networks, and for solidifying identity (Alfred, 2009).

SCT facilitated the investigation of parental decisions in wielding capital to gain access to resources, thereby enhancing their children's educational experiences and achievement. However, access to capital proved inadequate for family advocacy by parents until families

activated it for their benefit. In several studies, family activation of capital (social and cultural capital, in particular) led parents to advocate for their children's education, thus increasing support for their children at home, and resilience and resistance to adverse circumstances (Ward, 1999). My reference to resilience originated from Ward's (1999) notion of perseverance despite adversity among minority families she researched. Continuing, Ward defined resistance as the response by African Americans to racial pressures, challenges, discrimination, or prejudice. Resilience, resistance, and transcendence rested on a spectrum, representing fortitude, push back against inequality or status quo, and progressive movement in fields. Advocacy recognized in this way centered the discussion on parental engagement from a family and capital perspective instead of a school perspective, thus highlighting parental habitus and empowerment. Despite schools' expectation that citizens take a back seat to policy and procedure in education, families engaged by fashioning social class and capital to work for them, endorsing further the significant contributions of EPE towards embracing the positive impact of parental engagement across race and class categories.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Ladson-Billings (1998) explored the use of Critical Race Theory (CRT) within the context of education from a salient perspective: race continues to be significant in the United States. This theoretical perspective maintains that race remains untheorized and class-based and gender-based explanations failed to explain evident dichotomies, particularly in students' experiences and in students' academic achievement. Ladson-Billings also discussed a component of CRT, which employs storytelling, or narratives, to offer context for the everyday experiences of individuals and also researchers' encounters in partnership with study participants. The telling of participants' stories in their own voice to communicate the

experiences of oppressed groups appropriated the application of CRT under the EPE framework and for the present ethnography. CRT offered a lens for the interpretation of phenomena in educational settings, leading to solutions for circumstances complicated by race and/or class issues.

CRT exposes the ever presence of racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998), the dynamic value of knowledge across various settings (Aldridge & Goldman, 2002), and the constant existence of injustices, which may never be eradicated. Ladson-Billings (1998) urged theorists, researchers, and practitioners to remember that despite the argument 'race no longer matters', race continues to play a role in determining life opportunities, including educational outcomes. In schools, this surfaces as deficit thinking; the author encouraged teachers to devise strategies to work with students and against systemic injustices (Ladson-Billings, 1998). My work aligned with CRT to expose and reject deficit models of thinking and replace them with documented strengths of diverse students and their families.

CRT within the context of a study on parenting practices and their impact on educational achievement remained multifaceted. Instead of allowing unexamined assumptions to persist, CRT creates a space to acknowledge and challenge the existence of such pressures. In doing so, injustice becomes exposed and equity increases for underrepresented populations. Positioning CRT within the field of education incited the interruption (as opposed to reproduction) of discriminatory practices towards underprivileged populations and heightened awareness of issues affecting minorities by countering negative and persistent narratives about African American families (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The value of CRT in my work became explicit when I considered the damaging effects of privileging certain voices over others. Who speaks and who is silenced; who is heard and who is ignored? Society hears the narratives of the powerful and

influential while the stories of others go unnoticed. CRT remained relevant in my work due to my emphases on middle class African American families including the voices of preadolescent participants. Negative perceptions of parenting in African American families of varying social classes may persist, but my research offered the telling of successful family and educational experiences. Under the umbrella of EPE, CRT facilitated participants' sharing of a counternarrative for African American middle class families—empowering the voices of children and their families in schools and in educational research.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

Another component of EPE, Roth & Lee (2007) investigated Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) in the context of psychology of learning. In doing so, the authors discussed the incorporation of cognition and development, the connection between human beings and artifacts, and the recognition that consciousness results from daily interactions. Barton et al. (2004) relayed that CHAT represents a theory "interested in understanding what individuals…know and do and how that knowing and doing is mediated by the community in which that doing takes place…" (p. 4). By extension, utilization of CHAT facilitated focused study of meanings and interactions of knowledge and activity within particular community groups or networks. Though initially explored to conceptualize the attainment of knowledge, the relevance of CHAT in my research rests in its cultural-historical emphasis. This framework examines interactions or activity within the context of history and culture, with implications for the field of education, particularly in the areas of research and practice (Roth & Lee, 2007).

According to Roth & Lee (2007), Vygotsky viewed individuals as products of their culture at particular points in history; their culture emanated in all aspects of their being, shifting focus from the individual to the intersection of the individual and the collective. Gaining

momentum as a useful tool in education research, Roth and Lee expounded upon CHAT's versatility and relevance:

> Students learn neither to memorize content matter to prepare for the next academic level nor merely for the purpose of passing tests or obtaining grades. Rather, the students learn science (and other culturally valued content matter) because it expands their action possibilities in and for the production of knowledge and *artifacts* that ultimately benefit their community. (p. 194)

Similar to the transference of cultural capital from home to school, and ultimately, vice versa, CHAT facilitates cultural and historical understandings of epistemology and artifacts in the school and community. Action by students in their learning network or environment influenced and became influenced by activity within the culture of their family network. With CHAT, dissemination of knowledge occurred through learning, sharing, and spreading while individuals functioned in and across networks.

Applied under the umbrella of the EPE framework, CHAT created the space to study culture and the transfer of knowledge from one space to another. Authors discussed the utility of CHAT in situating the student as a mediator, engaging in learning activities without separating themselves from their cultural contexts (Roth & Lee, 2007). In and outside of the classroom, learning interactions occurred within cultural and/or social contexts; learners assimilated knowledge as a product of their own sociocultural world. CHAT presented an avenue to not only understand, but to influence the environment of participants, through learning experiences and the application of knowledge among activity networks. With the potential to launch social class transcendence, new knowledge compelled students to adjust and to alter their actions and activities, all while influencing their societal and cultural condition (Roth & Lee, 2007).

Understanding how people perceive their actions and the meaning of their actions in social and historical contexts represents a tenet of CHAT. This theory framed history and culture in order for children to apply knowledge in advocacy for themselves. In my research, I hoped to extend this element to parents' assimilation of knowledge and advocacy as agents scrutinizing institutional practices on behalf of their children.

Summary

Though conceptualized in the context of science education in an urban school, components of EPE (including broader notions of engagement and understandings of being and operating in academic and nonacademic spaces) provided depth to my work from a family perspective. CRT, SCT, and CHAT comprised EPE, assembling a collection of factors affecting family functioning and academic achievement, including race, class, capital, culture, history, and activity networks. I utilized the EPE framework to challenge assumptions regarding African Americans' parenting and engagement, and perspectives of socioeconomic status. My work presented an opportunity to examine intersections between class and race, specifically, creating a better understanding of ways that these factors and others affect parenting and children's educational outcomes. The EPE framework facilitated discussions of social class and agency with participants, and more effectively explained—in the context of theory—their engagement and activism towards the disruption of stereotyping in schools. I contend that parental agency and empowerment viewed from an EPE perspective represent African Americans' self-advocacy within biased institutions. Parental engagement as authored by the participants of Barton et al.'s research (2004) redefined involvement for minority groups and represented the parents' dedication and support for learning, which I applied in the present qualitative research study.

I organized the present dissertation beginning with this first chapter in which I situated the study and positioned myself with theoretical perspectives useful in making sense of social, cultural, and societal factors affecting student learning, behavior, and achievement. Beginning with discussions and applications of the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) framework, I continued with a summary of the role of EPE in parenting research and children's learning. Chapter Two includes a review of the relevant literature, which informed my understandings of the evolution of research on African American middle class parenting and engagement. Methodological procedures found in Chapter Three detail procedures for participant selection, processes for data collection and analysis, and a researcher subjectivities statement. Chapter Four introduces participating families and I included findings of the research in Chapter Five. Discussion, implications, recommendations for future study, and limitations comprise Chapter Six, followed by References and Appendices.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Through review of the literature, I sought to better understand research about middle class African Americans' parenting practices and perceptions, engagement with their children's learning, and connections to academic achievement. Subsequent discussion of the literature addressed the following question regarding African American middle class families and successful academic performance: What do we know about the parenting practices of African American middle class parents and how were these practices found to relate to children's academic outcomes? Though I organized the following according to emergent themes from the reviewed literature, repeated overlaps emerged: African American Middle Class Parenting and Early Engagement, Continued Parental Engagement for Middle Class African American Students, and Associations between Engagement and Academic Achievement. This chapter first follows the decisions that drove selection of the literature and then presents findings from a systematic review of existing literature.

Procedures for Review of the Literature

In my search for relevant literature regarding parenting and academics among African American middle class families, I utilized the University of Georgia's Galileo database to identify journal articles published within the last 20 years. Desiring to discuss established and developing trends in parenting, I initially conducted a search utilizing the Boolean operator 'African American middle class parenting', resulting in the identification of 419 related items. To narrow my results, I conducted a secondary search of eleven databases closely aligned with

education research: *Academic Search Complete, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Research Complete, ERIC (Education Resource Information Center), Family & Society Studies Worldwide, JSTOR, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, PsychINFO, SocINDEX with Full Text, Urban Studies Abstracts, and ebook K-8 Collection (EBSCOhost).* In my pursuit of other highly relevant literature, subsequent searches included variations of the following terms: parenting, parent/family engagement/involvement, preadolescent, academics, and achievement.

Completion of the initial and subsequent searches generated over 400 articles; I surveyed these articles to determine which related to parenting of African American middle class children, with implications for academic achievement. Of the identified sources, Table 1 displays the 20 pieces of literature incorporated into this review, based upon my research focus emphasizing middle class African American parenting and perspectives relating to academic achievement with a family focus.

Table 1

Literature Incorporated for Review According to Themes

Literature Review Theme	Author(s) and Year
African American Middle Class Parenting and Early Engagement	Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda, 1999; Mulvaney & Morrissey, 2012; Smetana & Chuang, 2001; Suizzo et al., 2014; Trosper, 2002; Lareau, 2003; Bodovski, 2010; Mandara, 2006
Continued Parental Engagement for African American Middle Class Students	Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004; Watson-Hill, 2013; Latunde & Clark-Latunde, 2016; Lewis-McCoy, 2016; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Fields-Smith, 2007; Reynolds, 2015
Associations between Engagement and Academic Achievement	Cuspard-Hightower, 2009; Lindsay, 2011; Wu & Qi, 2006; Gosa & Alexander, 2007

Elements including European American families, working class African American families, and school-based research are at times incorporated into these articles. I included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research, along with dissertation studies. In preparation for this discussion, clarification of terms necessarily preceded their discussion in the literature.

Overview of Terminology

Variations in terminology found in parenting research necessitated clarification of parenting, involvement, action, and student performance. The abridged list of terms included in Table 2 evolved from consistent use of each throughout discussion of the literature and subsequent chapters. Terminology including academic achievement (Mandara, 2006), academic socialization (Suizzo et al., 2014), educational expectations (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004), parental beliefs (Mulvaney & Morrissey, 2012; Wu & Qi, 2006), parental engagement (Barton et al., 2004), parental involvement (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004), and racial socialization (Mandara, 2006) appeared frequently in the literature.

Table 2

Definitions of Selected Terms

Term	Definition	Source
Academic Achievement	Outcomes related empirically or conceptually to school, such as grades, motivation, and behavior	Mandara, 2006
Academic Socialization	Characterized as the means by which parents support their children's learning	Suizzo et al., 2014
Educational Expectations	Students' or parents' perceptions about future opportunities	Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004
Parental Beliefs	Parents' ideas, knowledge, values, goals, and attitudes	Mulvaney & Morrissey, 2012; Wu & Qi, 2006
Parental Engagement	A dynamic process in which parents draw on multiple experiences and resources to define their interactions with schools and among school actors	Barton et al., 2004
Parental	In-school activities, out-of-school activities, parent	Howard & Reynolds,

Involvement	behaviors and a variety of other factors that influence academic performance	2008; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004
Racial Socialization	Discussion of racial and cultural issues to foster a sense of cultural and racial identity	Mandara, 2006

Conceptualization of academic achievement by Mandara (2006) in his research study with African American males incorporated outcomes related empirically or conceptually to school achievement, such as grades, motivation, and behavior. Mandara's definition of achievement expanded the term beyond standardized testing. Similarly, I understood that parents held varied perceptions of standardized assessments in relation to academic achievement; therefore, my study utilized parents' self-reports of school performance in corroboration with gathered artifacts.

In the literature, parental involvement included behaviors of parents and activities by parents on behalf of their children, which influenced educational attainment (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004). Although Sirin & Rogers-Sirin (2004) expanded their discussion of involvement by referencing engagement, Barton et al. (2004) offered a comprehensive understanding of parental engagement, informed by experiences and interactions with school personnel and other parents (Barton et al., 2004). For the present research study, parental engagement served as an umbrella encompassing parental action to remain involved and to influence children's educational and behavioral outcomes. Parents' engagement aligned with educational goals for their children, whereas parenting aligned with development. Therefore, parenting and parenting practices, which occurred outside of the academic realm, nonetheless affected engagement in students' learning experiences. Parenting practices incorporated two components: educational expectations (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004) and parental beliefs (Mulvaney & Morrissey, 2012; Wu & Qi, 2006).

Influencing engagement by parents, educational expectations as discussed by Sirin & Rogers-Sirin (2004) comprised ideas related to future opportunities; consequently, children and parents conceptualized action necessary to bring these goals to fruition. Driven by parents' expectations and connected to parental practice and engagement, authors defined parental beliefs as what families did and ways they perceived their actions to benefit their families in terms of attitudes, goals, values, ideas, and knowledge (Mulvaney & Morrissey, 2012; Wu & Qi, 2006). With the establishment of beliefs, parents could then begin to socialize their children in preparation for challenges and successes in the academic realm and beyond. Racial socialization meant parents taught their children how to prepare for and react to various issues, such as discrimination, racism, difficult school encounters, and academic barriers (Mandara, 2006). As a result, discussion of educational expectations ensued as parents imparted their own ideas about future opportunities for their children, which represented an aspect of academic socialization (Suizzo et al, 2014). Developmental, social, academic, philosophic, and engagement aspects of child-rearing framed parenting via the aforementioned terms in a way that focused attention on a child's present performance and future success. Similarly, I have incorporated the terms in discussions of the literature in three sections: parenting and early engagement, continued engagement for school age children, and connections to academic achievement.

African American Middle Class Parenting and Early Engagement

Researchers in two studies described the protective power of parenting as potentially the greatest investment by parents on behalf of their children (Mulvaney & Morrissey, 2012; Wu & Qi, 2006). Faced with the potential to powerfully impact children and a multitude of social and cultural factors, parents must balance their parenting and engagement. To uncover influences of race and class for parents in the academic realm, I explored parenting in African American

middle class families as represented in the reviewed literature. In this section I included research referencing the home environment, social aspects of parenting and child-rearing, and parenting practices—all contextualized as early engagement by parents prior to their children's formal school experiences.

African American Middle Class Parenting Practices

A theme that emerged in reviewing the literature incorporated references to parenting style, practice, and habits, which encompassed acts and beliefs by parents as they raised their children. Research regarding African American middle class participants included parenting practice as discussed in six research studies relevant to this cultural group (Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda, 1999; Lareau, 2003; Lindsay, 2011; Mulvaney & Morrissey, 2012; Smetana & Chuang, 2001; Suizzo et al., 2014; Trosper, 2002). In the subsequent discussion, topics included parents' expectations for obedience and approaches to discipline, and practices by parents in research with African American middle class families.

Expectations for obedience and discipline. Discussions about disciplinary parenting practice emerged in the literature regarding African American middle class parents. Beginning in the home environment, discipline referred to parents' focused efforts to align children's behavior in accordance with acceptable forms of interaction, particularly with adults. In their quantitative research with 114 African American working and middle class mothers, Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda (1999) connected higher levels of depression among participants with harsher forms of discipline for their children, aged 5-12. Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda framed their research in a social context of parenting and included perspectives of preadolescent parenting across class categories; the study emphasized the benefits of child-centered parenting and a shift away from physical discipline perceived common among African Americans (and

mothers in particular). The authors intentionally distinguished child-centered practices (with a focus on the needs of the child) from parent-centered practices (with a focus on parents' goals). For example, Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda (1999) found participants to utilize reasoning with their children, representing a child-centered approach to parenting. Authors did not include fathers in the study; however, data gathered regarding fathers' practices could have balanced the findings by offering another perspective of parenting practice for study participants.

In continued support of child-centered parenting, Trosper (2002) corroborated the incorporation of more positive approaches to discipline. In his research with African American middle class families, the author investigated the influence of race and class on the parenting and educational outcomes of children aged 3-11 (Trosper, 2002). Social Domain Theory framed the study, with a contention that children made meaning of their behaviors and sometimes resisted the demands of authority figures. Believing interactions between parents to be reciprocal, Trosper's theoretical approach facilitated a balanced view of behavior and discipline—one which created the space for parents to analyze their reactions and decisions regarding discipline for their preadolescent children. Consequently, among his 60 college-educated participants, parents associated harsh discipline—such as physical punishment—with moral and prudential offenses, but the preferred method of addressing behavior remained verbal explanations, or even inaction when parents perceived the child's infraction to be a minor rather than a moral offense (Trosper, 2002). For example, if children resisted in the personal domain, with selection of clothing or even friends, parents responded in a less punitive or nonpunitive manner. Compared to previous work by Bluestone & Tamis-Lemonda (1999), Trosper included fathers in his research study, highlighting distinctions along the lines of gender and age compared to participating mothers. Specifically, the age of participants' children influenced the type of discipline employed; the

author attributed this to beliefs that younger children do not always comprehend the consequences of their behavior. Nonetheless, synonymous with the work of previous authors, the findings suggested that supportive, less power-assertive approaches to discipline might result in better outcomes for children. Discipline, however, represented only a facet of parenting practice for African American middle class families.

Concerted cultivation. Lareau (2003) conducted a study with twelve poor, working class, and middle class families primarily of African American and European American descent (one family was biracial). The author approached her qualitative research from a social capital perspective, using intensive, naturalistic observations at school and home to understand relationships between child-rearing and social class. She documented parenting patterns and outcomes for participating parents of third grade students. Two philosophies of parenting emerged from her work, which she termed 'concerted cultivation' and the 'accomplishment of natural growth.' The accomplishment of natural growth described parenting traits of poor and working class participants necessarily focused on making provisions for their children. In turn, children enjoyed flexibility to organize their own activities, choose their level of engagement, and resolve conflicts among peers with minimal involvement from their parents. Conversely, Lareau (2003) observed concerted cultivation in the families of middle and upper middle class participants, whose children demonstrated entitlement, notable language skills, and the ability to more effectively navigate institutions as a result of parents' nurture, evaluation, and intervention (Lareau, 2003). Practices by middle and upper middle class parents seemed to prepare children for later success in life, including navigation of educational institutions (school), effective communication with adults, and self-advocacy (questioning to gain information). Lareau's work substantiated the notion that social class and activation of capital (i.e., intellectual, cultural,

economic, social) certainly influenced children, evidenced by participants' continual cultivation and active assessment of their children's skills. The study findings indicated the widest gaps transpired across social class rather than racial groups, demonstrating ways that class differences manifested in child-rearing and family life.

Practices by middle class families described by Lareau (2003) remained applicable for African Americans; however, three research studies contested her findings (Bodovski, 2010; Lewis-McCoy, 2016; Suizzo et al., 2014). Close examination of concerted cultivation revealed some of the complexities of race and class; consequently, researchers refuted Lareau's claim that concerted cultivation was associated with class, but not with race. Findings reported by Bodovski (2010) and Suizzo et al. (2014) in their research with parents of varying ethnicity connected *both* race and class with concerted cultivation. Suizzo et al. (2014) agreed that similarities existed among middle class parents of differing races; however, the authors emphasized that class and race should be examined more closely to comprehend nuances of parenting among cultural groups. In his study with African American male preadolescents, Lewis-McCoy (2016) also challenged aspects of concerted cultivation, noting although components of class remained influential in discussions of social mobility, Lareau's research presumed socioeconomic status (SES) equality among European American and African American middle class groups. Reviewed literature does *not* present members of the African American and European American middle classes as equivalent (Lindsay, 2011). In fact, emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives of middle class wealth (along with other social classes) varied across racial groups. Concerted cultivation offered a foundation for work with middle class African American families through depictions of family qualities and emphases on the acknowledgement, access, and activation of capital. However, regarding concerted cultivation,

Lewis-McCoy (2016) and the other aforementioned authors illuminated previously discounted, yet complex intersections between race and class that affected parenting within middle class families.

Modernity construct. Found to be quite varied among participants, styles of parenting had an impact on students' eventual school performance. Following examination of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (NICHD SECCYD) survey instrument, Mulvaney & Morrissey (2012) reported findings that participants' rigid styles of parenting adversely affected academic achievement, noting increased significance of these effects on African American children. The authors investigated gaps in assessed competency among African American and European American children, revealing score differences to be negatively associated with traditional methods of parenting heavily laden with control. Their quantitative study with 942 mothers and their first grade children connected traditionally strict child-rearing practices to risk factors (including emphases on obedience and suppression of autonomy development) for children of both races. Whereas Trosper's (2002) participants saw strict discipline to be appropriate for moral or prudential offenses, Mulvaney & Morrissey (2012) noted adverse effects of punitive discipline. However, building on Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda's (1999) emphasis on child-centered parenting, Mulvaney & Morrissey (2012) described parenting approaches with an acute emphasis on obedience related negatively with developmental and academic outcomes. Perhaps related to the social class identification of participants, highly demanding practices fit poorly; however, in more dangerous environments, strict practices might have provided the boundaries necessary for children's resilience in other settings. Again, the research focused on mothers instead of fathers; therefore findings connected with mothers and their children; a trend in research associated with

the perception that child-rearing remains mother's work. Absence of a paternal perspective perpetuated a gap in parenting research, which more authors should aim to fill. According to the authors, utilization of a framework termed the modernity construct encompassed, "the combined and related impact of beliefs on parental and other-adult authority and the educational philosophies of the parents that have such substantial importance for children's academic outcomes" (Mulvaney & Morrissey, 2012, p. 1118). A modernity construct framework integrated parents' beliefs into their practice, which informed their practice and ultimately influenced children's academics. In accordance with their findings, Mulvaney & Morrissey regarded the assumption of a particular set of parenting beliefs (promoting autonomy and self-determination, for example) to be of critical significance for academic achievement. Similar to Lareau's (2003) participants, parental action corresponding with an established system of beliefs and educational prospects seemed to benefit young children, with transferability to academic and other settings.

Influences of the Home environment

Practices by parents laid the foundation for family functioning in the home/community space and beyond; still, characteristics of the home environment as represented in the literature must be explored. Discussion of influences in the home environment comprised research findings from three primary research studies emphasizing the parental role in children's development (Lindsay, 2011; Smetana & Chuang, 2001; Suizzo et al., 2014). Specifically, parents engaged in socialization practices to prepare their children to function effectively in society. They interacted socially for support in their parental role, and also reported ideas found consonant with self-efficacy (perceived effectiveness of parenting practice). Reviewed literature relating to influences in the home/community space expounded on parents' perceptions of their

engagement in the early stages of their children's development and connected with outcomes delineated in subsequent sections relating to engagement in academic spaces in connection to academic achievement.

The local ecology. Family interactions continually influenced parents' engagement in the home/community space and affected children's development. Regarding the home environment as the family's local ecology, Lindsay's (2011) research employed quantitative measures to ascertain differences in achievement among African American and European American children. Focusing theoretically on particular domains, the local ecology included time use, parenting styles/practices, and neighborhood influences. The author's investigation of this ecology facilitated exploration of proximal processes and additional intersecting factors influencing children's development and achievement (Lindsay, 2011). Drawing from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (1994-1995) survey, Lindsay (2011) measured adolescents' reports of family demographics, parenting, time use, neighborhood contexts, and achievement. The survey included data gathered from three in-home interviews between adolescence and adulthood (grades 7-12). Middle class participants (all of whom possessed a college degree), parented similarly, fostering communication, independence, and problem solving. However, African American adolescents reported spending more time hanging out and watching television compared to European American children, which research findings associated negatively with achievement. Lindsay's (2011) work echoed characteristics of the accomplishment of natural growth, a philosophy of parenting that Lareau (2003) associated with impoverished and working class families. However, participants identified as middle class; therefore, this distinction possibly represents unbalanced perspectives of wealth among African American and European American families. Importantly, Lindsay found that an achievement

gap persisted due to differing contexts between races, particularly regarding neighborhood influences and academic outcomes (which will be discussed subsequently in the context of achievement). Characteristics of the local ecology also influenced the socialization practices by parents endeavoring to rear their children for success in different fields.

Socialization practices by parents. In their qualitative study, Suizzo et al. (2014) noted that academic socialization, inclusive of intellectually stimulating activities (such as educational games, singing, or rhyming) constituted an integral component of early school preparation. The authors assumed a theoretical viewpoint comprised of cultural models and academic socialization in hopes of gaining better understandings of parental involvement in relation to young learners. Their framework incorporated interconnected and guiding ideas, beliefs, goals, and practices within a culture; and means by which mothers supported their children's learning through expectations and engagement. The authors found that their 41 predominantly middle class African American, Mexican American, and European American participants set individualistic and collective goals for their children (ages 1-6). This highlighted parenting practice nurturing both independence and interdependence in their families, conveying the value of parental influence in the home environment, its impact on the student, and its transfer to other spaces. Findings included concerns by African American parents that their children would encounter barriers to educational attainment, such as discrimination, lack of financial resources, challenges with learning, or peer pressure (Suizzo et al., 2014). Furthermore, participating mothers reported continual active involvement to ameliorate barriers for their children, beginning early with their children. Admittedly, their active involvement might differ as children aged into adolescence; however, parents continued to support learning across developmental and intellectual domains (Suizzo et al., 2014).

Authors purported that academic socialization incorporating beneficial learning practices with encouragement and support by parents could serve as a buffer against and resilience to imminent discrimination and racism (Suizzo et al., 2014), some of which could be found within the school walls. Possessing adequate intellectual capital of their own (due to college levels of education), African American mothers hoped their children would attend college and graduate school, viewing education as a means to combat the effects of racism. Moreover, socialization by parents offered a foundation and prepared students to assimilate into the broader society, beginning with understandings of their family network and culture, and extending into understandings of race.

In terms of the impact of race on child socialization practices, Howard & Reynolds (2008) acknowledged the potential influence of parents' upbringing, asserting that "differences in how African American parents approached educational participation resulted from the interchange between the educational environments to which they are exposed and prior race and social class-rooted family and schooling experiences" (p. 86). This meant that socialization by parents was informed by their own exposure as children in different spaces and networks of activity, and reflected their experiences in more racialized settings. Researchers found socialization to be child centered in a quantitative study with 95 African American middle class parents and their adolescent children, ages 11-14 (Smetana & Chuang, 2001). In their research, Smetana and Chuang (2001) examined conceptions of parenting and discovered distinctions among participants' practices (perhaps due to variations within the range of middle class income). Participants believed their consistent firmness related to the attainment of long term socialization goals, inclusive of parents' desires for their children to function effectively in society.

To socialize their children and foster autonomy (Suizzo et al., 2014), parents firmly imposed limits and encouraged independence—particularly related to decision-making (Smetana & Chuang, 2001). Notably, heterogeneity of parenting demonstrated diverse beliefs about practices for participants; however, parents generally viewed their roles as restricting behavior to facilitate their adolescents' socialization. Variety in parenting practices found by Smetana & Chuang (2001) echoed statements by other researchers that parenting factors influencing disparities in achievement remained numerous and difficult to identify (Gosa & Alexander, 2007). Even so, informed by their own beliefs and experiences, parents indoctrinated the rules of society, while simultaneously promoting children's independence—thereby influencing students' behavior and performance in formal schooling environs.

Building upon practices for academic socialization of children, descriptions of parenting among African American children in the United States included participants' instructions for children regarding what it meant to be an ethnic minority in this country. In his review of literature regarding achievement for African American males, Mandara (2006) defined racial socialization as fostering a sense of racial and social identity by preparing children to respond to peer pressure and discrimination in academic spaces. However, parents began to racially socialize their children by discussing issues of race and culture prior to school attendance, hoping to instill in their children mechanisms for coping with unfair treatment due to their race or perceptions of their ability. Exclusion of girls from Mandara's data set represented a gap in the literature; gender might have influenced the extent to which parents socialized their children, racially and academically. Importantly, however, participants in Mandara's (2006) research and Suizzo et al.'s (2014) study recognized the urgency to prepare their children to handle race issues and improve their chances for success later in life. Socialization practices by parents seemed to

contribute to their children's own stores of social and cultural capital for activation in academic and nonacademic spaces described by Barton et al. (2004).

Parents' social practices and self-efficacy. Not only did parents nurture healthy socialization in social and academic realms for their children, they sought their own social networks for support in their parental role. In their quantitative research with African American parents and guardians of varying levels of income, Latunde & Clark-Louque (2016) found that their male and female participants discussed concerns with other parents while also relying on them as a resource to navigate complex issues. Similarly Trosper (2002) noted kinship (closeness between participants and their extended family members) with cousins or aunts/uncles for instance, was historically rooted in African culture and provided valuable support for participants in their provisions for one another. Synonymous with the adage, "It takes a village," this cultural reciprocity served as a network of give and share for families within their communities and substantiated African American parents' tendency to rear their children uniquely in accordance with their cultural beliefs. Reliance on relationships with parents to support their engagement exemplified participants drawing on their own capital and sharing in the intellectual capital of others to maintain or transcend social class for their children.

By theorizing their research in a social context, Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda (1999) utilized a determinants of parenting model, asserting that parenting was informed by multiple interacting factors. The researchers found that parental modeling, family engagement, and parenting practices influenced adaptive strategies, behavior, psychological functioning, and physiological trajectories for children (Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda, 1999). Along the way, parental roles developed into habitual practice, continually influencing children socially, relationally, and academically. Parents' self-efficacy or confidence in their effectiveness,

buttressed children's development, and enhanced beliefs that their parenting would ultimately benefit their children. Perhaps in observance of parental empowerment due to positive influences and outcomes of their own engagement, authors regarded parental efficacy as one of the strongest influential factors guiding parents' later involvement in their children's education (Suizzo et al., 2014). Parents believing in their ability to successfully parent and advocate for their children factored in, helping them to view their high levels of engagement as essential to their children's development and contributing to their expectancy for a better life (Watson-Hill, 2013). Parental self-efficacy drove parents to continually advocate for their children in ways they perceived beneficial; the school institution would not dictate engagement for these participants, but the school could be seen as creating additional opportunities for involvement.

Parenting and Early Engagement in Summary

African American middle class parenting as presented in the literature offered a portrait of families in which parents negotiated the influence of their role, balance in the home environment, and parenting practices in their child-rearing. Overall, practices by parental participants depicted in the research offered a firm but nurturing perception of African American middle class parenting. The home environment became a space for children to develop and inquire, while parents engaged in socialization practices that prepared their children to operate effectively in other fields, including academic spaces. Despite perceptions of overly assertive and demanding African American parents, research with middle class families revealed a different picture incorporating nurture and support balanced with compliance and discipline. Parenting in the home/community space expanded developmental foundations for children, with an impact on performance in both academic and nonacademic spaces. Moreover, their parents continued to support them through varied practices of parental engagement.

Continued Parental Engagement for Middle Class African American Students

Discussion of continued parental engagement builds upon the previous section, which incorporated parenting practices as early engagement by participants to promote the development and socialization of their children. Intersectionality of race, capital, and class informed manifestations of engagement in students' educational experiences. Now I turn the focus towards parental engagement concurrent with children's school attendance. Stemming from proven connections with positive academic outcomes, the government mandated efforts by schools to improve home school partnerships through legislature such as the No Child Left Behind Act (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Barton et al.'s (2004) Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) framework coincided with legal mandate in recognition of parents as authors of their engagement in children's education. In exploration of aspects of middle class parenting and engagement prior to formal schooling, this section includes African American parental engagement as discussed in the reviewed literature, including beliefs and perceptions (Fields-Smith, 2007; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004), factors associated with race (Lewis-McCoy, 2016; Reynolds; 2015), learning practices (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016), and authored involvement or engagement in academic and nonacademic spaces (Watson-Hill, 2013).

Parental Beliefs, Expectations, and Perceptions Regarding Parental Engagement

A research study by Sirin & Rogers-Sirin (2004) explored engagement by parents with regard to African American adolescent students and their biological mothers. Quantitative in nature, research by Sirin & Rogers-Sirin incorporated data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health resolved that the 336 middle class (determined by completion of college) participating mothers actively engaged in their adolescents' academic and social lives. Findings

indicated a positive relationship between educational expectations and school engagement/academic performance, even after the researchers controlled for parenting factors, including parent-adolescent relationships and parents' educational values (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004). The authors emphasized the unique ecology for adolescents prior to study participation, noting academic success, engagement by a college educated parent, and expectations to attend college. Ecological characteristics of their participants limited the generalizability of their research and influenced the findings, indicative of a positive relationship between expectations and achievement. Nonetheless, the authors' conceptualization of involvement by parents, in accord with the work of Latunde & Clark-Louque (2016) suggested that engagement and educational expectations should both be taken into consideration when investigating school performance of African American students.

Seeking to learn more about parental involvement in relation to social class position, Fields-Smith (2007) conducted qualitative research with seven working and middle class African American parents (of kindergarten to adult children). Through critical examination of involvement in overlapping spheres, the author observed parents' entitlement in academic spaces due to their intellectual capital (associated with level of education) and willing advocacy. Consonant with discussion of entitlement and activation of capital in the work of Lareau (2003), Fields-Smith's research implicated the influence of these characteristics on manifestations of engagement. Involvement included volunteering in classrooms, completing clerical duties, supervising learning tasks, and serving in positions of leadership within local organizations (Fields-Smith, 2007). Middle class participants established networks in which they enacted their participation to gain access to information. Parents in Fields-Smith's study engaged further by serving as 'watchdogs' over their children's learning. Though representing a small sample of

highly involved parents, the study involved parents molding their engagement into close monitoring of learning to address the particular needs of their children; in this way, the author's research corresponds with EPE's explanation of parental engagement.

In further examination of engagement, Watson-Hill (2013), conducted her qualitative dissertation study with five African Americans parenting children, aged 9-17. The author included mothers' descriptions of their fluid movement in and out of the school realm to enact their engagement without relying solely on teachers to educate their children (Watson-Hill, 2013). Parents emphasized the importance of their advocacy, described further:

> Some of the parents' efforts included participating in school-sanctioned activities, monitoring homework assignments, utilizing tutoring as a resource, keeping in constant communication with their children's' teachers and promoting a strong work ethic. (Watson-Hill, 2013, p. 139)

Belief in the critical influence of parenting on their child's academic and future success guided parental engagement, consistent with aforementioned research with African American families (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004). Utilizing the EPE framework and CRT, Watson-Hill challenged existing racial bias by offering a storytelling of proactive parental engagement. The research did not include the fathers' perspectives or a school component; however, the sounding of parental voices in strong advocacy for their children's learning presented a counternarrative of African American parental involvement, aligning with the intentions of my own work focusing on academic achievement among middle class families of this ethnic group.

Howard & Reynolds (2008) conducted qualitative research with middle class African American families regarding their perceptions of involvement. The study included a focus group of 36 parents representing 73 African American students (ages 13-18) attending middle class

schools in California. The authors purported that complexities surrounding intersections of race and class largely determined manifestations of parents' involvement. Though Howard & Reynolds initially described parents' participation as involvement, they applied a model of engagement to examine acts by parents in home/community spaces and academic spaces. For example, the authors included participants' involvement in school policy through parent-teacher association meetings and community forums. Theorized from a CRT perspective, Howard & Reynolds (2008) examined complexities of race and class, exemplified in their use of counterstorytelling and exploration of differences for parents compared to their less affluent counterparts. Exemplifying the EPE framework, authors observed parents affecting change by challenging the schools for parity and for the incorporation of additional opportunities for more meaningful engagement (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Again (as stated by Watson-Hill, 2013), participating parents cautioned other middle class African Americans against placing blind faith in schools to educate their youth, insisting instead, that they advocate for their children to ensure quality educational experiences, beginning with a reconceptualization of their involvement (Howard & Reynolds, 2008).

In addition to shifting notions of involvement to engagement authored by parents, Howard & Reynolds (2008) purported that parents with insider school knowledge and familiarity with the school building could best use their resources to assess and challenge issues, practices, and personnel perceived as barriers regarding their children's educational attainment. Participants agreed that attending school-sanctioned activities initiated important contacts with the school; however, valuable engagement extended beyond scheduled school events. Similar to other literature (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016), and representing an important premise of their work included the propensity for parents to actively seek information, thus enlightening and

empowering participants to address and perhaps even contest traditions, procedures, and policy. Even if this brought conflict, participants faced these challenges because they believed their advocacy would lead to reform and improve learning environs for their children. From a CRT perspective, these parents acted in opposition to an oppressive structure to address school's minimal efforts to include diverse opportunities for engagement and activism. Continuing in the next section, neglect by schools in the provision of ample opportunities for varied engagement represented one aspect of factors associated with race.

Issues of Race Affecting Parental Engagement

Greater entrée by middle class African Americans into more affluent neighborhoods and selective suburban schools arose out of families' continual pursuit of academic achievement for their children. Despite greater access to opportunities and capital associated (in some cases) with newly acquired class position, members of the African American middle class continued to face obstacles in their daily lives and their parental engagement (Cuspard-Hightower, 2009). Lewis-McCoy (2016) conducted qualitative research with 18 poor to affluent families to better understand intersections of race and class among African American male adolescents (4^{th}-5^{th} grade) in suburban settings. Parental participants in the research study expressed their belief that schools failed to prioritize completion of school for their children. Referenced previously by Fields-Smith (2007), mistrust regarding the school's interest in their children's success led to hypervigilance among African American parents to ensure proper treatment of their sons in school settings (Lewis-McCoy, 2016). Families expressed concerns regarding negative school encounters (such as discrimination), dealings with peer pressure (especially concerning the child's efforts to fit in), dating prospects, and perhaps becoming too sheltered from the world due to their suburban childhood experiences. Parents' apprehensions connected with issues found by

other authors to influence outcomes and exacerbate achievement disparity for African American middle class families (Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Lindsay, 2011). Regardless of their trepidation, participants engaging in their sons' education positioned parents to proactively secure mutually beneficial partnerships and decrease barriers to excellence. Focus on male participants offered potential solutions for disparities (in conduct, for instance) occurring along gender lines (Trosper, 2002). Additionally, in connection to the work of Mandara (2006), Lewis-McCoy discussed racial socialization by parents in a school context to prepare their children for educational experiences and opportunities. Participants' efforts mirrored those of other parents in the literature engaging in racial and academic socialization to increase their children's overall chances for success (Suizzo et al., 2014).

Mistrust and negative perceptions by parents and teachers. Not uncommon among research study participants, Reynolds (2015) reported parental anxiety due to beliefs that school staff stereotyped them based on race and other discriminatory factors. In addition to levels of mistrust among parents regarding school officials, beliefs emerged that the continued success of their children fell secondary, and schools remained overly bureaucratic and less sensitive to the needs of African American children (Reynolds, 2015). Participants in Reynolds (2015) qualitative study with 14 African American middle class parents of adolescents (attending secondary/high school) at times felt perplexed in their attempts to make meaning of their experiences in schools. This did not, however, affect their level of engagement, and perhaps exemplifying prejudgment or previous experiences, the author introduced a participating father who felt school staff underestimated his knowledge and ability to both recognize and address racial tensions in the school environment (Reynolds, 2015). Not uncommon, this father's frustration echoed the voices of parents seeking equality from unequal school institutions.

Appropriately, Reynolds approached her research from an EPE and CRT perspective, acknowledging the impact of the ever-presence of race and underscoring the critical importance of sounding previously silenced voices. Negative perceptions held by parents, teachers, or both manifested in opposition to the intended goal for involvement by parents in school settings. This culminated in a shift *away* from mutual understanding, reaching a common ground regarding engagement, and cementing home-school collaboration (Watson-Hill, 2013).

Advocacy despite continual race issues. Continuing with issues of race for study participants, researchers sought solutions for racial inequality in education among African American students. Lewis-McCoy (2016) noted disproportionately imposed discipline of African American boys in particular, compared to students of other races. Unfortunately, schools expected male preadolescents—four times more likely to be disciplined for the same offenses—to perform equally despite unjust treatment by teachers and other school officials (Lewis-McCoy, 2016). Parental participants expressed their concern regarding special services for students, affirming their feelings that teachers resisted supplying the type of support perceived helpful (Lewis-McCoy 2016). Likewise, Latunde & Clark-Louque (2016) cited continued discrimination among African American students including overrepresentation in special education classes, harsher consequences for school behavior, and higher expulsion rates. Unsurprisingly, indifference or injustice towards students increased pressure on parents to remain aware and engaged as advocates for their children. In accordance with reviewed literature, the type of equity expected by middle class African American parents remained elusive (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Some parental participants, attempting to gain equal footing, elected to look past race to better position their children and future generations for academic success (Reynolds, 2015). They accomplished this with a colorblind approach—

resisting urges to 'play the race card' in their advocacy for school equality. Utilizing a CRT framework to examine parenting among participants employing a colorblind approach (which might have yielded results temporarily) seemed counterintuitive; however, if parents sought justice, then perhaps their choice to separate race was warranted. However, the larger issue of racial prejudice remained, compelling researchers to continually examine, identify, and affect change for African American students.

Parental Engagement across Academic and Nonacademic Spaces

Barton et al. (2004) described engagement occurring in various spaces for their participants, including the academic and nonacademic spaces. Similarly, in their qualitative study with 130 African American parents (including grandparents and legal guardians), Latunde and Clark-Louque (2016) reported engagement falling into two major categories: learning assistance in the home environment and exposure to extracurricular educational activities outside of the home environment. Parents of students (grades K-12, ages 6-23) reported their participation in community educational experiences, programs, and organizations (including church); and activities designed specifically for African American children. Their sample included a range of income incorporating impoverished, working class, middle class, and affluent families; therefore, the findings affirmed the influence of capital and contributed to the literature across class groupings. However, applicability for middle class parents may be low. Approaching their work from a theory of multiple influences and cultural reciprocity framework, the authors discerned interactions that affected learning, inclusive of support from other parents within their social networks (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016). Culture specific programs offered a unique opportunity for parents to engage with other like-minded individuals in support of their children's learning. Consonant with Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), inclusion of a

relatable cultural component underscored interactions within and among networks of activity, yet simultaneously strengthened the home school partnership. Compared to activities in support of early development (Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda, 1999), these parents engaged by reading to their children, reviewing school assignments, and securing tutoring to support academic progress (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016). Variation in their engagement could be explained by the age of their children. Nonetheless, similar to Reynolds' (2015) participant expressing frustration over disregard of his potential contributions, this research substantiated the necessity for schools to diversify parental engagement opportunities to incorporate parents' capital and enrich students in academic and nonacademic spaces.

Watson-Hill (2013) also emphasized the importance of schools aligning their opportunities for engagement with their student populations (particularly in African American communities). Her research highlighted a lack of understanding regarding the potential contributions of African American family engagement for solidifying and increasing the power of home school partnerships benefitting student success (Watson-Hill, 2013). Schools should continually strive to harness the influence of African American parents' cultural and social capital, thus assuming a posture of cultural reciprocity. Persons of influence outside of the school would be drawn in to influence outcomes extrinsically *and* intrinsically. Watson-Hill's (2013) respondents agreed that school efforts to build trust with parents and work together to increase family empowerment through recognition of capital could improve collaboration and provide more comprehensive engagement opportunities in academic and nonacademic spaces.

Continued Engagement in Summary

Viewing parenting from an EPE perspective facilitated greater comprehension of parental support of children's learning. Barton et al., (2004) emphasized the importance of parents

choosing their levels of engagement according to their purposes to benefit their child's learning beginning in the home environment, and continuing during formal learning experiences. Reviewed research fit with this framework through findings in the areas of racial influences, barriers to engagement, perceptions and beliefs regarding engagement, the role of school institutions and advocacy. Though parents identified racial barriers, they did not limit their engagement; if anything, meeting resistance heightened their vigilance and enhanced their involvement, in advocacy for their children. Throughout the home, community, academic and nonacademic spaces, African American middle class parents continually promoted learning for their children, representative of their beliefs, and with regard for their perceptions of the transformative power of education. Detailed aspects of engagement relating to academic achievement follow in the subsequent section.

Associations between Parenting/Engagement and Academic Achievement

Through review of the literature, parental engagement connected to academic achievement (defined as outcomes related to school) in multiple ways. Consistently, research described associations between parenting, engagement by parents, and school outcomes. To organize these relationships, I separated discussion of outcomes according to particular influences. Sectioned by investigation of race, environment, students' engagement, and perceptions of schooling, I elaborated research findings as reported in reviewed research studies (Cuspard-Hightower, 2009; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Lindsay, 2011; Wu & Qi, 2006). Aspects of achievement presented in this section expand on factors associated with parenting and early engagement, and continued engagement, discussed in previous sections of the literature. Therefore, I attributed overlaps to close relationships and findings by authors making connections between parenting, engagement, and academic achievement. However, a distinction

to be made in the subsequent section is that authors included or referenced measures of academic achievement, specifically. This aspect of their work facilitated a closer look at achievement as seen by parents, the school, or both. Regardless of the perspective, one major factor in the academic achievement of parent and child participants remained: the impact of social class position for African American middle class families.

Impact of Socioeconomic Status (SES) On Achievement

In their quantitative longitudinal research with African American parents of varying social class, Wu & Qi (2006) argued that regarding academic outcomes, socioeconomic status remained the most influential predictor of successful academic performance for elementary age students. Utilizing a chronosystem model, their research study of academic competency examined various aspects including parenting, discipline, expectations, parental beliefs, and parental involvement (Wu & Qi, 2006). Phone interviews with 2,247 parents and their children illustrated how parents' high educational expectations connected with reading, math, and general knowledge/science cognitive test scores in kindergarten, first, and third grade. Participants included primarily single parents, yet their findings indicated no significant effect of family structure on participants' children. Though the authors noted no adverse effects, focus on single parent households excluded examination of factors associated with child outcomes from two parent homes of varying SES. Despite perceptions of family structure, Wu & Qi's participants provided optimal home environments for their children; held high expectations for educational attainment; and maintained consistency regarding parenting practices, style, and socialization. This research supported the significant influence of parental perceptions on student academic outcomes in early childhood and preadolescence, even across social class stratifications. Their research affirmed that parental ideas, expectations, and socioeconomic status correlated with

achievement—more so than family structure, offering a positive viewpoint of single parent households (Wu & Qi, 2006).

Barriers Affecting Academic Achievement

Relating to issues of race, which impeded engagement, continued uncertainty surrounding existing disparities in achievement led Cuspard-Hightower (2009) to investigate beneficial teaching practices among African American and European American elementary school students. Her teacher-focused research documented perceptions of barriers to academic success for elementary students attending a suburban elementary school, including "(a) cultural ignorance, (b) the inability of adults to understand the students, (c) an ineffective curriculum, (d) under qualified teachers assigning negative labels, (e) poor instructional practices, and (f) uncaring teachers" (Cuspard-Hightower, 2009, p. 47). The author cited cultural ignorance, adults' misunderstanding of students, and uncaring teachers, which paralleled African American parents' perceptions of school spaces, affecting parents' engagement (Cuspard-Hightower, 2009). Additionally, teachers' acknowledgement of challenges for students added to the complexity surrounding outcomes for African American youth in middle class families. Her viewpoint from a CRT, Oppositional Theory, and Stereotype Threat perspective framed Cuspard-Hightower's qualitative research. Thus, interpretation of the data incorporated dynamics associated with race, including the permanence of race issues, and students' refusal of success (choosing not to be successful), particularly among African American students. Lewis-McCoy (2016) similarly noted adolescent males' desire to be cool (or fit in), consequently deprioritizing their achievement. Analysis revealed that parental involvement, grade inflation, stakeholders' expectations, and lack of resources contributed further to a gap in achievement between the children of African American and European American middle class parents. The

author did not include parents' perspectives; however, Cuspard-Hightower identified positive attributes of educators that enhanced student success, including building positive relationships with parents, thereby strengthening collaboration between home and school. Also, her findings connected with engagement and my own research because teachers' concerns reflected perceptions of school by parents as discussed in the reviewed literature.

Neighborhood and Parental Influences on Academic Achievement

Another component of barriers to success, differences across races were found in some cases, to be explained by neighborhood (Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda, 1999; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Lindsay, 2011) and parents' influences. Middle class African American families resided in comparatively different neighborhoods than middle class European American families and served as a buffer between the two races. Distinctively, African American participants' neighborhoods included a greater number of African American households documenting income below the poverty line (Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Lindsay, 2011). If the level of affluence in a community was found to factor into schooling for students (Gosa & Alexander, 2007), then students residing in communities with greater numbers of poor families likely experienced an adverse effect on academics. Accordingly, Lindsay demonstrated that, "out-of-school factors such as family resources and characteristics of their environment [had] a relationship to achievement that [was] worthy of discussion when considering how to improve educational outcomes" (Lindsay, 2011, p. 779). A relationship between environmental factors and achievement disparity persisted for participants, though Lindsay (2011) controlled for these influences. Surrounding neighborhood differences and intermediary status between races influenced adolescent achievement in African American families (representing a source of stress for students). Furthermore, other authors (Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Suizzo et al., 2014; Watson-

Hill, 2013) reported that African American youth experienced favorable academic outcomes in school and later in life when exposed to more diverse schooling environments in addition to supportive home environments. Consistent with representations of collaboration and reciprocity (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016) by African Americans in their communities, and CHAT's description of the influence of networks of activity, this suggests a relationship between students' surrounding community and their achievement in academic spaces, which could not be ignored in the context of parenting and engagement.

Associations between Parenting/Engagement and Achievement in Summary

Reviewed literature found academic achievement among African American middle class students to be informed by issues relating to race, class, environmental influences, and parent influences. The number of studies connecting parenting and engagement to academic achievement among this population remained minimal; therefore, more research is necessary to fill the gap in parenting research. However, relevant studies supported the idea that a variety of factors continually affected the educational experiences and achievement of students. Review of the literature offered evidence that academic achievement continued to be affected by social class, school barriers for African American students, and neighborhood composition. Considering aspects of the home environment including parenting and socialization, prior to proceeding with research about continued engagement, helped me to connect research findings to reports of academic achievement. Complex interactions of African American culture, middle class ascription, discrimination in school, assessment bias, and influences stemming from the home environment complicated researchers' efforts to identify specific relationships between parenting, engagement, and achievement. However, through their findings, authors agreed that

relationships existed and educational research could be used to affect change regarding family engagement opportunities in schools, as well as associated academic outcomes.

Conclusion

Throughout this review of the literature I examined connections (as reported by parent respondents) between parenting practices, engagement, and academic outcomes among participants. In an effort to honor the diverse educational contributions of African American middle class parents, I highlighted intersecting factors affecting academic achievement. Consonant with review of the literature, no author claimed a particular style of parenting or engagement to be more effective than another. Returning to the question posed for review of the literature, I investigated, what was known about the parenting practices of African American middle class parents and ways practices related to children's academic outcomes. Research presented here supports the notion that parenting practices varied and believed by parents to influence present and eventual academic achievement; however, causality could not be determined due to the multiple and multifaceted factors influencing the education of children. The research emphasized the educational impact of class and race, the home environment, parental engagement, and the influence of capital for African American middle class families. Furthermore, parents perceived socialization as preparation for children to deal with sensitive issues associated with their race and learning (Mulvaney & Morrissey, 2012; Tamis-LeMonda, 1999). Contrasting perceptions of highly demanding approaches, African American parenting included responsive parental attributes combined with structure and consistent expectations for educational success. Although literature regarded some approaches to discipline as harsh, parents paired firm parenting practices with the emotional support necessary to build trusting relationships and socialize their children.

Socioeconomic status remained an influential factor, affirming the significant effect of class and race among African American families (Cuspard-Hightower, 2009; Lindsay, 2011). Research incorporated into this literature review bolstered the need for further examination of the intersectionality of race, class, and capital, which guides parental engagement and affects academic achievement. My work aimed to fill a gap in reviewed research by depicting a counternarrative inclusive of positive images of engaged parents and their academically successful children in opposition to negative perspectives of engagement among middle class African American families. Ultimately, the literature presented variations of parental participation corresponding with a broader notion of parental engagement discussed by (Barton et al., 2004). Consistent with critical race theory, race still mattered, specifically regarding barriers to educational achievement among middle class students. Identified antecedents to discrepancies in achievement for African Americans included societal influences at play long before children began school, and emphasized the need for increased study of family practices, particularly those withstanding societal barriers, promoting advocacy, and connecting with academic achievement. Additionally, research literature suggested that schools needed more concerted efforts to bridge the gap with African American families by recognizing family culture in the home setting, honoring various representations of family capital, and promoting opportunities for families to engage in the educational lives of their children. Chapter Three builds upon discussion of relevant literature to include methodology for the present qualitative research study, detailing each component of my work to examine parenting and engagement in relation to academic achievement with four African American middle class families.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Researchers employ methodology as a means of describing their understanding of knowledge, to include the process and explication of their research. I designed the present study to include self-ascribed African American middle class families in the exploration of family practices and perspectives regarding parental engagement and preadolescent academic achievement. In this chapter, I included a statement of researcher subjectivities, a rationale for the research methods, a detailed description of the study design, and procedures for data analysis—each representing a component of qualitative research with an ethnographic design.

Qualitative research incorporates detailed study of phenomena in which researchers and participants proceed with openness and depth, requiring description of participants' understandings within the context of their lived experiences (Patton, 2002). Though quantitative methods or even mixed methods could have been applied to the present ethnography, I chose to solely utilize qualitative methods because of my focus on family culture and participants' narratives. Specifically, I investigated participants' environments and family dynamics in interaction with school outcomes, which suited an ethnographic design because I was able to compile data regarding meanings each individual associated with various aspects of their family, parenting, and school culture. Through its focus on participants' voice through interviews, observation in their settings, and review of related documents, qualitative inquiry allowed me to center analysis on parents' beliefs, experiences, interpretation, goals, and outcomes relating to children's academic achievement.

Ethnography as qualitative research methodology examines cultural experiences in greater depth to gain understandings of the knowledge and system of meanings characterizing a group's culture (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Additionally, ethnography created the space for exploration of emerging patterns among persons sharing the same culture, defined by Patton (2002) as a collection of behaviors and beliefs that constitute standards for decision making and action within a particular cluster of people. By immersing the researcher in the activity and daily lives of participants, ethnography served to uncover cultural aspects of a group of people (Creswell, 2007). In this case, I sought to learn more about parenting and learning among African American middle class families.

Not only did ethnography suit my goal to learn about parenting culture, this design also complemented the theoretical framework, Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE). Similar to Barton et al. (2004), I employed EPE as a means to understand how parents perceived their involvement and why they perceived it in such a way. I sought to emphasize parenting as habitus, uniquely experienced by each parental participant and passed to their child. Under the auspices of EPE, Social Capital Theory (SCT) acknowledged habitus as an embodiment of the possession, interpretation, and perceptions of an individual's capital in a particular field (space). Though Barton et al. explored parental engagement with parents in high poverty environs, I utilize the framework with middle class African American families to uncover participants' cultural perspectives of parenting and academic achievement.

Subjectivities Statement

Reflexivity obligates the researcher to reflect critically on self, the research participants, and interactions between participants and their environment (Morse, 2015). This includes a focused interpretation of data and its conveyance to others throughout and beyond the course of

research (Patton 2002). By this I mean the findings must be a true representation of study participants. Reflexive strategies assist anthropologists in remaining vigilant to avoid adverse influences on the data and findings, and possible threats to the validity of the study. Attempts to maintain validity of the work required me to make comparisons between representations of my work and the participants' realities; I sought to align the two before I could describe my research as valid. Conversely, self-critical examination of the researcher's perspective can benefit the overall research study, especially when participants and researcher share commonalities.

Personally, I related to participants because of my African American identity; my middle class upbringing; and my passion for learning, teaching, and collaborating with families. I hoped these connections would foster meaningful engagement with each participant, rather than adversely affect the outcomes of the research study due to personal bias. African-American, female, single, having no children, and possessing more than eleven years of elementary teaching and counseling experience, I recognized that my subjectivities would influence my perceptions over the course of this research study. Therefore, I exposed and attempted to neutralize potential consequences of my being and experiences. Having been asked on several occasions if I have children of my own, the resounding "No," coupled with the inquirer's reaction seemed a strike against me. I strongly believed that training, skill, and field hours spent educating and guiding children should matter more than my parental status, but participants might have wondered about my personal experiences to increase their confidence in my ability to collaborate with them in the capacity of researcher. Having been parented, but lacking personal parenting expertise, I considered whether participants would be hesitant in their interactions with me instead of connecting with me as an African American, woman, teacher, and researcher.

I tried to understand ways my very presence, words, actions, and appearance could distract and/or become interwoven with the details of my work. In order to mediate these factors, I prioritized professionalism in my conversation, attire, and interactions, yet used conversational language surrounding interview sessions to build rapport. Incorporating the practice of bridling facilitated frequent reflection and examination of my being and involvement in the work and the natural consequences of my role as researcher (Vagle, 2009). In a researcher memo following the group interview, I noted a moment of subjectivity in which bridling helped me to focus on the data.

> I am finding that I relate well with the group, but I hope my biases are in check so that I can really see the data for what it is. I have to step back from it! With the analysis I have begun, this will be accomplished by completing layers of coding. Also, I will reread my subjectivities and continually reflect thoughtfully on them moving forward. With consistency this will increase the validity of my research.

In order to increase the relevance and validity of this study, I made efforts to bring awareness to my perspective through journaling, in order to view data more clearly.

I understood that my training and experience as a teacher and school counselor might have conflicted with the goals of my research in that my usual positioning as a child advocate would be neutralized. By this I mean my researcher role superseded my impulse to prioritize children's needs. Parental role as child advocate in the research setting disrupted my norm, but unless I observed neglect or abuse I could not intervene. Following completion of the study, I would resume a role of advocacy for students and parents through finalization of the dissertation by offering reciprocity in the form of community involvement and my own engagement with children, families, and schools.

My family background also affected subjectivities during the research study. As a military dependent (which I equated to middle class position), I experienced a childhood inclusive of exposure to many aspects of the world, a variety of cultural influences, unique experiences, and access to social capital. I learned to adapt and gained a love of diversity, which causes me to doubt parents' decisions to keep children too close, instead of exposing them to new environments and experiences. At times I assume that individuals studied within a specific demographic or location to be close-minded and caught in certain circumstances because of their decision-making, which exemplifies an inaccurate assumption. Adversity limits resources available to individuals and, beyond their control, difficult circumstances may develop. Fortuitously, the middle class families with whom I worked had fluid access to capital; therefore, seeing participants as advocates with resources for their families occurred naturally.

I grew up in a traditional family, my interpretation of which includes a mother and father living together in the home with their biological children. This family structure matched that of participant families; therefore, I found myself relating to my participants on multiple levels. Did my connections to participants negatively affect my role as a qualitative researcher? I prepared myself to proceed professionally when the answer to this question was a resounding yes. I countered my subjectivities by returning to the literature and inviting participants to elaborate regarding circumstances they perceived to have an impact on their family composition. I can understand the EPE framework's references to capital because growing up as the child of a military veteran, I witnessed instant habitus (or embodiment of capital) and access to capital in several fields, simply as a result of my father's profession. For example, my family received discounts, medical benefits, and access to tax free products due to our affiliation with the military community. Instead of perceiving any family exceptional because of their structure, I

utilized my upbringing as a lens to view families in recognition of strengths and capital associated with family identification and composition.

My African American identity, experiences, and gender influenced interactions with participants, the research, and my interpretation of data. The impact of a feminine perspective sensitized the plight of modern families for me, particularly regarding mothering and engagement in educational institutions, because in many respects, individuals regard children's learning as women's work. Therefore, mothers' dedication of innumerable hours with children's learning seems natural rather than extraordinary, and likewise, father's time spent advocating for their children appears exceptional, rather than expected. These perceptions could have veiled certain realities of the participants' lives, important to their functioning as a family unit, such as parental sacrifices made to support their preadolescent. I sought to compartmentalize my feelings in order to maintain focus on the participants and the data, rather than concentrating on my personal opinions. I believe my gender and race positively influenced participants throughout the research study due to our shared African American middle class culture and my experiences as an educator. Still, I endeavored to remain a focused professional and to convey humility and transparency throughout the research process in my inevitably subjective role as a female African American educator and researcher.

Participant Selection

My efforts to compose a layered and meaningful research study began to manifest with the identification of four African American middle class families. The use of purposeful sampling as described by Patton (2002) to secure information-rich cases allowed me to collect quality data over the course of the research study (Berg, 2009). I applied a form of snowball sampling for its recruiting effectiveness within well-networked populations in which participants

might be difficult to approach or access. Termed community nomination by Foster (1997) in her work with African American teachers, this process fostered an emic (occurring within the population) versus an etic (external perspective) approach to my research. Foster described community nomination as a method of selecting participants through individuals in the communities in which she conducted her research. Members of the community nominated relevant cases (known teachers in their neighborhoods) for participation in the research by communicating with educators and encouraging potential participants to contact the researcher (Foster, 1997). I adopted this approach to participant selection by asking members of a local suburban community to recommend families for participation. The community members agreed to connect with families on my behalf, thus setting into motion the community nomination process as utilized by Foster.

Owing to insider influence, participants contacted me and our first communication consisted of the following six-question phone screening (See Appendix A):

1. Are you between the ages of twenty and seventy?
2. Are you of African American descent?
3. Do you self-identify as middle class?
4. Are you currently parenting a preadolescent child, aged 7-12?
5. Do you perceive your child to be academically successful?
6. Are you interested in participating in this research study?

Participants found eligible offered an affirmative response to each of the six questions and once eligible, I scheduled an initial meeting to obtain informed consent, parental permission, and child assent. Informed Consent and Parental Permission (found in Appendix B), along with Minor Assent (found in Appendix C) ensured full disclosure of research procedures and offered

participants an opportunity to nominate other parents for participation. At the conclusion of these meetings, I provided families with a copy of their informed consent documentation for reference, a checklist for document/artifact collection (See Appendix D), and scheduled our first interview within two weeks of the meeting. The participant selection process continued for two weeks and culminated with a final group of four participating families. Purposeful selection of participants using community nomination enabled me to partner with families respected by community members also invested in their parenting and engagement.

Collection of Data

Qualitative researchers collect data via four methods: participation, observation, interviews, and artifacts. Termed triangulation, this process strengthens research and avoids the reliance upon a singular, perceived truth (Patton, 2002). Academic rigor mandates that research remains credible, reliable, confirmable, valid, and to a certain degree, generalizable (Morse, 2015). According to Patton (2002), comparisons among data sources—triangulation—tested the consistency of collected data, thus increasing the credibility, reliability, generalizability, and overall trustworthiness of the present research study.

Table 3

Data Sources

Sources of Collected Data
Participant Observation (Intermittent)
Parent Interviews (8)
Child Interviews (4)
Group Interview (1)
Artifacts (50)

The use of multiple sources (delineated in Table 3) as a component of qualitative research aided in the discernment of patterns and anomalies across sources of data, as well as maintain rigor and integrity in my research methods.

Participant Observation

Participation includes firsthand involvement in the environment, and observation requires the researcher to record extensive notes detailing events, behaviors, and artifacts (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). DeWalt and DeWalt (2001) defined participant observation accordingly.

> For anthropologists and social scientists, participant observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture (p. 1).

Through participation in the observation, researchers might gain a greater understanding of interactions among participants. For example, according to Creswell (2007), combining participation and observation could balance bias of self-reported family interactions. Parents reported parental habits and practices while children relayed events; however, placing a researcher to observe and perhaps even participate varied the depiction of the relationships, decisions, and responses within a family. Differentiation in family interaction due to researcher presence could also bias family representations; nonetheless, the use of triangulation, including both observations and interviews, increased research reliability (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Initially, I designed the research to include one sixty-minute family observation, and communicated to participants that this would be a scheduled component of our work together. My intention to observe family interactions motivated this format during the prospectus writing phase of the study; however, as I reflected more on the utility of family observations in this

work, I realized that such data might be compromised. Prior to Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of my dissertation, I conducted a practice study with one African American middle class family. I learned that family dynamics during participant observation could result in inauthentic representations of everyday family life. For example, at the start of my observation, the mother queried when she saw me writing in my notebook, "Ok, are we starting now?" She wanted to prepare for the observation, instead of permitting the natural occurrence of family interactions. Her inquiry impressed upon me the fragility of family observations and caused me to reconsider their structure moving forward. To further illustrate this methodological quandary, Patton (2002) described the limits of observations in qualitative research design.

> Limitations of observations include the possibility that the observer may affect the situation being observed in unknown ways, program staff and participants may behave in some atypical fashion when they know they are being observed, and the selective perception of the observer may distort the data. (Patton, 2002, p. 306)

Patton also noted that observations focus solely on external behaviors; we cannot learn what participants experience internally. If family members behaved uncharacteristically during observations, then conflicting data might result; thus I elected to eliminate the sixty-minute family observation.

Seeking a more effective approach to gathering data regarding family functioning without the imposing form of a structured observation, I resolved to note observations surrounding scheduled interview times. I aspired to witness family interactions because they served as indicators of the parent-child relationship, a key factor in parenting and child outcomes. As participant observation involves taking part in aspects of the participants' environments, I chose to record observations occurring while I engaged with participants before

and after each interview in the families' homes. For instance, while I set up my computer and digital audio recorder, or while I waited for a participant to prepare to speak with me, I noted family activity. I acknowledged that one benefit of this style of intermittent participant observation included observance of genuine exchanges; however, I was challenged with sole reliance on recollection of family activity. Even journaling immediately following interviews required recall of interaction, nuances, and reflections associated with such informal observations. Time and my attempt to preserve the authenticity of moments of interaction did not permit immediate documentation of observations.

Research data gathered through family observances contributed examples of family interactions in their home environment. Compared to scheduled participant observations, I recorded fewer observation notes; however I perceived exchanges among family members to be genuine because of their focus on one another before our structured interviews (instead of being concerned about the observations of a researcher). Though participants had been made aware of study observations due to Informed Consent, their relaxed conversation increased my confidence in the authenticity of these moments. Consequently, in the time surrounding 12 interviews, I recorded sufficient information regarding participants' relationships as an alternative to structured participant observations.

Interviews and Discussion Group Data

Components of ethnographic research have evolved with societal changes, media, and technology (Patton, 2002). Ethnographic interviews elicit implicit structures guiding participants' worldviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), which, incorporated into present study might influence parental action, parental decisions regarding engagement, and parent-child interactions. Choosing to conduct multiple interviews facilitated the gathering of rich and varied

collection and triangulation of data. I designed interview protocols following careful review of research literature, consisting of queries aimed at parenting and family habits, child-rearing, early learning practices, parental engagement, parent-child relationships, and academic achievement.

Utilization of separate interview protocols for parent and child created concentrated focus on individual participants; however, the interview questions remained similar. Initially the semi-structured protocols required amending for the inclusion of details regarding participants' relationships and interactions. Completion of a practice study facilitated fine tuning of the interview protocol, involving deletion of questions and insertion of more relevant queries. For example, I included a question in the revised interview protocol for parents to elicit perceptions regarding love in the family and connections to the parent-child relationship. The rationale for this adjustment evolved from my belief that such data remained highly relevant, but missing from extant parenting literature. Talking about love and parent-child relationships during participant interviews resulted in the inclusion of unique data for analysis in the study.

Participants' involvement in two parent interviews (less than three weeks apart) and one child interview commenced following completion of informed consent. Conducting two interview sessions with parents served three intentional purposes. I separated lengthy interview protocols into two parts, with a family focus during Interview #1 and a community focus during Interview #2. Finally, the second session facilitated another meeting with the family and an additional opportunity for participant observation. Each semi-structured interview followed an interview protocol (See Appendix E and Appendix F), incorporating pursuance of topics of interest as the interviews unfolded (Patton, 2002). I hoped that spacing adult interviews weeks

apart might give the parental participants time to reflect on our discussion and allow the researcher time for transcription and review in preparation for the second interview.

Conducting interviews prompted the telling of narratives regarding family impact upon student academic performance. If participants deviated from guiding questions, I encouraged them to insert details they deemed relevant, and then refocused discussion in accordance with the interview protocol. Interviewing participants allowed me to learn through the creation of space and time to discuss aspects of parenting culture (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Furthermore, interviews offered participants opportunities to insert personal narratives—a rarity compared to other methods of data collection (Patton, 2002).

Following two seventy-five minute individual interviews with adult participants and one 40-minute interview with child participants, I conducted a parent discussion group (also seventy-five minutes) comprising organized discussion of parenting patterns. Adapted from large scale market research and applied to social science, discussion group interviews focused on a social context (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Patton, 2002). Supporting the group in a natural and relaxed atmosphere allowed participants to enjoy flexibility to explore topics socially and spontaneously (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). A level of community support and social interaction emerged as participants appeared to comfortably share their family challenges and triumphs—evidenced by agreement and frequent laughter. In the group setting, participants shared and supported the discussion by layering their own narrative atop one another's. Additionally, they made connections between others' experiences with parenting and their own, at times interjecting phrases such as, "Like you said," and "I agree, because…" In a social context, the group interview (See Appendix G for interview protocol) presented more opportunities to observe dynamics among parental participants and greater exploration of

tangential subjects, thereby increasing validity of my portrayal of this group's parenting practices (Patton, 2002).

The goal of the group discussion was to gain a perspective of parental engagement defined by participants, which spilled over the boundaries of involvement found in the literature, and in doing so redefining perceptions of middle class African American parental roles assumed in advocacy for their children in home/community and academic spaces. To mitigate the emergence of power players in the group, Marshall & Rossman (2006) recommended that a trained moderator be present to refocus discussion when necessary. For my purposes, I served as group moderator to encourage respectful commentary while participants disclosed personal accounts of parenting and family experiences. A comfortable atmosphere persisted, which I believe resulted from animated conversations among parents during the group discussion. The discussion group format coincided with the EPE framework because discussion continued to be guided by interactions among parents in response to contemplation of their authored parental engagement, access and activation of capital, and their children's academic achievement.

Expounding on one component of EPE, Ladson-Billings (1998) argued that Critical Race Theory (CRT) emphasized the importance of voices among different races sounding, resounding, and eliciting reaction. Social constructions of parenting beliefs (and the evolution of these beliefs), along with factors associated with race and culture, which surfaced in interviews and the group discussion, illustrated the alignment of research methodology with components of CRT. The use of a discussion group directed by the group interview protocol offered participants a sounding board inclusive of individuals possessing similar goals and divergent techniques to achieve their goals (Patton, 2002). Collectively, the individual interviews and the group

discussion generated the majority of collected data; however, the collected artifacts comprised an integral component of analysis regarding achievement.

Collection of Artifacts

The research literature demonstrated that parental engagement involved the advocacy for children's edification in both home/community and school-based nonacademic spaces (Barton et al., 2004). Such engagement reinforced learning, thus equipping students with the capacity to excel in school-based academic spaces on tasks such as classroom assignments, classroom assessments, standardized assessments, and homework assignments. Patton (2002) considered documents as material culture, which validated institutional performance and provided an additional avenue to inquiry. Displayed in Table 4, parent participants submitted fifty artifacts to substantiate preadolescent academic achievement. Documents included samples of items related to preadolescent participants' academic achievement, including graded assignments, awards, grade reports, graded assessments, and standardized assessments.

Table 4

Artifacts Collected for Document Analysis

Participant	Artifact	Total
India	Graded Assignments (Science [n.d., 9/2016], Math [n.d., n.d., 8/2016, 9/2016, 9/2016], Reading [n.d., 8/2016, 8/2016, 9/2016], Vocabulary [n.d., 8/2016, 9/2016], Language Arts [n.d., 9/2016], Social Studies [n.d.]) Awards (Superstar Student [10/2012]) Language Arts Assessments (n.d., 4/2015, 8,/2016, 9/2016, 9/2016) Grade Report (5/2015, 12/2015, 9/2016. 10/2016)	27
Nadia	Standardized Assessment (10/2013) Grade Reports (12/2013, 5/2014, 12/2015, 5/2016) Benchmark Report (4/2016) Progress Report with Detailed Description (9/2016)	7
Brian	Standardized Assessment (10/2014) Progress Report (3/2015) Grade Report (5/2016)	3

Aja	Certificates of Achievement (Spelling Bee [12/2013], Honor Roll [1/2013, 5/2013, 12/2014, 5/2015, 1/2016], Reading Achievement [5/2013], Perfect Attendance [1/2013, 1/2015], Star Student [4/2016], Social Studies [5/2016])	
	Grade Reports (12/2012, 5/2016)	13
Total		50

Requiring a particular form of documentation from parents seemed counterintuitive because parent perceptions (including participants' ideas about achievement) represented a vital component of the research. I valued parental choices about which documents to share, allowing for parental discernment; therefore, the type and number of documents submitted for each preadolescent participant varied.

Leaving selection and submission of academic artifacts to parental participants affected data collection in multiple ways. First, it left me uncertain about the type, quantity, and quality of documents parents would share. I also wondered if parents would only submit items that demonstrated their child's skills proficiency and whether or not the documents would reflect parents' ideas regarding their children's success or refute these perceptions and professions. Finally, I considered the time necessary to gather artifacts. I wanted participants to have time to gather relevant documents in support of their children's achievement; however, the amount of time it may have taken to collect these items concerned me. I requested student documents in advance, however, two families submitted their artifacts after I had already begun document analysis. Nonetheless, artifacts presented data regarding academic achievement and conduct. Representing an important aspect of this research, school reports offered an institutional perspective of the student—otherwise unattainable because I did not include school-based observations into the design of the research study.

Analysis of Data

Patton (2002) offered that triangulation comprised cross-checking of gathered data, adding credibility and reliability to research, findings, and conclusions. In preparation for analysis, I incorporated ATLAS.ti software for the organization of raw data to increase ease and efficiency of data access. The program simplified organization of collected data through storage of documents and artifacts and allocation of codes and themes, as well as their definitions. I uploaded interviews, observation notes, artifacts, and entered research memos directly into ATLAS.ti. Compiling collected data, including participant observation notes, interview transcriptions, artifacts, and memos amassed 175 pages of information for analysis. Though comparatively, data collection for my research resulted in a smaller set of data, I rationalized my utilization of data analysis software for the potential of ATLAS.ti to organize and make accessible each document and gathered artifact prior to the initial stages of data analysis.

Ethnographers employ content analysis to examine interview transcripts, observation data, and artifacts collected over the course of their study. Berg (2009) defines content analysis as "a careful, detailed systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings" (p. 338). In other words, assignment of codes resulted in categorized themes (Berg, 2009; Patton, 2002). I planned two phases for coding of raw data, but returned to raw data repeatedly to validate the identification, naming, and formation of codes and categories. For example, Phase 1 (inductive coding) involved linking topic phrases or codes to chunks of text (participant quotes) and similarly linking the new code to related statements. In Phase 2 of data analysis, I proceeded with review of raw data, constantly returning to evolving code definitions. I analyzed each interview and artifact until all were coded, thereby preparing data for Phase 3, thematic analysis.

Understandings of the EPE framework informed analysis of data in my research study. Similar to beliefs by Barton et al. (2004) that parents designed their engagement, I hoped that in a similar way, participants would guide the analysis and findings of the research. Particularly, through reading, review, and annotation of collected data, the participants' voices resonated and participants' relationships surfaced. Consonant with their work in constructing the EPE framework, the authors took notice of developments in their research setting and applied this data to their description of parental engagement (Barton et al., 2004). Though I did not construct theory, I gathered data to support the evidence of the EPE framework during my research with participating African American middle class families. Critical Race Theory (CRT) also informed the design of the research, due to my focus on participants' voices, as inductive analysis unfolded. Open coding fit well with CRT's emphasis on underrepresented groups in academia because participants' quotes directed analysis and ultimate findings. Thus the cultural relevance of components of the EPE framework for research with African American middle class families strengthened the foundation of study's methodological approach.

After I read, transcribed, and reviewed each interview transcript (individual and group) for accuracy, I proceeded to offer participants an opportunity to verify their transcripts. This process of member checking represented a component of qualitative research to increase validity of collected data. Each participant confirmed the accuracy of transcripts with a few exceptions. For example, a preadolescent participant asked me to correct recorded times for the family schedule and another participant requested that I correct an error in one of her quotes. I completed other grammatical issues and, having made appropriate edits, then finalized and uploaded transcripts in preparation for data analysis.

Interview Transcripts and Observations

Inductive coding of interview transcripts and observation notes commenced with line by line reading, and simultaneous coding of raw data. I expressed my initial feelings about the process of data analysis during inductive coding in the following memo.

> I find data analysis to be unfolding before me like a road map. Not a completed road map, but a partial one, in which I see a portion of the unfinished route revealed in front of me. Now I proceed one turn at a time, stopping at the end of each to see which road I will take next, never being able to see the entire route at once. But I have the destination in my mind, similar to the functionality of a GPS device with turn by turn instructions. I know where I am going, but the details in between are in some ways determined by the data itself. Which way will I go next?

I described my experience with inductive analysis as analogous to a journey guided by single step directions, before arriving at the final destination. Allowing the findings to unfold in such a way facilitated bridling described by Vagle (2009) due to awareness and consideration of my positionality throughout the research. An iterative process, coding raw data resulted in a clear portrait of participants, while also offering insight into the impact of parenting perceptions and the influences of their practices on preadolescent achievement.

Document Analysis

Following collection and organization of gathered artifacts, I read and reviewed each document, searching for evidence of student outcomes to compare and contrast with participant descriptions of academic achievement. This triangulation process contributed to the level of academic rigor in the present qualitative research study by offering an institutional perspective of students' academic achievement. I compared artifacts to parent- and child-reported school

performance and home behaviors, and corroborated or contradicted collected interview and observational data, contributing to the overall picture of the child's academic achievement. Specifically, I noted levels of performance on each of the documents, whether the child had scored a high grade (assigned an A or B), placed in the upper quadrant of a percentile score on a standardized assessment, met or exceed expectations, or received acknowledgement for performance or conduct (behavior). I coded documents according to level of performance, then analyzed them in comparison with the remaining data sources.

Characteristic of methodology associated with qualitative analysis, open coding of artifacts led to determinants of achievement, as I coded sections of the documents indicating levels of performance: letter grades, conduct grades, numerical grades, percentages, and percentiles. Other descriptors depicting exceptional performance included the following terms, for example: satisfactory, high or high average, proficient learner, and distinguished learner. Not to negate participants' reports of academic achievement, by including artifacts I triangulated data among parent, student, and institutional reports. Therefore coding subsequently led to the emergence of chunks of data representative of student's achievement in school, in preparation for thematic analysis.

Thematic Analysis

Following open coding of collected data, I continued with axial coding, described by Creswell (2007) as the identification of categories among coded data. Review of the coded raw data involved searching for relationships among the codes. I identified connections among particular codes and grouped them together, representing themes. For example, I integrated coded quotes relating to children's personality, development, well-being, self-esteem, responsibilities, and extracurricular activities into a common code family: Outcomes. This

process of axial coding resulted in five overarching themes—descriptions of which I delineated in Table 5. Themes (or patterns) of parenting practice included Support, Structure, Enlightenment, Engagement, and Outcomes. I analyzed similarities and distinctions among the themes of parenting practice in detail in Chapter Five. Each theme included patterns of practice converging into a prescribed method of parenting and child outcomes among the African American middle class participants.

Table 5

Descriptions: Themes of Parenting Practice Resultant from Thematic Analysis

Theme	Description of Theme
Theme 1: Support	Comprises codes relating to family communication of thoughts, feelings, and directives; sibling interactions; routines; traditions; involvement of extended family and close friends; relationships between parent and focal child; faith; and adversity
Theme 2: Structure	Comprises codes relating to parental habits, practice, method or style; decision-making, rules, or expectations; consequences and discipline; teachings about values; relationships; roles; articulated goals and outcomes for children; and childhood influences
Theme 3: Enlightenment	Comprises codes relating to educational and cultural exposure, participation in extracurricular activities, socialization practices, social aspects of participants' lives, parents' upbringing, balancing parenting,
Theme 4: Parental Engagement	Comprises codes relating to parental engagement at home, in school, and beyond; early learning practices prior to formalized schooling; and learning rituals practiced outside of school hours
Theme 5: Outcomes	Comprises codes relating to children's personality traits, maturity, development, responsibilities, extracurricular activities, academic achievement, academic qualities, communication, perceptions, behavior, barriers, and influence of family/parenting practice

My work connected parental practice with academic achievement through emphasis on variety in parental engagement found among study participants. Table 5 describes each theme, which incorporated participants' narratives, as discussed in the findings. Due to the nature of

family study, components of themes overlapped in several ways; however, descriptions of codes from Table 5 and theme definitions found in Table 6 helped to distinguish associated themes from one another. In the findings, examination of themes of parenting practice further explicated similarities and differences.

Table 6

Definitions: Themes of Parenting Practice

Theme	Definition
Theme 1: Support	Family members' habits contributing to the home atmosphere and environment, as well as family interaction and relationships
Theme 2: Structure	Parental habits and beliefs consistent with parenting, representing their experiences, decisions, hopes, and expectations
Theme 3: Enlightenment	Efforts by parental participants to nurture their children's development and learning according to their own beliefs and expectations
Theme 4: Engagement	Including home and school participation by parents in the learning process of their preadolescent child
Theme 5: Outcomes	Relating to the characteristics, behaviors, and learning outcomes of preadolescent participants in the home and school setting

Academic Rigor

Researchers have a responsibility to maintain integrity and ethics, due to implications for our work, individually and collectively; therefore, I recognized that if I am to be a respected scholar, the veracity of my work and respect for participants had to be apparent. In researchers' pursuit of answers to difficult questions, participants should trust that their confidentiality will be prioritized. To protect the identity of participants, I stored interview recordings and transcripts electronically on a password encrypted personal computer and employed the use of pseudonyms in my writing. I remained professional and respectful of participants' time and personal space. When meetings needed to be rescheduled or deadlines pushed back to accommodate participants, I immediately and genially acquiesced. By taking the aforementioned precautions, I maintained

personal standards of excellence, protected participants' confidentiality, preserved the study's reliability, and upheld ethical practice mandated by the Institutional Review Board.

Morse (2015) described and later critiqued components of rigor in qualitative inquiry by examining creditability, reliability, trustworthiness, rigor, validity, and integrity. In Figure 2, Morse (2015, pp. 1213-1214) emphasized concepts that increase academic rigor.

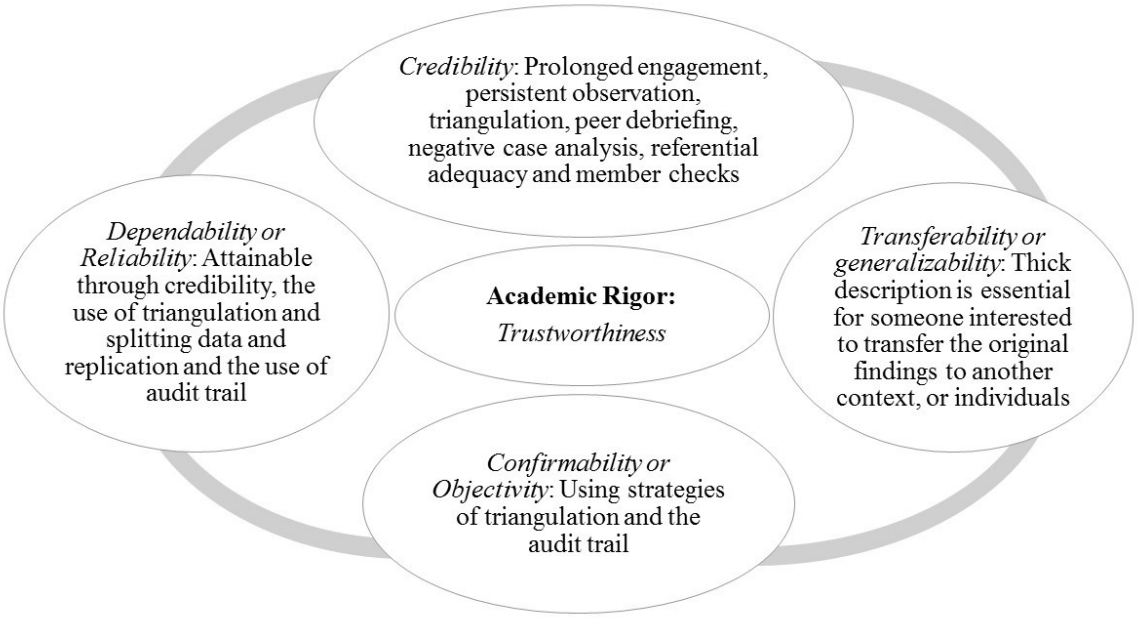

Figure 2. Academic Rigor in Qualitative Research

Each element of the process to complete the present ethnography involved careful steps to address trustworthiness of the research study. I strived to ensure credibility, dependability and objectivity, understanding however, that the generalizability of research with four middle class African American families might be limited. Parents expected that in teaming with a researcher who has read, studied, and practiced in the field, they would observe competency, professionalism, and ethical practice. Methods of meeting participant expectations included

prolonged engagement with participants, triangulation of data sources, peer debriefing following interviews and discussion groups, member checking, bridling, and reflexive journaling—the application of which enhanced the overall trustworthiness of my research.

Summary

I utilized qualitative ethnographic methods to examine parenting practices with four self-ascribed middle class African American families. Participants from middle class African American families participated in interviews and observations, and presented school artifacts reflecting child performance at school. Dialogue compensated for gaps and inconsistencies in artifacts, inclusive of grade reports, attendance records, and assessment data. Utilizing ATLAS.ti software to organize and analyze data, the process of content analysis ensued, including open and axial coding. Coding resulted in the emergence of subsidiary categories and five overall themes, permitting comparisons of data with reviewed literature regarding trends in parenting. Finally, bridling subjectivities facilitated the preservation of findings based upon data and emergent themes, thus decreasing adverse effects of my personal influence upon study outcomes. My ultimate goal remained to contribute participants' expertise to the growing body of parenting research so practitioners might focus their attention on parenting engagement to further support students in elementary school classrooms (and other grade levels). Qualitative inquiry of parenting patterns among African American middle class families—emphasizing preadolescent academic achievement—facilitated the collection of valuable data applicable both to family life and support within a school context.

CHAPTER FOUR

FAMILY PORTRAITS

Community nomination resulted in four families, who met the selection criteria (African American self-identified, middle class parents of preadolescent children) and agreed to participate in the research study. Table 7 displays the demographics of study participants, with each participant identified using a pseudonym to protect their identity in accordance with ethical practice in research.

Table 7

Participant Demographics

Participants	Gender	Age	Level of Education	Occupation
Shauna Patrick	Female	46	Doctorate	Optometrist
India Patrick	Female	7	3rd Grade	(Student)
Faye Anderson	Female	45	Specialist's	Principal
Nadia Anderson	Female	9	4th Grade	(Student)
Tony Samuels	Male	52	Bachelor's	Financial Planner
Andrea Samuels	Female	48	Specialist's	Assistant Principal
Brian Samuels	Male	10	5th Grade	(Student)
Keith Roberts	Male	43	Master's	Manager
Cynthia Roberts	Female	43	Doctorate	Pharmacist
Aja Roberts	Female	11	6th Grade	(Student)

As represented in Table 7, I worked with six adult participants (two fathers did not participate in interviews) and four preadolescent participants (3 girls, 1 boy) whose ages ranged from seven to eleven at the time of data collection. The Patrick, Anderson, Samuels, and Roberts families each parented a child attending a public elementary or middle school in the suburbs of a metropolitan

city located in the southeastern region of the United States. The college educated parents participating in the present study self-identified as African American middle class based upon their levels of education, their career, and income. Participants included two doctors, two principals, a financial planner, and a manager. Each resided in two-level homes amidst suburban neighborhoods within thirty minutes of the schools their children attended. According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2015, participants' county of school attendance majorly comprised of African Americans (55%), with a median income of approximately $51,000, with 41% of citizens possessing four-year college degrees.

In addition to demographics, participant families shared additional characteristics including support of their children's academic and extracurricular endeavors, reliance on afterschool programs, and caring for a family pet. Specifically, their approaches to child-rearing and engagement corresponded in multiple ways, though the nature of their selection (community nomination) might have suggested more diverse family characteristics. During each participant's first interview, introductions ensued, and a family portrayal emerged, replete with family descriptions, patterns of parental practice, and perceptions regarding academic achievement.

The Patrick Family

The Patrick family includes Shauna, and her spouse, Reid, parenting four children and celebrating 20 years of marriage. Three daughters and one son reside in the home with Mr. and Mrs. Patrick. Shauna's two oldest daughters are 17 and 15; her son is 12, and her 7-year-old daughter, India, is the focal child of the research study and the youngest preadolescent participant. Mr. Patrick works as a manager in the corporate arena, while Shauna owns an optometry practice. The four children attend different schools, and participate in several extracurricular activities; therefore the family (particularly Shauna) remained busy with school,

practices, activities, and games. Recently, the eldest Patrick daughters signed a modeling contract, which they balanced along with their athletic commitments. Shauna's firm style of parenting balanced her husband's willingness to handle serious disciplinary issues should they arise. India loves school, talks incessantly, tells jokes, and captures attention with a commanding personality. Despite her fear of consequences and discipline, she often stays up late, earning the title, The Family Night Owl. India described her family as nice and supportive, especially when it came to her homework. Reportedly, they cook for her, read to her, buy her gifts and allow her to do her favorite things, making them laugh and playing on her tablet. She seemed content with being the youngest of her siblings and an academically successful second grade student and athlete.

The Anderson Family

Faye and Mel Anderson parent two daughters, ages 16 and 9. Their youngest fifth grade daughter, Nadia, is the focal child of the present research study. Married for 20 years, the Andersons work as school administrators in separate school districts. Faye serves as a principal at her daughter's school. For this reason, she assumes the majority of responsibilities regarding Nadia's educational experience, including transportation and communication with her daughter's teachers. Overall, the pair approaches parenting in a supportive manner sharing parental duties; however, Faye assumed the role of primary disciplinarian. Mel supports Nadia at school when his busy schedule as an assistant principal and adjunct professor permits. Faye also attends a nearby university part time, in pursuit of an advanced degree in education. Similar to the Patrick family, Faye and Mel balance a hectic schedule of working two jobs, raising two daughters and remaining involved in the lives of their family members. Faye described her daughter as talkative, very social, and "happy go lucky." A budding artist, Nadia enjoys working on the

computer and watching television. She portrayed her family as "very loving and supportive;" closeness among immediate and extended family members seemed the norm for the Anderson family, according to the outspoken Nadia. Quite mature, Nadia presented as friendly, respectful, confident, thoughtful, and inquisitive during our interactions.

The Samuels Family

The sole male child participant represents the Samuels family. Tony and Andrea have been married for twenty years and together, they parent a 13-year-old daughter and a 10-year-old son, Brian (focal child in the study). Andrea, like the Andersons, works as an administrator, employed at the middle school where her son attends. Her husband, Tony works as a financial planner, but also volunteers as a Sunday school teacher at their church. Andrea takes the lead with parenting, while Tony takes on "follow up and support." The couple seems to have defined parental roles, to the point that during our first interview, Andrea's references to her son's development prompted Tony to respond, "That's not my lane." This indicated that Andrea's discussion of her children's growth and maturation remained primarily a maternal versus paternal responsibility for the Samuels. Exemplifying parental roles, the couple managed to balance a full schedule of Brian's participation in orchestra, membership with multiple athletic teams, and their daughter's involvement in gymnastics. Brian rarely misbehaved with his parents, though he occasionally displayed a "preteen attitude" coinciding with puberty and maturation. Described as a pleaser by his parents, he showed sensitivity and receptivity in his demeanor and language with parents, but shied away from emotional interactions (according to his mother). Brian felt supported and loved by his family because he has a room, food, and his parents know him so well. Due to early and ongoing health issues, which Brian's parents did not elaborate upon, they remained vigilant, by administering medication and inquiring about his

welfare in my presence. In contrast to the other preadolescents, Brian's reticence limited the amount and type of data gathered during our interview together. However, his timidity in no way hindered support from his parents, evidenced by their encouraging response to his shy behavior throughout our interactions.

The Roberts Family

Aja Roberts, age 11, represents the only single child participant in the research study. Married for 17 years, her parents Keith and Cynthia, work as a corporate manager and a pharmacist, respectively. Aja's parents seemed more flexible with their work schedules than other parental participants; therefore, their engagement in her schooling varied from homework guidance to providing school transportation. Their support (including in-depth academic guidance, for example) assisted Aja academically, especially in light of challenges due to an attention deficit disorder (ADD) diagnosis. Cynthia works remotely at least three days each week to maintain her presence with Aja after school. Keith works late hours, but supported his daughter by finding other ways to engage with her, including their attendance at a technology fair or providing golf lessons. Interestingly, the couple splits parental roles along the lines of communication and presence, demonstrated by Keith's joy of interacting with school staff and attending school activities and Cynthia's willingness to take responsibility for communication with her daughter's teachers. Assumption of their parental roles required them to communicate with each other regarding their daughter's progress. Keith prided himself in being an encourager, generating a positive learning environment for his daughter and he lightheartedly described his wife as the "consequence dealer" or disciplinarian. Furthermore, Aja acknowledged, "My dad really likes technology and engineering and math. My mom likes to do things that doctors do, like help people." Awareness of her parents' passions including her

father's interests signified a cherished bond. Through our work together, I observed her obedience, playfulness and sensitivity through discussion of school, her parents, and family interactions. Aja enjoyed reading graphic (comic-book format) novels and creative expressions of artistic ability. She believes that her family provides for her and when asked what she might change about her parents, she smiled and said nothing.

A Summarized Portrayal of Participants

Parents raising a preadolescent child composed one of four African American middle class families in the present study. Though similar in many ways, participant families also distinguished themselves from one another in their chosen professions, neighborhoods of residence, and in minor details regarding their daily routines. The purpose of this brief chapter was to introduce the participants to establish a foundation of understanding regarding their parenting and engagement, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 5. Subsequent chapters built from the foundation of these introductions consistently signify a focus on the family and my committed efforts to highlight beneficial practices among the aforementioned middle class African American parents and their preadolescent children.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

My research with four self-ascribed African American middle class families achieved a focused exploration of family practices associated with the successful academic achievement of preadolescent participants. Framing the study from an EPE perspective facilitated a deeper understanding of parental engagement among a population seldom portrayed in family and educational research—the African American middle class. Data collected from parent and child interviews, the group discussion, observations, and artifacts, led to the identification of five themes including Support, Structure, Enlightenment, Engagement, and Outcomes. Subsequent analysis and interpretation of data resulted in findings indicating that parental expectations, beliefs, and perceptions regarding parental influence, along with prescribed parental engagement, connected with children's motivation, obedience, and academic achievement.

Represented in Figure 3, my research revealed 22 Patterns of Parental Practice enacted within each of the four participating families. Articulation of parental action in the areas of support, structure, enlightenment, and engagement corroborated outcomes among participating African American middle class parents and preadolescents. My decision to focus on the discussion of similarities among parents represented a goal to highlight positive outcomes of parenting among participants; however, families differed in several of their approaches to parenting in their families. Overall, the identification of patterns of their practice suggests that particular acts by parental participants contributed to preadolescent outcomes consonant with academic achievement.

Patterns of Parental Practice

Five Patterns of Parental Practice summarized habits reported by parents from each of the four participating families. Similar to discussion over the course of the research study, patterns of practice overlapped and repeated. Parents reiterated elements of support, for example when they elaborated their engagement; therefore, themes connected continuously despite the somewhat linear organization of Figure 3.

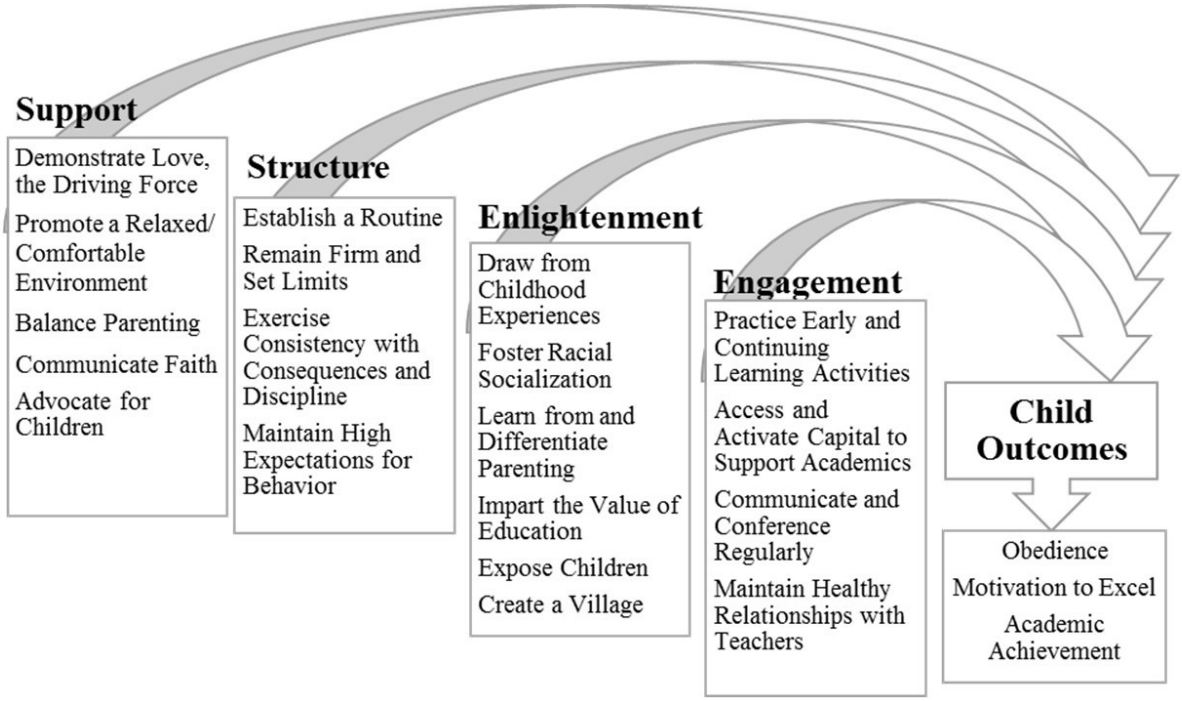

Figure 3: Patterns of Parental Practice

The first pattern of practice—Support—signified the promotion of the child's best interest and included demonstrations of love, creation of a relaxed home environment, balanced parenting, communication of faith, and parental advocacy. The establishment of a supportive atmosphere in each family nurtured relationships among participants and set a foundation for the integration

of structure, the second pattern of parental practice. Structure involved discussion of family routines, firm establishment of limits, consistency with consequences, and expectations for behavior. Support combined with structure communicated acceptance to children and held them to standards of behavior perceived acceptable by their parents.

Engagement by parents ensued in early childhood and continued through preadolescence, beginning with the third pattern of parental practice: Enlightenment. Consistent with the provision of knowledge for children or insight into the parental role, this pattern of practice included parents' reflection on childhood experiences, fostering socialization, differentiating parenting, conveying the importance of education, exposing children to various environments and experiences, and associating with like-minded people. Efforts to enlighten their children represented indoctrination by parents in preparation for functioning in a larger society. Representing a dynamic process of interactions and the final pattern of parental practice, Engagement encompassed learning practices, activation of capital in support of learning, communicating regularly with teachers, and the establishment of healthy parent-school partnerships. Interaction across the four themes of Support, Structure, Enlightenment, and Engagement, connected with the final theme, Outcomes. This final theme includes preadolescent tendencies towards motivation, obedience, and academic achievement—in summary of achievement associated with parental support, structure, enlightenment, and engagement.

Similar to parental participants, preadolescents observed and separately described patterns of practice in their families, which related to the five themes of parenting represented in Figure 3. Preadolescents experienced *support* from their parents when they recognized or responded to affectionate interactions during interviews and intermittent observations.

Children's acknowledgement of their parents' expectations to follow the rules and behave related to imposed *structure* by parents at home, and in order to avoid the associated negative consequences. Preadolescent participants referenced encouragement with support which stimulated intrinsic motivation and characterized the second pattern of parental practice: *enlightenment*. Enlightenment encompassed detailed discussion of extracurricular activities in which preadolescents participated. Finally, children attested to their parents' *engagement* in their academic lives, noting involvement and provision of resources. In addition to connections between Support, Structure, Enlightenment, and Engagement, *Outcomes* emerged from parent and student reports.

Preadolescent respondents demonstrated their maturity when they corroborated and continued the catalog of outcomes with the inclusion of three academic characteristics only alluded to by parents. Children agreed with parents' reports that they felt motivated to excel, displayed satisfactory conduct in school, and achieved academically. However, child participants also expressed aspects of schooling that they enjoyed, reported initiating contact with their teachers, and acknowledged their behavioral/academic strengths and weaknesses. More specifically, emphasis on participation in their own learning consisted of positive regard for teacher or school, requesting assistance from teachers when needed, and achieving honor roll status in their academic subjects. Each of these characteristics aligned with student engagement and a personal desire to meet and exceed parents' behavioral and educational expectations. As child participants spoke about their academic performance, their discussion paralleled their parents' patterns of practice, concurrently revealing recognition of personal contributions to their learning. Subsequent analysis of data substantiated the Patterns of Parental Practice, which follow—beginning with support.

Theme 1: Support

Support by parents included discussion of love, balance, the home environment, advocacy, communication and faith. Whether negotiating appropriate participation and involvement in their children's lives, intentionally creating a supportive atmosphere in the home, or speaking openly about faith and religion, analysis of data found participants in agreement that Theme 1: Support, included significant factors connecting to their family functioning. Overall, each parent felt that love remained the impetus for their action and involvement in aspects of their family lives, as well as in the academic life of their preadolescent child. In accordance with Critical Race Theory (CRT) discussed by Ladson-Billings (1998), this aspect of the research exemplified participants' voices and counternarratives, due to parents' stories of providing support for their children in various ways.

Demonstrate Love, the Driving Force

The research began and ended with family, the data fell in between the two, but how could I write about family without incorporating love? When invited to discuss the significance of love in parental relationships, adult participants found it difficult to express. However, each agreed love added meaning to their familial encounters, and the family network would not function properly without it. Shauna ardently addressed the void that might persist without expressions of love, "I feel sorry for those kids that don't have, or feel like they can't hug or kiss their parents. I think that's important because it's part of showing that you love them, having that contact with them." Similar to Shauna, Aja articulated from a child's perspective, the implications of parental demonstrations of love:

Some parents don't love their children or care about what they do. They'll just let them do what they want. That's not good because they can do bad things that could get them hurt or in trouble or in prison.

Compared to Shauna, Aja described love simply; however, her statement represented a preadolescent perception of family activity, which significantly contributed to parental relationships. She contrasted uncaring parents and her own parents, who supported and held her accountable in preparation for present and eventual success in life. Brian, Nadia, and India also shared their impressions of parents' regard by describing evidence of love and support in their families.

Parents prioritized nurturance; therefore, references to love resonated with participants during discussions of family interactions. Their statements relayed perceptions of the influence of love in building and maintaining meaningful parent-child relationships.

Shauna: I think love is important.

Keith: I try to show her that love by the things that I do. By trying to be at every program that she may be in. Be there for any type of engagement they may have at the school. Try to go with her [different] places or field trips if I can. Those things, I think from a love standpoint, kind of show that I'm dedicated to her and her learning. Whether or not she truly understands that at this age or not, I don't know, but I think in the long run, she'll appreciate it. So, for me, it's just by being there and showing her that I do love her.

Andrea: I think you do the things that you do out of love. I mean that's the reason you want them to be successful, you want to make it a positive experience.

Tony: I think we do know the importance of it [love] and it does start with caring for

someone, especially enough to have him want to succeed.

Faye: That's really the reason why we do it. We love them and we want our children to experience success…So I would say the love that you have for your child is probably what drives you so much.

The preceding quotes signified the necessity for demonstrations of love in family relationships. Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) emphasized activity within networks, represented here by parents' acknowledgement of the influential factor of love within their family network. Naturally, the extensive role of love in family relationships, family functioning, and academic outcomes remained beyond the scope of my research; however, participants' explanations of love and parenting conveyed the powerful influence of caring relationships on study participants, transferrable to extra-familial relationships in other spaces.

Promote a Relaxed/Comfortable Environment

Parents' positive regard fostered comfort in the home space, which Tony believed aided in the establishment of a "loving and nurturing environment". Broadly, each of the four mothers expressed the value of a supportive and nurturing relationship and home environment for their preadolescent children. Specifically, Faye offered, "I feel like we have a relaxed home environment in that they kind of have the ability and opportunity to do the things that they want and need to do at home." Along with other participants, she realized that if the environment at home conveyed comfort and safety, then the atmosphere generated could contribute to the child's level of comfort and confidence to accomplish tasks and goals. Participants perceived the creation of a supportive environment at home to transfer to academic spaces. Overall, the home influence had the potential to equip participating African American youth with the capital necessary to navigate their social worlds, but parents felt they would have to maintain a balance.

Balance Parenting

Parents assisted their children, but occasionally withheld intervention, attempting to balance their support and intervention, while simultaneously nurturing independence. Andrea stated the right balance might lead to increased maturity while better preparing her children for success. Perceiving her husband and herself as motivators, Cynthia shared, "Going towards the fourth and fifth grade it's trying to get her to become more self-motivated, more of a self-learner, and develop some learning habits." This required Cynthia to step back and allow her daughter to problem solve for herself. Faye discussed her balanced parenting somewhat differently; she surmised, "So it's about balance for me and how do I continue to encourage her, to motivate her and give her what she needs to be successful…?" The utilization of these qualities proved helpful for parents, especially Faye, Cynthia, and Andrea. Parents understood that if they found equilibrium in their parenting to build confidence and competence in the home/community space, then their children might transfer these skills to other spaces, and later engage in their own advocacy. Offering positivity, support, and balance in the home environment emerged in relation to parental discussions of child-rearing.

Communicate Faith

Participants connected their discussion regarding family communication and faith, which inspired simultaneous presentation of both. Evidence surfaced that verbal exchanges had an impact on family functioning and child outcomes (Lareau, 2003), which continued in my work with study participants. Parents spoke of building vocabulary, emphasizing communication of feelings and desires to adults, and elaborating on daily life experiences. Faye expressed without hesitance the value of communication in her family.

> And just wanting her to also be able to talk with us about what was going on whenever we weren't together. So just having conversations with [Nadia] about her day and what was going on and how she was treated and how she felt. I wanted to make sure that she could give that to me when I needed to receive it; I thought that was important.

Families communicated the importance of language by encouraging children to use their words and express themselves clearly with adults. Similar to Lareau's (2003) discussion of the influence of language within middle class families, my participants stressed communicating effectively at home, to promote transference of these skills outside of the home/community space.

Conversations surrounding God and faith began early, replete with lessons about expectations and the importance of making good decisions. Each participant family discussed the role of faith in their lives. Lessons abounded to include reflections about whether or not God would be pleased with a particular choice or reaction. Shauna revealed, "I'm always talking to India about God…wanting us to do our best and treating people with love and kindness." Such lessons permeated conversations between Shauna and India, reinforcing the significance of family communication, religious beliefs, and the Patricks' continual aspiration to live in accordance with their faith. Similarly, Cynthia recalled an encounter with Aja.

> We'd walk around and just little things like opening the door for somebody and I'd say well God wants us to do this. She'd say, "Well, why do I have to open the door for somebody?" Well, because God wants you to do that. He's looking at you. He's watching you—he's watching what you're doing. With the little things that she's told me somebody did at school, I'd say, well do you really think God would want you to do

that? Do you really think that God would want you to say that to somebody? What do you think He's saying?

Prompting her daughter to think critically about her behavior and their faith modeled use of language by parents to impart knowledge in the home space. During the group discussion participants referenced their religious beliefs, including early lessons similar to Cynthia and Aja's dialogue. By indoctrinating their children with faith, parents traditionally passed religious beliefs to their children, holding them to a higher standard of respect, obedience, and love, familiar among African Americans from a historical perspective. Parents also modeled these lessons in their interaction with school personnel and their protective instincts towards their children.

Advocate for Children

Participants continued a historical trend among African Americans of respecting educators and educational institutions. However, they also made clear their expectation that teachers be responsible for their role in educating their children. "I think the teacher is part of the trilogy: it's the teacher, the child, and the parent and everybody is responsible. You can't put it off on one person." Here, Tony's perspective emphasized the child's and the parent's responsibility to engage in their children's educational experiences. In agreement, Cynthia confidently stated that teachers can only present the curriculum and parents should reinforce learning because teachers must continue whether one child gets it or not. Parents from all four families believed that due to the large numbers of students and the limited time in classrooms, teachers had a lot to accomplish; therefore, participants partnered with schools and teachers to promote academic achievement.

Parental perceptions varied, as demonstrated in Faye's quote, "I also think that with the work that we do, we understand how to make…public school education work." Faye's reference to her and her husband's efforts to make schooling work for them conveyed confidence regarding the navigation of school spaces, which benefitted their daughters and contributed to their achievement. She contended that by advocating for good schools and good teachers, desirable outcomes resulted, and the school system did indeed work in their favor. Representative of social class, entitlement, or both, her statement clearly demonstrated authoring higher levels of engagement on her children's behalf. The Roberts agreed when they spoke about the quality of teachers Aja had in elementary school, with the exception of an experience in first grade with a novice teacher. (Cynthia felt Aja should have received a stronger foundation in the subject of reading.) Parents' ability to reflect and adapt following unpleasant learning experiences—such as mediocre instruction—benefitted their children. Cynthia and Shauna worked closely with teachers in hopes of preventing breaks in communication or fractured acquisition of skills. Their levels of advocacy clearly aligned with tenets of the EPE framework regarding parental authoring of their engagement to promote positive and quality learning experiences.

Variances in Support

Distinctions in the Support theme emerged. Andrea, Tony, and Cynthia mentioned an emphasis for their children of age-appropriate self-care and the attainment of life skills, including organization/cleanliness, or preparing clothes and supplies for the day. Similarly, in preparation for adulthood, four parents (Tony, Keith and Cynthia, and Shauna) enthusiastically discussed hopes that their children would move out and begin their lives, having been encouraged by their parents to be responsible and behave as caring and productive citizens in society. With the

exception of the Roberts' family, the siblings also played a supportive role for participating preadolescents, by assisting with homework, preparing dinner, or occasionally providing school transportation. Although families talked about faith; church attendance as a unit was only mentioned by the Samuels and Shauna; time spent engaging in extracurricular activities likely affected the families' ability to spend time together in the same space. Therefore, participants created family time in when they could. These differences highlighted the uniqueness of families, which balanced their similarities regarding patterns of support.

Theme 2: Structure

Combined with parental support, structure comprised the foundation for family functioning and subsequent engagement in learning, which helped children to communicate their understanding and voice appreciation for their parents during interviews. Parental practices in relation to family structure included the establishment of routine, setting limits and expectations, and imposing consequences and discipline. Provisions for a structured environment promoted regularity in the homes of participants, enabling family members to focus on their relationships, roles in the family, and productivity in various spaces; participants began their discussions regarding structure with references to daily schedules.

Establish a Routine

Effective family functioning included a daily routine, especially during the school year, to accomplish the myriad tasks associated with parenting a preadolescent child. All participants noted the existence of a family routine, and elaborated their part in one typical day of their family life. The daily routines constituted a crucial piece of the family puzzle, allowing for the completion of and smooth transitions between one task and the next. Consistently, each family mentioned procedures for waking up, eating breakfast (rarely together), traveling to school/work,

completing the school/work day, homework or after school program completion, dinner (occasionally as a family), and bedtime routines. Relevance of family practices exemplified a traditional cultural heritage stemming from a time when African American families expressed unity in community churches, neighborhoods, and at family dinner tables, for example. Consonant with Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, the activity within the participants' family networks represented cultural traditions and affected regular family participation—including setting boundaries for children from an early age.

Remain Firm and Set Limits

Parental participants described structure as a primary component of their parenting, incorporating expectations for behavior and hopes for their children's character development. The Samuels family employed a firm approach, while remaining consistent with their parenting, described in greater detail by Andrea.

> I would consider myself firm but loving. I do like structure. I think they need to have structure, that's a need…They have to have guidance. I like to teach rather than tell children how to do things…I think that establishes the foundation that you need in order for you to move on and be successful because our goal is, of course, to have successful citizens in society. So, I do feel that the firm but fair approach works. They may not like it but that's kind of what needs to happen in my opinion.

Andrea's structured approach to parenting—similar to Keith's—was perceived to contribute to acquisition of skills by their children for application in present and future life circumstances. Standing firm and setting limits resonated with both parents and their children in discussions of parenting practice. Other participants similarly attributed consistency to their ability to incorporate boundaries for behavior and interaction into their households.

Maintain High Expectations for Behavior

An established parent-child relationship based on structure and support seemed to result in a comfortable and positive space for high parental expectations among participant families. Each family expressed a conscious decision to continually establish and reiterate behavioral and participatory expectations for their children. Genuine delivery of expectations for children's behavior seemed linked to children's positive regard for their parents' consistency, balance, discipline, and communication regarding the importance of meeting parental expectations and personal goals. For instance, Faye required her daughters to be responsible for their space and "to contribute to the household in terms of duties and responsibilities, and for them that's in the form of chores." Andrea reflected on the importance of delegating responsibilities to her children.

> I do think they need to have chores….We all live here in the house. Everybody has to contribute. Everybody has to clean up, everybody has to pick up. It's not just the parents' job to do that.

Three of the four child participants mentioned their responsibilities, but Nadia elaborated her duties within her family.

> Usually I do have chores and sometimes on the weekend, my mom is at school still working so I'll do my chores and I don't really get an allowance...Usually my chores are cleaning my room, dusting, cleaning the dishes and that kind of stuff.

Not only did Nadia understand that she should share in responsibilities at home, she also recognized she would not be rewarded for her actions. Consistent with this understanding, Aja nonchalantly expressed she had a duty to contribute because her parents mandated that she

assume responsibilities in the home. The girls accepted responsibility and internalized respect for parents through household contributions and meeting standards for behavior.

Reminiscent of traditional teachings in African American families, participants urged their children to be principled and to continue to demand of themselves a higher standard despite others' perceptions of them, which might lower expectations. Brian, for example, was taught to be a role model and instructed on how to interact with waiters in a restaurant; "I say thank you and you're welcome. My parents taught me manners." Aja's father, Keith, shared reminders for his daughter to be a leader and to practice the golden rule by treating others the way she wanted to be treated. Furthermore, Nadia confidently iterated lessons learned from her parents.

> Say if your friend is doing something wrong then you don't follow them and tell the teacher. Or if you do something wrong, then you might as well admit it before someone accuses you and you get in even more trouble. Also, don't tell stories because you can get in big trouble for that.

Her detailed recollection exemplified participating parents' practices of instilling appropriate behavior regarding social interactions. During their interviews, India iterated her parents' expectations for good behavior and good grades, while Aja disclosed her parents' instructions to listen with a positive attitude and stay out of trouble. Representative of a proactive approach to parenting inclusive of behavioral expectations, participants distinguished themselves from negative perceptions of African American families. Occurring in the home/community space, parents' practices with their children prioritized beneficial lessons, experiences, and values for their children.

Exercise Consistency with Consequences and Discipline

Adopting values and learning life lessons was seen by parents as molding self-discipline; however, the institution of consequences by parents assisted children in their understanding of appropriate behavior and interactions. Overall, parents' approaches to discipline remained firm and incorporated elements of communication, positive and negative consequences, physical discipline, withholding, and rewarding. A cycle emerged: parents set limits, iterated expectations, discussed consequences, and imposed said consequences when their child did not follow instructions. Shauna succinctly stated, "There are consequences when they don't do what they are supposed to. They get their things taken away and they can't go anywhere. Basically, they're on punishment." Tony, Faye, and Shauna each utilized physical discipline when they perceived it appropriate, but now they incorporate different consequences. Supported by the work of (Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda, 1999; Trosper, 2002), participants used a child-centered approach to discipline, imposing denial of privileges as a consequence for their children's misbehavior. Withholding electronics (including the cell phone, tablet or television), time with friends, or other privileges created the desired effect, perhaps, to improve decision-making—similar to Keith's reference to discipline in the following example.

> From a discipline standpoint, she's pretty well disciplined. It's like I said, just talking…Well, we had to address it [behavior] at her previous school. Sometimes she got in trouble, had to have things taken from her. She couldn't have electronics before for a couple of days and it kind of cleared itself up. Consequences might involve her not having her play date or something. She can't go somewhere or we've even started doing this now—Cynthia primarily—where if she doesn't clean up her space, she's got to pay

money back from her allowance….It's working, some of the stuff we just started, but mostly taking away her electronics, she really hates that.

Simply put, participants maintained consistency of discipline utilizing lessons about behavior, but they also incorporated rewards into their process for consequences. Such rewards included time with friends or the receipt of a material gift. Bearing resemblance to societal structures, such as income for work and legal ramifications for unlawful behavior, parents equipped their children with knowledge and understanding to operate in other activity networks to which they would continually be exposed.

Students discussed their family experiences with positive and negative consequences for behavior. Like their parents, each child believed they behaved well, but admitted being disciplined at home. India's parents reprimanded her for occasional misconduct in school and for oversleeping when she continued to ignore her bedtime. Aja admitted she talks excessively in school, but she tried to improve and even recounted one occasion in which she received a reward for having demonstrated good behavior on four consecutive days at school. Nadia confidently stated that her parents do not spoil her (by giving her everything she wants), and expounded by adding, "If I needed to be disciplined for doing something, then they'll discipline me." Brian included he might get punished for not following the rules, but this occurred infrequently. Utilization of consequences to promote structure in the household supported parents' behavioral expectations; however, some differences regarding structure among participants emerged.

Variances in Structure

Similarities in structure included deviating practices discussed by participants. Keith and Shauna noted the presence of physical discipline in theirs or their spouse's upbringing, but seemed to prioritize more child-centered consequences in their household. Neither Tony nor

Keith discussed details surrounding meal times when they described the family schedule; reminiscent of gender stereotyped roles, the mothers in the group talked about meal preparation, but noted the infrequency of eating together due to their hectic schedules. Keith acknowledged his value of being part of a nuclear family because, largely, he was raised by his grandmother. Therefore, when he emphasized proper treatment of a young lady to his daughter, perhaps he was motivated by ideas of family structure from his own upbringing. Quite relevant in discussions of family functioning and structure, Keith's reference remained unique because each participating family parented their children in the context of a two-parent household. Beneficially, family structure buttressed the support provided by parents and paved the way for enlightenment; participants learned about one another and attained knowledge in their families, which likely influenced subsequent engagement and achievement.

Theme 3: Enlightenment

Participating families strived to equip their children with skills so that they might become self-sufficient, self-motivated, and independent. Keith encouraged his daughter and the Samuels family (particularly Andrea) hoped their children would experience success as adults later in life.

> To me parenting is equipping them with skills so they can go out and be successful for themselves. That's not me telling you everything, because, ultimately, we want you to be a productive citizen in society. But I can't and I'm not going to always be there, so my perception is that I am hopefully providing them with the skills they need to move through life.

Parents' ideas about how to nurture their children's development and education according to their own beliefs comprised the third theme: Enlightenment.

Draw from Childhood Experiences

Literature supported parents' assertions that upbringing influenced child-rearing later in life (Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda, 1999), which demonstrated the impact parents' culture had on their parenting. Participants represented such influences in their beliefs regarding the influential power of childhood experiences on parenting practice. "I mean I really think that my upbringing and the expectations that my parents had, for me, have been very instrumental in how we have parented our girls." Faye's example demonstrated the influence of childhood experiences on her and her husband's parenting practices, especially regarding expectations for their daughters. In agreement, Tony stated, "Well of course you tune into what your parents did with you that worked, in a way you feel [is] beneficial to you." His emphasis on positive influences from his own parents exemplified wisdom and a desire to act in his children's best interest, irrespective of childhood events he may have experienced. Supported by the CHAT arm of the EPE framework, parents' childhood experiences in an African American family factored into parental decision making.

Participants reflected on family experiences to guide them, by imitating supportive practices or discarding what they considered to be unsupportive practices employed by parents over the course of their own childhoods. The Samuels, the Andersons, Cynthia, and Mel (Shauna's husband) each grew up in two-parent homes. At times, Shauna parented contrary to her mother's style of parenting because she felt that her mother was not always available to her and at times, her family lacked the basic necessities. "I think I was self-motivated because we didn't have a lot of things, sometimes not even food, so it made me work to try to get what I needed and to do well in school…" The family structure and socioeconomic status of Shauna's childhood affected her family's access to capital. Primarily reared by his grandmother, Keith

wanted to ensure that Aja experienced her parents' presence and he modeled what he considered to be appropriate paternal behaviors, demonstrating for his daughter how she should be treated (especially by males). During their interviews, Shauna and Tony agreed that identifying and then emulating positive experiences from their own childhood, could, in turn, benefit their children. Her mother's inability to adequately provide for their family motivated Shauna to work harder, attain more, and set expectations for her own children to ultimately establish financial (and other) capital in the next generation.

Foster Socialization

In relation to child development, parents discussed socialization, believing in and prioritizing interaction with other children from an early age, which assisted preadolescents with social skills and dealing with adversity. Faye set the tone for Nadia, stating, "I also wanted her to socially feel comfortable so that she knew how to socialize and interact with other children prior to getting in a formal setting—so that it wouldn't be a barrier for her." Participants emphasized the skill of cooperating with other children and interacting appropriately with adults by exposing them to a variety of settings, including daycare, pre-kindergarten, music class, group activities, and recreational sports. Also, parents supported their children's desires to interact with their friends in their home, during recess, or on prearranged play dates. Like other components of parenting, Andrea touted her decision to balance support and intervention so that Brian would socialize and begin to resolve friendship issues independently. Interaction by child participants with peers via telephone, text message, or in person, further exemplified social interaction, which parents encouraged because they believed that such relationships enhanced the social development of their preadolescent children.

In addition to socialization in general, parents reported instances similar to racial socialization, defined by (Mandara, 2006) as a practice that better prepared children to face discrimination in various spaces or fields, diminishing the shock or confusion associated with extant bias (Mandara, 2006). Coinciding with tenets of CRT (Ladson-Billings, 1998), parents believed race would always be an issue and that they could not pretend otherwise. Therefore, from this emanated pertinent age appropriate conversations with their children about race and culture. Racial encounters discussed by participants included the Samuels' oldest daughter being called a racial slur following a sleepover with friends and the Patrick family's recent loss of a close family friend murdered in a racially motivated shooting. Direct incidents such as these reflected hatred in a broader society influencing both preadolescent and adult participants. Corroborated by Mandara (2006), the presence of racial and societal barriers forced parents to teach their children about discrimination and prejudice to equip them with coping mechanisms, i.e., racial socialization. Participants' lessons about race demonstrated an exerted effort to prepare their preadolescents to handle future encounters instigated by racial matters.

Create a Village

In reference to socialization practices for children discussed by Suizzo et al. (2014), a component of parents' social interaction included their creation of a village of trusted individuals to surround their family. Involving like-minded people in their lives facilitated the introduction of positive role models and new experiences (including unique sports, creative outlets, travel, differentiated learning experiences, and diversity) into their network. In discussions about her own experiences, Shauna emphasized the worth of "getting strength from family and friends" and her faith when challenges arose. Even for common tasks, such as homework, Cynthia contacted her 'teacher friends' for assistance. Furthermore, mothers (with the exception of

Andrea) mentioned occasionally depending on friends to assist with transportation to school, summer activities, extracurricular activities, and other outings. Though Faye's first experience sharing responsibility for transportation with another parent occurred just months prior to our work together, she indicated that its success would likely lead to more collaboration with other parents. The absence of transportation services from Aja's school necessitated Keith's participation in a carpool for his daughter. Without such arrangements, he and Cynthia would have been required to make a daily hour-long commute, in addition to heading to work themselves.

The formation of a village afforded parents and children confidants and camaraderie to support their navigation of parenting and childhood, respectively. In accordance with SCT and CHAT, these social interactions appeared to fortify participants' social capital because they established networks to support family functioning and academic achievement. Maintaining an obliging circle of friends denoted individual efforts by parents to keep their children surrounded by a village of caring and like-minded individuals. Parents' supervision of preadolescent socialization and personal social interactions with other parents influenced children's development and family engagement by providing a safety net, should participants need support.

Learn from and Differentiate Parenting

Family portrayals would be incomplete without the inclusion of sibling influences. Due to Aja's status as an only child, her parents could not offer input regarding sibling influences in their home. However, the three remaining families communicated a belief that parenting multiple children influenced their parenting practice. Parents recognized and understood differences among their children and strived to create space to differentiate parenting, while maintaining equity. Tony understood and imparted that, "Everybody's getting, but somebody is

going to feel like they were shortchanged," and he attempted to balance his parenting so that each of his children felt special. Faye expressed her encounter with parenting siblings, articulating her initial belief regarding uniformity in parenting.

> What worked for her [Nadia's older sister] will work for the little one, but no, their personalities are totally different. I think in the beginning we tried to do it the same way and then realized that Nadia needed something different than my older daughter needed because their personalities were so very different. So just trying to allow for that, just to create a space for that where we could respond differently. My older daughter says with her we didn't do that, but she's a totally different person. She's looking for equity but they're different and what she responded well to, Nadia does not. We're just trying to differentiate our parenting.

In accordance with this example, acquiring the wisdom to step back, analyze, regroup, and approach parenting from another standpoint worked for Faye; other parental participants reacted to sibling differences similarly. In addition, although the Roberts family parented an only child, they noted moments in which they adjusted their parenting, realizing a parenting practice was not working to benefit Aja.

Impart the Value of Education

Another component of Enlightenment included educational expectations, found to be critical regarding children's outcomes (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004). Evidence of participants' overarching ideas about expectations emerged during interviews, and Faye shared her viewpoint.

> I think expectations mean a lot and I think because we have positioned it as a priority and as important, I think that's influenced [Nadia's] performance in school. I think [our

children] understand what our expectations are, just in terms of how they interact with others, how they interact with each other and just the things that we expect them to do.

Similarly, Tony upheld the establishment of goals for his children, by proffering the following:

> Again, we don't expect everything to be perfect but we do have expectations for you. We want to put some things in place where if you don't understand it or if you need assistance, then that is provided for you.

Expectations for his children permeated discussions representing parental mandates for children to take responsibility for school preparation, behavior, and achievement in school.

Frequently intertwined with discussion of expectations, parents referenced personal values and the importance of sharing their life lessons with their children. The significance of a good education surfaced in interviews with each family; family members emphasized the power of knowledge and prioritized passing the torch for education to their children. Tony offered,

> Also, you've got to start thinking of it in terms of the value of an education. At that point, you start thinking about making sure that the child knows it's important to you and you also make sure that you show them how this can be used later in life.

Prioritization of high standards connected with student perceptions and realizations of parental expectations. By this I mean children seemed to understand what was expected of them and proceeded accordingly. Additionally, Faye and Shauna stressed the role of consistency and communication in setting the bar for their children's performance when they elaborated their daughters' responses to parental expectations.

> Faye: From a young age, she understands there is an expectation for learning and for school and for performing well. I think that part has probably played a huge role in her participation in school.

Shauna: I think we influence India because we set a standard…as far as doing the best she can in school. I feel that also she has her older siblings to look up to as far as what we've expected from them since she is the youngest but she knows we expect her to do her best, to make good grades, and to not cause problems in school.

Inclusive of reminders about expectations for behavior and character, participants communicated and transferred personal beliefs to their children, which they felt contributed to positive educational outcomes for their children. Again aligning with CHAT, transfer of knowledge buttressed children's capital for use in other spaces as discussed in the EPE framework.

Expose Children

Parents described exposure during their childhood to ethnically diverse environments and prioritized similar exposure for their children to prepare them for social interactions in the future. Andrea and Shauna separately attended diverse schools and as a result, wanted to expose their children to similar settings to foster their children's development of adaptive social skills. Representing an aspect of racial socialization, Shauna described benefits and challenges of diverse and homogenous environs, contending, "I think it is important to have both because sometimes you get the confidence that you need in being in an all-Black situation but you want to know how to interact with everybody because that's the real world." At the time, each preadolescent attended schools with a primarily African American enrollment; however, parents endeavored to involve their children in diverse settings. Synonymous with an essential component of CRT, parents' desires connected to their understanding that race would continue to be an issue and resolved to expose their preadolescents to diversity through extracurricular involvement.

Research data corroborated Lareau's (2003) findings regarding middle class families' tendency to schedule children's time; participants experienced busy scheduling associated with preadolescent participation in extracurricular activities. Parents made decisions to expose their children to various activities in hopes of rousing a new interest, career option, or life skill. Shauna, Tony, and Andrea believed that involvement in sports, for example, "kept them busy" and enhanced focus, planning, coping skills, organization, and academics for their children. Extracurricular activities also offered parents an opportunity for parental engagement, collaboration with other parents, and interaction with their children's friends. Ultimately, all four families—though perhaps indirectly—prioritized their children becoming student athletes, in preparation for balancing responsibilities into adolescence and beyond.

Participation in multiple events resulted in hectic night and weekend schedules; however, parents believed in the importance of their children's extracurricular involvement. Table 8 delineates activities engaged in by preadolescent participants and their siblings.

Table 8

Extracurricular Activities of Preadolescent Participants and Siblings

	India Patrick (Age 7)	Nadia Anderson (Age 9)	Brian Samuels (Age 10)	Aja Roberts (Age 11)
Preadolescent Participants' Extracurricular Activities	Training for Volleyball Tennis Lessons Basketball (May join Gymnastics)	(Previously Music Class, Dance and Soccer) Girl Scouts Safety Patrol	Baseball Basketball Football Orchestra (Violin)	Swimming Lessons Golf Girl Scouts (May join Chorus, Sewing, Art, and/or Book Club)
Siblings' Extracurricular Activities	Volleyball Football Basketball Baseball	Girl Scouts Tennis	Gymnastics	N/A (Only Child)

Parents reported that participation in extracurricular activities not only functioned to incorporate regular physical activity into the lives of preadolescent participants, but that it also promoted social interaction and exposed them to unique and valuable experiences affecting their self-concept.

Parents admitted challenges associated with financing and allocating time for extracurricular activities. In particular, Tony referenced sacrificing time and finances to support his children's participation in activities. However, parents' commitment to these endeavors symbolized their dedication to and investment in their children's development and future.

> Those kind of things, I really like to get her out and expose her to. Then, you know I like to play golf, so I'm trying to get her to also start to play now and get her involved with the game. That's just something that she'll continue to do from a lifelong perspective.

Above, Keith considered Aja's involvement in extracurricular activity as influential to her interests and level of activity as an adult. In short, parents associated scheduling of their child's time with future recreation and involvement; therefore, they adjusted socially and financially to incorporate diversity and extracurricular exposure for their children.

Variances in Enlightenment

Enlightenment referred to parental efforts to impart knowledge and to reflect on parenting a successfully performing preadolescent child. As they impressed upon their children the importance of hard work, Andrea, Faye, and Shauna also emphasized their parents' efforts and their own diligence in positioning themselves and their families for success in their current lives. This hard work seemed to pay off for Keith and Cynthia in their descriptions and prioritization of vacations—without the financial stressors commonly associated with family travel. Other participants did not discuss vacationing, perhaps because they stretched their economic capital to

finance extracurricular activities for multiple children. Whether distinctions in the enlightenment theme persisted among participants regarding communicating diligence or discussing exposure to culture through travel, families set themselves apart in nuanced ways throughout the data.

Theme 4: Engagement

Home and school participation by parents in the educational experiences of their children constituted Engagement in Theme 4. Manifestations of parental engagement for parental participants connected with descriptions presented by Barton et al. (2004) in their discussion of EPE. Recognizing that parents draw on multiple sources to define their engagement, Watson-Hill (2013) further acknowledged that parents participated in their child's learning in ways often unrecognized in schools and extant literature. Though participants did not use the term engagement to describe their involvement during interviews, each participant referenced participation synonymous with parental engagement including learning rituals and diverse participation in home/community and school-based nonacademic spaces.

I observed moments of engagement in spaces between interviews during the data collection process. For example, Andrea guided me through their family study room dedicated to homework and study time, which I reflected on in a researcher memo (following the observation and interview).

> Today, while I waited for Tony to begin our second interview, I asked Andrea to show me their homework room. This space had been created for their children to complete academic tasks at home and it reflected a school setting. I noticed two desks with comfortable chairs, a bulletin board on the wall, bean bag chairs in the corner and plenty of floor space for the siblings to work on projects. A blank tri-fold board stood against

> the wall, for Brian's upcoming social studies project. The room was small, but it was neat and full of school supplies for Brian and his sister.

The family's homework room represented engagement by parents and the provision of resources in the home/community space related to academic performance. Early practices by parents promoted development and learning, which also substantiated their engagement. However, due to the overlapping nature of discussion among parents in the present study, engagement could not be confined to Theme 4 discussion due to intersectionality with most practices by parents to support their children; therefore, I emphasized enacted engagement throughout these findings.

Practice Early and Continuing Learning Activities

References to early learning rituals included efforts by parents to support their children prior to formal schooling in public institutions. When requested to elaborate on any learning activities that families practiced prior to kindergarten, parents first reported preschool. However, child participants began formalized schooling having already been equipped at home with basic skills. For instance, parents prioritized early development and learning in the areas of, independence (i.e., feeding themselves), exposure (including music lessons and travel) and language. Moreover, parents taught children demographic information, the alphabet, phonics, numerals, shapes, writing, and spelling. Among participants, development of skills continued with puzzles and games; positive television programs; and workbook practice. Cynthia summarized her engagement.

> The amount of energy that you devote to your baby infant is the same amount of energy you have to devote at least to the elementary school level….That's kind of how I approached it when Aja was really small. It's just the devotion and don't put so much emphasis into the grade, but is the kid getting it? It's great if you make an A, but if you

make a C because that's all you could get, then work on trying to improve it. I fuss about everything, but I don't fuss about her doing poorly, if it's because she didn't get it.

Cynthia placed emphasis on mastery of skills, as opposed to the letter grade Aja received on her work, representative of her perception of educational attainment. The realization that early learning and parental intervention might position children for greater success motivated Cynthia and other parents to devote their time to early engagement.

Following the inception and establishment of early educational rituals, and similar to parenting habits described by participants, family learning at home developed into consistent learning practices. To elaborate, these learning practices developed into repetitive acts by parents in support of children's learning outside of school hours, constituting a component of daily functioning, and representing another layer of parental engagement. For example, parents complemented completion of homework in the home or in an aftercare program (which India, Nadia and Brian attended) with instructional support or additional practice. Called "study work" by Nadia, Aja's description of her parents' supplementary teaching differed slightly. "In math, [my parents] help me do things that I haven't learned at school yet so I'll be past the class and I'll already know what it is and it won't be too challenging when I get to it." For participating African American families, it was not just about homework, but access gained with diligence, persistence, and knowledge. These families were building a foundation of social and intellectual capital. Without negotiation, academic socialization (discussed in the work of Suizzo et al., 2014) by parents superseded social interaction and extracurricular activities for preadolescents, and regular completion of homework exemplified a family commitment to learning.

Access and Activate Capital to Support Academics

Access to resources significantly affected participants' support of their families. Consistent with the principles of SCT, capital associated with socioeconomic status largely dictated the family's access to resources. Acknowledging the value of capital for her family, and barriers to access for others, Faye had this to say:

> I think even when I talked about experiences, just knowing how to navigate and access the resources that are available that may not necessarily have a fee or cost associated with them. They could be out there for free. But families might not necessarily know how to access them.

Wisely, she understood that barriers existed in family access to resources, but hoped our work together might illuminate such issues surrounding capital for others, despite their socioeconomic status. Evidence of various forms of capital emerged for participants, including economic capital, social capital, familial capital, and intellectual capital. In Faye's concern regarding access to capital for others, she implied that barriers to access did not describe her family; likewise, other participants did not identify any barriers to capital or engagement.

Economic capital enriched the lives of participants in academic, nonacademic, and home/community spaces. Middle class status associated with education and career provided adequate income, affording families both wants and needs. Provisions for housing, food, and utilities presented few challenges (if any), nor did financing conveniences such as television, cellular and internet service, family outings/travel, academic support, and extracurricular activities. One resource—shortage of time—did elude participants, limiting frequent meal preparation, making learning more fun, providing enrichment, and researching alternate approaches to child-rearing and issues in a modernized society. Though economic or financial

capital could not buy families time, it did facilitate the procurement of supplies, practice workbooks, exposure (i.e., field trips), and donations of materials to organizations (i.e., church).

Intellectual capital exemplified by parents' educational training, influenced academic achievement for child participants. In the Roberts' home, for example, because of Cynthia's and Keith's educational backgrounds in science and math, respectively, each could review Aja's sixth grade homework with her and supplement instruction when necessary. Furthermore, Tony believed Andrea's background in early childhood education and development to be helpful, offering, "I think that since my wife is in academia, she has a better feel for education than I do." Similar to her husband's perspective, it appeared that Andrea's perceptions of educators (associated with her social capital) led Andrea to regard teachers as a "…valuable resource. Being able to go in and talk to the teacher, you can find out what happened because they do have a different perspective on things than a student does. I think the teacher is valuable for that." Through the aforementioned examples, participants demonstrated the influence of capital in their engagement in home/community spaces.

Communicate and Conference Regularly

In their parental engagement, parents utilized various methods in school-based academic spaces to maintain communication and interaction with teachers. Communications connecting home and school included the following: daily agenda planners, weekly homework folders or couriers, text messages, emails, parent conferences, curriculum night, teacher notes, newsletters, electronic parent portal (to access student records information), class dojo (virtual communication platform), progress reports, report cards, and impromptu face to face encounters. As an example of interaction by parents, curriculum night offered Cynthia and Keith an opportunity to connect with teachers and learn about Aja's academic and social performance in

school. Importantly, school interaction allowed parents to advocate for their children, which minimized the necessity for their children to "play catch up" if they fell behind. Referred to as the trilogy by Tony, parents and students initiated contact with teachers (and vice versa) depending on the circumstances. Cynthia demonstrated initiative when she contacted one of Aja's new middle school teachers for the first time. During our discussion, she casually inserted, "I emailed one of the teachers yesterday. Not really than for any other reason than just to kind of get a feel for what would happen." Quite a proactive practice, her experimental gesture characterized her authored engagement described by Barton et al. (2004). Parents continued to discuss proactive communication, suggesting that reactive engagement, instead, was less effective. Yet India's first grade teacher contacted Shauna only when she needed to address behavior or performance, and Tony received a call if a problem arose with his children. However organized, communication with teachers created an avenue to enhance learning experiences and consistency signified a key component throughout these examples of school contact for parental participants.

Maintain Healthy Relationships with Teachers

Parents articulated the idea that maintaining consistent communication and various forms of interactions with school and staff nurtured a healthy home school connection, thus cultivating relationships with educators without compromising parental beliefs about how they would engage in their children's learning. Though Faye and Andrea restricted their involvement in the school building in some ways (due to their administrative roles), and Cynthia preferred not to volunteer in the school building, these participants and others *created* opportunities to engage. Furthermore, Faye provided resources for her daughter's class, and participated in hallway discussions with Nadia's teachers, when appropriate. However, Andrea avoided approaching her

child's instructors in this manner due to her preference for scheduled appointments and prearranged times to meet with Brian's teacher or volunteer in his class.

> I was a teacher as well and I did not like when other teachers would come and stop and talk to you about their children. So I do try to keep it separate. I schedule appointments with the teacher just like everybody else on conference night, before school, or after school and I preface [the meeting] by saying, this is just about Brian.

Here, Andrea's respect for the teacher's time and her own professional boundaries contributed to a working relationship between home and school. Likely, the maintenance of a healthy equilibrium with school engagement and communication also nurtured independence for preadolescents and promoted positive interactions with other school faculty. Notably, participants' engagement did not fit the mold for involvement in school. Nonetheless, parents' understanding of evolving parental roles, balance of support and intervention, belief in their actual and perceived influence as parents, and persistent advocacy, inspired meaningful collaboration and engagement on their children's behalf.

Variances in Engagement

The noted differences in engagement centered on participants' individual approaches to academic support. Female adult participants emphasized their reliance on books and workbooks to reinforce learning-most of which included skills review and practice. However, Tony and Keith discussed in their interviews their desire to promote fun with learning for their children. Descriptions of creating or attending engaging activities (such as a science and technology fair) associated pleasure with learning, which remained important to them. Interestingly, participating female parents didn't discuss fun in connection with learning, perhaps indicative of gender differences among adult participants. Regarding perceptions of educators, four adult

participants' own parents worked in the teaching profession, thus shaping their perceptions of the challenges facing educators. Understanding that teachers managed challenges in their professions, parents assumed their role of engagement and advocacy to fill the gaps.

Theme 5: Outcomes

In order to understand how parenting potentially influenced academics, I initially sought to understand ways in which parenting influenced the child. Discovering the impact of parental perceptions on preadolescent outcomes resided at the core of this qualitative study. In this section, data analysis focused on reports by parents regarding the character, behavior, and achievement of their children in school, and disclosure of their perceived influence. Also, I included an exploration of parental engagement and academic achievement corroborated by representative artifacts, beginning with analysis of data related to perceptions of school, teachers, and education. I delineated distinctions among child participants inclusive of outcomes in each section describing preadolescent participants.

Obedience

Parents stated that behavior of their preadolescent children qualified as disciplined and their children agreed. Data indicated that discipline for school behavior centered on excessive talking, subsequently addressed by parents when issues surfaced. Though minor infractions occurred, preadolescent participants appeared to understand both the importance of behaving in school and the meaning of it. India described her impression of good behavior. "I'm doing school work. I'm being quiet. I'm listening to the teacher. I've got my eyes on [the teacher]." India's response to inquiry regarding behavior demonstrated comprehension of specific acts associated with acceptable behavior in school. Aja connected her understanding of expectations for conduct in school to early lessons about behavior. Referring first to her parents, she recalled,

"They told me I need to listen to them, and in school not to talk so much. Pay attention when the teacher is talking and try not to get in trouble." Preadolescents occasionally 'got in trouble'; however, evidence of an association between parental practice and satisfactory school conduct emerged as reported by participants and substantiated by artifacts.

Motivation to Excel

Encouragement and advocacy by parents motivated their children and stimulated academic achievement in school. Indicative of students' intrinsic motivation to excel, preadolescent participants shared examples of communication they initiated with their teachers. They discussed asking for assistance, inquiring about grades or an upcoming test, securing study sheets or schoolwork, and Aja, in particular, felt empowered and confident in the following example when she addressed her teacher.

> I used to be nervous to ask the teacher [for help] but not anymore. One day I had to ask my teacher what day the test was because I didn't think he said [it]. I wasn't scared to do it. He answered me, and if I hadn't asked I wouldn't have known what day [the test] was going to be.

Any reticence to speak up might have prevented her from getting the information she needed, but instead, she posed a query, which prompted Aja to study and probably affected the outcome of her upcoming assessment.

Preadolescents' academic behaviors indicative of their feelings about school corresponded to successful academic achievement (further upheld by document analysis). Overall students maintained a positive attitude and worked hard to sustain high levels of achievement in school. Tony and Andrea admitted that Brian displayed frustration with increased skill difficulty and a more challenging curriculum; nonetheless he exhibited an

optimistic attitude regarding academics. Nadia balanced her nonchalance concerning school with desires for success and recognition (i.e., Honor's Day), while India, who was continually motivated by the academic performance of her older siblings, excelled in school. Aja, despite an ADHD diagnosis, maintained honor roll status through diligent study coupled with daily homework sessions with one or both of her parents (an advantage associated with being an only child), another representation of student engagement among child participants

An element of their engagement, students enjoyed particular academically related tasks but acknowledged areas for improvement. India, for instance, aspired to listen more carefully, talk less, and become the teacher's helper; while Brian desired to strengthen his memorization of higher level multiplication facts. Nadia admitted, "school can be challenging," while Andrea and Keith wanted their preadolescents to put forth effort to achieve and improve time management skills, respectively. Though each child's ability and personality could not be ignored, outcomes for academic achievement of each preadolescent participant associated with parental influence, parental perceptions of influence, and student effort or outlook. Though the EPE framework focused on parents' engagement, through this lens, I came to understand student engagement as authored by child participants. Like their parents, they shared examples of moments when they authored their engagement according to their intellectual capital—and with positive academic outcomes.

Academic Achievement

Recalling that academic achievement included empirical or conceptual school outcomes (Mandara, 2006), thematic analysis involved parental perceptions and their relationships to parental practice and academic achievement. Academic achievement from participants' perspectives represented their viewpoints as interpreted by the researcher; however, documents

shared by parents offered a school perspective for comparison. In this section, I compared participant-reported outcomes to artifacts produced by the school institutions, discussed one student at a time. This deviation from the previous structure refocused analysis on preadolescents' individual performance—an analytical decision described in detail with the following memo.

> Review of analytical procedures urges me to separate documents from other collected data, yet make connections between them. I am prepared to analyze documents to make connections, but I have to remember that these data are school constructions of child participants' academic achievement. Yet this work is centered on meanings associated with academic success radiating from the families themselves, not just the school institution. Prioritization of institutional perspectives over participants' understandings informed my decision to discuss each child individually, which deviates from the structure of previous sections. I hope this is not disruptive, but instead represents an organizational strategy to highlight preadolescent participants and their achievement.

The goal of the work focused on the identification of factors contributing to preadolescent success in the classroom. What did the four middle class African American parents do or conceive of which positively contributed to their children's achievement in school? Thematic analysis revealed a student mindset centered on achievement and influenced by upbringing.

India. The youngest participant and the youngest of four children, India excelled in the second grade, making all A's on her report card. Similarly, each of her siblings achieved honor roll status, which Shauna attributed to expectations she and her husband established for their children to excel and behave. India's hard work and persistence resulted in achievement and she reflected, "They taught me to be good, to get good grades." She enjoyed math and subtraction in

particular, but believed reading and taking tests proved difficult tasks. Her feelings about math and reading mirrored her mixed emotions regarding school: she believed school remained necessary because it helped her learn. India's occasional sadness, excitement, and even fear about being at school varied according to the day's occurrences (i.e., if she met new people, or a scheduled test was approaching). Inconsistencies in data collected from India could be attributed to her age and level of maturity, emphasizing the need to consider Shauna's statements and artifacts documenting her daughter's progress.

Shauna submitted the largest quantity of artifacts on India's behalf to substantiate her daughter's academic performance. Documents ranged from a pre-kindergarten developmental assessment to the final grade report from her previous semester in school—each document confirming academic achievement. Developmentally (at the age of four), India met all of her benchmarks and impressed her teacher, who remarked, "Parents, thank you for having [India] well prepared before entering my classroom. [India] will do excellent at her new school." The assessment and teacher comments confirmed that early learning practices discussed by Shauna (including learning the alphabet, practicing letter sounds, and reading at home) prepared her daughter for achievement in a formal learning environment. Similarly, in a kindergarten assessment of foundational academic skills, on a scale of 1-3 (a score of three meant meeting expectations), India's teacher marked twos and threes throughout the measure. Shauna provided additional artifacts including completed and graded school assignments in the areas of phonics, spelling, vocabulary, handwriting, social studies, science, and math, each validating excellence in conduct and achievement. High grades and satisfactory conduct on her report card corroborated India's and Shauna's testament to her exceptional performance and overall behavior in school.

Nadia. Perhaps less intrinsically motivated than the other preadolescent participants, Nadia worked in school towards recognition offered by her family members and teachers or school. Though Faye and Nadia identified different subjects as her strongest, both stated that Nadia maintained honor roll status at her elementary school. Similar to Shauna, Faye believed their educational expectations "played a huge role in her participation in school." At times, Nadia worried about school, but her confidence exuded when she attributed academic achievement to her dedicated effort.

> I think I'm a student that succeeds because I'm actually participating in some stuff at school and I get good grades and I don't really ever get in trouble. For example, I do safety patrol and you had to get some stuff from teachers about how you act. So, I passed and now I'm in safety patrol.

Nadia's understanding and expression of what academic achievement required (participation) mirrored that of her parents, both employed as school administrators. During her interview, Nadia's reasoning skills demonstrated critical thinking and responses to queries. Even when she discussed challenges with school or requesting assistance from teachers, she relayed her determination to succeed by choosing to study and approach teachers for help. Similarly, her mother connected her own parental acts to her daughter's academic behaviors and outcomes, when she expressed concerns about pushing her daughter too hard and causing her to be "turned off" when it came to school performance.

Faye provided benchmark assessments, grade reports, and standardized test scores, evidencing Nadia's honor roll status in all academic areas and average to above average performance on standardized assessments. Nadia specified strengths in the areas of history, writing, and reading; benchmark scores in reading and language use (ranking above district and

state averages) corroborated her statements. Faye mentioned, "Nadia seems to be more solid with the language arts and social studies than the math. She likes science, I think, but she definitely feels less confident with mathematics." Standardized test scores ranked Nadia at the 81st percentile in first grade, while benchmark scores ranked Nadia at the 30th percentile in math for third grade. Conflicting feedback on Nadia's standardized test performance could have been explained by gaps in instruction, time lapses between instruction and assessment, or even test anxiety. Both participants' awareness of Nadia's ability and performance materialized in artifacts produced by the school institution. Consistently, teachers represented Nadia's performance with high grades, satisfactory behavior, and other accolades including Safety Patrol and student helper, indicative of their confidence in her overall ability as a student and a leader. Artifacts supported the Anderson's perceptions of Nadia's academic achievement.

Brian. The only male preadolescent participant, Brian distinguished himself academically by performing above average in nearly all academic areas of standardized testing. Both he and his parents agreed that learning came easily to him, so he usually overcame academic difficulty, without requiring excess study time. Though slightly younger than his fifth grade peers, he kept up socially, academically, and physically. Likely due to his intellectual aptitude, Brian typically achieved A-honor roll status and excelled as an all-around student (playing an instrument, participating in sports, and socializing with friends). Also, Tony believed his critical thinking skills in math improved with his participation in sports because his son enjoyed manipulating statistics. Brian recognized his own need to improve rote memory of multiplication facts, then skeptically acknowledged his perception of school.

> I don't like homework. I don't like school, but I like recess and lunch. I liked my teacher last year and sometimes I like learning. Especially math, because I like working with numbers and doing stats with sports.

Brian's academic aptitude resulted in his ability to handle academic tasks placed before him.

Andrea provided three artifacts to substantiate Brian's academic performance in fourth grade: standardized test scores, benchmark scores, and his end of year report card. He scored no less than the 89th percentile in each academic area of his standardized assessment and ranked Distinguished (highest level) in three of four areas of his benchmark tests. Both assessments revealed his weakest area to be science and his strongest area to be math, yet he earned an A in every school subject. Brian's exceeding aptitude in school made qualifying parental practice and perceptions regarding his academic success a challenge. Perhaps, his intellect explained his achievement; however, parental influence manifested in expectations set by parents, which Brian met at home and at school.

Aja. The eldest child participant, Aja, overcame persistent challenges due to attention difficulties resulting in an Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) diagnosis during her second grade school year. Consequently, her parents adjusted their schedules and their approach to supporting Aja academically. Aja more effectively acquired skills with audiovisual representations of subject matter and repetition, thus her parents sought to provide such resources for her utilizing videos and daily study, for example. They applied visual methods of organization and study (including color coordinated folders, note cards, and highlighters), and diversified presentation of new information to accommodate her unique learning style. Keith described his daughter as a student:

> Aja has always been an okay student. She hasn't been one at top of the class or anything like that. She's kind of had to find a way in terms of how to figure out the best way for her to learn but she's always been a pretty good student in terms of her trying hard and listening to the teacher.

Teachers validated his descriptions and perceptions of success for his daughter's learning efforts, with high marks on her grade reports. Unsurprisingly, Aja's parents placed less emphasis on grades, but on mastery, instead. In my experience, decisions to focus on grades versus mastery varied among families, among class, and even between genders; however, the Roberts' attention to mastery reflected their understandings regarding learning and the application of learning beyond school contexts. Similar to Faye and Nadia, the Roberts' believed their daughter to be somewhat motivated; however, the amount of encouragement they provided contributed to Aja's academic achievement despite any learning difficulties.

Her positive regard for school stood out among participants when Aja described school as good and interesting, even though sixth grade was

> …different than it was in elementary school because of the work. I had better grades in elementary school. I do have A's in science, math and reading. Science is okay. Social studies, I had to bring [my grade] back up because I had a 67 or a 69 this year. I didn't have a lot of grades in the computer.

Synopsis of her feelings about school offered insight into her optimism and determination previously alluded to by Keith. Perhaps Aja's school structure influenced her academics, as well, because she attended a school with a favorable teacher-student ratio. She noted this difference during her interview, disclosing "There's not a lot of people in the class, only 15 or less. Some people were sick for two days and there were about 12 students." Attention to class

size differences signified her awareness and optimism regarding a distinctive learning environment, perhaps more conducive to her particular style of learning.

Cynthia presented an array of documents including awards and grade reports; however, she did not submit Aja's test scores. Keith had indicated that his daughter performed below average on standardized tests, due to the structure of these assessments. Though she did not allude to standardized tests, herself, Aja did explain other aspects of her academic performance. "I think my weaknesses are in math and science. My strongest subjects are social studies and reading. I think I'm stronger in reading because I read a lot and in math I do a lot with my dad." As a mature and focused 11-year old, she recognized the impact of parental action in academic domains—here and previously—sharing her belief that she was being prepared for college. Artifacts presented Aja as a capable student, excelling in the spelling bee, social studies, conduct, and reading. Report cards from second and fifth grade confirmed her satisfactory behavior and honor roll status. Though her sixth grade year began with low grades in social studies, Aja pledged to improve her grade, and her reputation for being a hard worker made this a goal she would likely achieve.

Conclusion

Departing from deficit approaches to research, I endeavored to learn more about practice by parents relating to academic achievement. Evidenced by their reliance on a set of family rituals and expectations, participants enriched their children's lives through engagement and exposure. Each family, in their own way, established their parenting practice, created healthy relationships and supportive home environments, communicated the value of education, held family members to standards of excellence, accessed capital in their advocacy, and actively engaged in the education of their preadolescent youth. I didn't endeavor to write about a correct

or incorrect method of parenting, nor did participants portray their practices in that manner. From my reflexive journal, "I reminded myself that these families don't perceive their way to be foolproof or even the *right* way. It's just *their* way and it seems to be working for them because of their child's success and family functioning." Due to the multitude of factors affecting academic achievement, causality could not be determined; however, the purposeful focus of this qualitative study on participants' narrative resulted in the identification of beneficial practices and perceptions by parents in connection with the academic achievement of their preadolescent children.

Remarkably, the findings indicated that parental participants collectively subscribed to 22 patterns of parental practice, while their preadolescent children concurred on ten qualities of family practice influencing their learning outcomes. Though each participant shared their ideas regarding parental engagement individually, collectively, a shared set of habits emerged, representative of parenting practice, engagement and child outcomes. Themes of Parenting Practice based upon data analysis and presented in this chapter corroborated parenting literature in meaningful ways (discussed in Chapter Six). It also offered a family perspective of African American middle class family functioning and parental practice, as well as engagement influencing educational attainment. Students' academic achievement reported by participants and corroborated by submitted artifacts largely reflected successful performance over the course of data analysis. Through research with the four participant families, narratives painted a portrait of parentally authored parenting and engagement, relating with academic achievement in school-based academic spaces.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

Due to a dearth of research focusing on the participation of African American middle class parents in their children's edification, the present study focused attention on the ways participants perceived their parenting practice. Qualitative methods including collection and analysis of data from interviews, observations, and artifacts, facilitated the incorporation of preadolescent and parent participants' narratives consistent with ethnographic research methods. The study posed the following research questions: (a) What parenting practices exist among a group of African American self-ascribed middle class families? (b) What are the perceived influences of these parenting practices upon the interactions and the relationships they cultivate with their children? and (c) How does this group of parents perceive the influence of their parenting and other factors (race and socioeconomic status, for example), to affect their children's academic outcomes? In this discussion, I included an overview of the study, revisited the research questions, made connections with extant literature, discussed significance of the study, explored implications of the research, and identified limitations.

Participants included six self-ascribed African American middle class parents and four preadolescent children, aged 7-11. Analysis of data collected from interviews, artifacts, and observations facilitated triangulation of data, thus offering increased credibility to data analysis and interpretation of findings. Through iterative interpretation of data respective of participants' narratives, family portraits emerged indicative of parenting and engagement. Thematic analysis of coded participant quotations resulted in five overall themes of parenting, summarized as

Patterns of Parental Practice, and representing 22 components of participants' parenting and outcomes. Patterns of Parental Practice in the areas of Support, Structure, Enlightenment, and Engagement associated with Outcomes including motivation to excel, obedience, and academic achievement.

Approaching the work from an EPE perspective increased understandings of parenting and parental authoring of engagement in education on children's behalf. Collection of parent and child narratives accentuated the participants' voices, preceding data analysis and replete with parental wisdom regarding parenting and academics among participants. Emphasis on determining the extent of parental participation in family life and learning epitomized the primary tenet of the EPE framework—the hows and whys of engagement, situated socially and culturally. The present study demonstrated such emphases; it is, however, important to note that before engagement ensued, parents invested valuable time developing their parenting practice to nurture strong family relationships, all of which I revisited in the three research questions.

African American Middle Class Parenting

Thematic analysis revealed patterns of parenting present in each of the four participating families; their recipe for success guided discussion of my three initial research questions. Emphasis on parenting practice proceeded from the opening research question: *What parenting practices exist among a group of African American middle class families?* Among the self-identifying middle class African American parents of successfully performing preadolescent children, I observed evidence of support, structure, enlightenment, and engagement. Parenting practice consisted of the early establishment of routines, firm structure and boundaries for children, as well as consistent implementation of consequences and discipline. These foundational qualities allowed parents to establish expectations for family functioning, so that as

children developed in early childhood and preadolescence, appropriate behavior and family routine became embodied practice, less likely to be interrupted.

Participants used the establishment of routines, structure, and consequences as a springboard from which to implement expectations for behavior and performance. Though parents did not specify how they raised the bar with expectations over time, it remained clear in interviews and through artifacts that children understood and met behavioral and educational expectations with effort and achievement. Parents balanced expectations for behavior and achievement with reason and understanding. Specifically, among multiple siblings, parents tried to distinguish their parenting to accommodate differences between their children, with the exception of the Roberts (a single child family). Though Cynthia and Keith parented one child, they endeavored to learn from parenting decisions and readjust, similar to study participants with multiple children. One means of increasing parental effectiveness involved reflections by parents on their own upbringing. Returning to their childhood opened participants' minds to consider parenting methods that affected development and success, prompting them to adjust their family practices and expectations accordingly.

A key component of child-rearing for participants included the exposure of children to diverse environs, incorporating extracurricular activities, diversity, and social interaction. Parents endeavored to meet their children's desires as well as their needs, investing time and money into their interests and passions, which manifested in varied preadolescent participation across academic and home/community spaces. Parents also prioritized socialization for themselves and their children with like-minded people. Creation of a goal-oriented village remained important, so much so, that they engaged frequently with other parents, family members, and friends, in the interest of promoting community and achievement for their

children. Participating middle class parents perceived and embodied alignment of the aforementioned parental acts as parental practice in connection with preadolescent academic achievement.

Influences on Parent-Child Relationships

Findings related to parental relationships connected to my next research question: *What are the perceived influences of these parenting practices upon interactions and relationships they cultivate with their children?* A unique and interesting aspect of the research, observed parent-child relationships reminded me of interactions with my own parents. Taking care to bridle my subjectivities through reflexive journaling helped me to maintain the integrity of the research and refocus the work on participants. However, connection to the research through my childhood and profession also facilitated increased understandings of parental practice and academic achievement. Reflection on Research Question #2 and the interview protocol sparked notice of the absence of an important quality in my initial research design. Where was love? I anticipated parents might speak of love; however, I found that this was not a topic to be broached spontaneously in the work, so I encouraged parents to speak directly about the role affection played in child-rearing and academics. Reviewed literature relating to African American middle class parenting approached the topic of love through discussion of supportive parent-child relationships. In this way, authors incorporated expressions and manifestations of love. However, participants in the present study deviated from representations of such affection in the literature through similar descriptions of the impact love and loving relationships had on their parenting and parenting practice. Parents' inspired reflections resulted in powerful arguments for the influence of love in parent-child relationships, interactions, and education.

Parental belief in the impetus and demonstration of love remained a driving force for parental engagement on their children's behalf. They understood that if a meaningful and supportive relationship could be forged, then their children might become intrinsically motivated to please their parents through effort and excellence at home and in school—perhaps even later in life. Provisions for a comfortable and relaxed home environment nurtured reassurance for preadolescents that parents acted in their best interest and could be trusted in their advocacy. In their wisdom, parents strived to balance parenting to assimilate new information, to accommodate for preadolescent development, to prepare for changing school environments (such as new teachers every year), and to adjust amidst influential factors that might arise. Parental engagement for participants involved connections between parenting and love; it could not be excluded from discussion in the present research study.

Communication was an additional factor, vital to the establishment and maintenance of healthy parent-child relationships. Communication within family occurred over meals and surrounding faith. With hectic schedules, eating together permitted families to steal moments from their busy days to engage in conversations about daily experiences and challenges. Parents recalled from their childhoods, that dinner time constituted a revered tradition in their families. Though protecting dinner time in this modern society proved a challenge, participants attempted to use any time spent together during meals to debrief about the day, or discuss church and Sunday school. Faith connected participants within their families, even if they attended church infrequently. During these discussions, participants talked about God's expectations for everyone and how this should manifest in their own families. Through church attendance, discussion about faith, and sharing religious beliefs, parents taught their children important

lessons about prayer, appropriate social interaction, and the value of communication, further strengthening family relationships.

The overall message parents offered through this research resided in a single word: *advocacy*. Parental participants believed if they could find a way to advocate for their children, then their chances for success would increase considerably. Emphasis on advocacy, *whatever that means,* by Cynthia revealed her recognition of the dynamics between parenting, parental engagement, and academic achievement. Similarly, Barton et al., (2004) documented the subtleties of parental engagement, proffering that parents choosing to engage in methods best suited for themselves and their family benefitted children exceedingly. Children gained from their parents' meaningful engagement, which involved the activation of interactive capital with a positive and intended impact on learning experiences. Similarly, my participants, engaged on their own terms, perceiving their efforts to be critical when their advocacy buttressed edification of their children. Ideas about parental practice and advocacy may not have mirrored school perceptions of parental involvement; however, this in no way weakened the influence of parental engagement. In contrast, the opposite occurred; competent and confident parents engaging in their children's learning inspired continued engagement. Preadolescents demonstrated understanding of their parents' engagement in their own ways, acknowledging that relationships cultivated with their parents and engagement by their parents contributed to the continuance of their present and likely future success.

Parental Perceptions of Influence

The final query focused study findings on academic performance of preadolescent participants: *How did this group of parents perceive the influence of their parenting and other factors to affect their children's academic outcomes?* Parents began making connections

between their practice and student outcomes in their first interviews and continued throughout the data collection process. Factors influencing their children's academic achievement included components of the EPE framework: race, class, and capital. Parents felt it appropriate to expose their children to cultural diversity in an effort to promote socialization in general and racial socialization, specifically. Similar to Ladson-Billings' (1998) CRT research, parents wanted children to understand that race matters, but it should not affect the manner in which their preadolescent children treated others. In their endeavors to promote awareness, parents continued to expose children and prepare them in healthy ways to embrace diversity. Each family indicated that race, class, and capital influenced their parental engagement. Due to upward class mobility from their previous generation, parents remained sensible about their resources. They understood the influence of capital and other factors on their lives, their world, and their children's learning.

Early establishment of the value of education (through modeling and setting educational expectations) transferred to early learning practices and the provision of resources (through capital) in support of academics. Parents found that students should understand the importance of education, just as their parents instilled this value in them. CHAT, as an arm of the EPE framework, allowed for the exploration of a historical perspective in research to better understand foundational influences on networks of activity. Parental reflection of their upbringing influenced action within their family network; as a result, these perceptions influenced parental engagement. The importance of education solidified, families initiated academic socialization to prepare their children for success in early childhood. With these early lessons and rituals in place at home, families created a tradition of teaching, learning, and support; they essentially established family practices and parental engagement in accordance

with their personal beliefs. Parents believed the incorporation of lessons in early development, encouragement of educational aspirations, and provisions for requisite learning tools coincided with academic achievement.

Parents noted school access, teacher relationships, and financial resources as influencing their engagement and their children's academic outcomes. Middle class status connected to parents' professions contributed to their social capital—particularly for participants employed by schools—affording them virtually unbridled access to the school building and their children's educators. Though parents associated few barriers with school access, they emphasized maintenance of a delicate balance with teacher contact in efforts to nurture healthy relationships with their children's teachers. Such a balance preserved the integrity of school interactions while technology simplified the process of communication, overall. By using online resources, parents circumvented time consuming school visits to receive quicker responses to their questions and access to academic resources for their children. Student effort, parental engagement, parental beliefs and perceptions, and tutoring, combined with effective instruction, related to satisfactory conduct and academic achievement for each preadolescent. Parents interpreted their role and their activation of capital as influencing rather than dictating their child's learning.

Connections with Extant Literature

Answers to the research question indicated that parenting and engagement among participant families continued to be influenced socially, culturally, and historically; however, participants' approaches to parenting reflected trends among African American middle class parents discussed in the literature. Contrary to the work of Trosper (2002) with a focus on disciplinary practices, participants in the present study, infrequently addressed behavior in the context of physical punishment. Instead, they preferred the child-centered approaches discussed

by Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda (1999) and Mulvaney & Morrissey (2012). Furthermore, parents proceeded with practices in accordance with their own beliefs as they reared and socialized their children for participation in society. Socialization practices connected with Suizzo et al.'s (2014) findings, endorsing the crucial role of preparing children to perform in school and other environments. Participants also epitomized the authoring of their own engagement described by Barton et al. (2004) because the families did not wait for institutions to define how they would interact with their children intellectually. Instead, parents implemented distinctive frameworks for engagement of their own design, consistent with personal values, educational expectations for their children, and optimism regarding their children's futures. Connecting with the work of Watson-Hill (2013), in which parents determined their means of engagement in school, my participants examined their parenting, and sanctioned their actions and subsequent engagement. Institutional approval did not factor into their practice because their engagement remained unapologetically family focused. Partnering with schools instead of holding teachers and institutions responsible for educating their children was not an option for my participants nor African American families in other research studies (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Watson-Hill, 2013).

EPE guided the present study in its allowance for parental authoring of their parenting and engagement, with emphasis on the early establishment of rituals and practices representative of parental advocacy to enhance the learning experiences of their children. It is not coincidental that each of the families separately agreed on 22 patterns of parenting practice. Parents' similar cultural and social backgrounds, as well as their socioeconomic status, informed beliefs and practices in the best interest of their families. Therefore, each time parents conceived of goals for their children, they imagined the engagement necessary for its achievement, and executed

their plan. The aggressive stance they assumed undoubtedly directed their engagement, affected their children, and resulted in a prescription for parenting associated with success among preadolescent participants. In accordance with the findings of Latunde & Clark-Louque (2016) participants in my research did not discuss concerns that the school might not be receptive to their engagement or that they might encounter conflict in their advocacy. Rather, parents engaged instinctively, seeming to welcome challenges if it meant they would arrive at a desirable outcome. Thus, they determined their level and type of engagement according to their beliefs and their children's needs.

Distinct practices of parental engagement among parents materialized (such as having lunch at school, prioritizing vacation, and emphasizing learning and fun), yet differences in particular acts remained a reflection of agreed upon practices. In other words, participating parents departed in ways they exposed their children, spent quality time, or experienced pleasure with their children. They did not, however, oppose the general incorporation of exposure, interaction, and entertainment in the lives of their families. Participating families created for themselves a structure conducive to innovative and effective conceptions of engagement according to the specific needs of their children. If their children wanted to take up fashion design, or participate in multiple extracurricular activities, or join the chorus, then parents would organize the capital and resources necessary to make it happen. If these parents noticed a barrier affecting or preventing meaningful learning experiences for their children, they would take action and remove barriers to their activism, which corroborated the work of Lewis-McCoy (2016). The observance of advocacy by parents also influenced preadolescents' own engagement, manifesting as intrinsic motivation, self-assessment, and self-improvement.

Participants took responsibility for their participation, and assumed their presence and engagement in learning, despite others' perceptions of their advocacy. By presence, I simply mean being in the space necessary to supply or supplement their children's intellectual and developmental needs, whether in the classroom, in the home, at an event, or elsewhere. For example, the establishment of a home environment, which promoted independence for participants in Suizzo et al. (2014) supported students in the home/community space prior to formal schooling experiences. Parents similarly communicated the importance of nurture in the home as they reared their children in preparation for learning and achievement. Continual engagement included the creation of a safe space for activity and reflection by each family member and due to access and activation of capital, embodiment in particular fields conveyed a clear message of belonging and authority as discussed in the context of SCT by Reay (2004). A challenge to school institutions might involve increasing awareness that each of the aforementioned scenarios absolutely exemplify valuable family engagement, which could impact student performance, overall.

The intersectionality of race and class offered clarity regarding gaps in achievement among African American children, particularly in the middle class (Cuspard-Hightower, 2009; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Gosa and Alexander (2007) proposed that the achievement gap might not be so perplexing, should ever-present factors associated with race and discrimination be considered. The present findings demonstrated that participants persisted in their engagement and advocacy. Steps taken to contribute to their family success consistently buffered adverse effects of a race- and class-based society. Lindsay's (2011) research emphasized the inequality of middle class families and identified differences between middle class African American and European American families. Her research framed

interpretation of findings in the context of race and class to understand parenting decisions by participants. Specifically, I saw observed evidence of racial socialization by parents in preparation for children's optimal functioning in society. Smetana & Chuang (2001) and Suizzo et al. (2014) also identified such practices among their participants as parents equipped themselves and their family members to resist, sustain, and advocate. For participants in the present study, manifestation of these efforts included supportive family relationships, open lines of communication, mutual respect, and reliance on one another. Through attainment of capital, and habitus, participants comfortably wielded class for parity and favorable family outcomes. Findings failed to explain achievement disparity among middle class African American families, perhaps to the absence of school-based exploration of engagement. Also, among participants, I did not investigate differences in achievement among participating or other preadolescents. Therefore, I could not discern disparities in their academic performance. However, collected data illuminated factors in support of children and their learning. Therefore, my research contributed a set of positive practices relating to achievement for African American middle class students.

Whether influences occurred as environmental, racial, cultural, or social, parents continued to participate in their children's learning utilizing methods most suited to their family life. Patterns of Parental Practice coincided with modern methods of parenting in all four areas: structure, support, enlightenment, and engagement. Research among representative populations endorsed child centered parenting (Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda, 1999), the influence of parental beliefs (Mulvaney & Morrissey, 2012; Wu & Qi, 2006), the impact of environmental influences (Lindsay, 2011), and complex intersections of race and class (Howard and Reynolds, 2008) as affecting academic outcomes of African American students. Emerging in the findings

of my research, also, these factors and resilience among participants demonstrated parents' ability to remain resilient in their parenting and engagement while promoting success in the home/community, academic, and nonacademic spaces.

Study Significance

Research with four African American middle class families and analysis of data led to suppositions regarding significance of research findings. I considered ways in which discussions of class and capital might unfold over the course of the study. Literature pertaining to self-ascribed social class inspired application of such methods in my own work; however, I was unaware of how meanings associated with social class might develop. What I learned from participant families about middleclass*ness* remained a powerful lesson regarding self-identification and identity beyond categorizations of race and class. Dynamics surrounding class descriptions evolved within the interview protocol, exemplified by the question (found in Appendix E, Item #18), "With which social class group do you identify? How and why do you identify with this particular class?" Candid query facilitated openness regarding categorical boundaries and freed parents to discuss their own perceptions of class and capital without speaking expressly about money. Discussion of social class encouraged participants to examine meanings and capital associated with middle class position in African American families. Furthermore, parental participants adamantly declared that education, career, and income informed their class identity. Their self-identification of class distinguished my work from other researchers, specifically because it upheld the parental empowerment coinciding with the EPE framework.

I realized efforts to fill the gap with the present research study by including African American parents *self-identifying* with the middle class and parenting *successful* preadolescent

children. As addressed in the literature review, much of parenting research centered on at-risk or impoverished youth, European American middle class families, and adolescents, without including family perspectives. My ambition to work with this specific population from a family perspective and focus on parental authoring of their engagement deviated from trends in the research and resulted in the identification of prescribed methods of parenting for the four participant families. Additionally, these findings offer a glimpse of effective applications of the EPE framework to studies of parent participation in learning, while shifting perspectives to the more comprehensive concept of parental engagement. The significance of including parents and preadolescents into the processes of discussion and research regarding academic achievement distinguished my study by sounding voices and offering counternarratives to dissonant discourse. The incorporation of such narratives could powerfully influence future educational research endeavors and school perspectives about family priorities for academic achievement.

Within the context of the EPE framework, parents expressed their beliefs about academic success from a family perspective. Qualification for participation in the research included a parental perception of preadolescent academic success. To confirm the accuracy of this perception, parents elaborated on their definitions of academic success. They summarized academic achievement by stating they favored good grades, but measured success by their children's engagement in learning and application of their learning. The significance of parental perceptions of academic success validated parental engagement in that parents participated in their children's learning, but also qualified their interpretations by defining academic success, separate from institutional measurements of achievement.

Returning to the research questions, participants' prescription for parenting, benefitting their children, represented the findings of my work. Understanding that dozens of factors existed

among four unique families reinforced my assertion that parents of successfully performing children have in common certain parenting practices. Not to assume the absence of unhelpful parenting qualities among participants, I contend that the parenting practices described by participants contributed positively to their children's current and likely future academic outcomes. Unlike any other research I have come across, the present study isolated 22 patterns of practice occurring among parents and their preadolescent children in African American middle class families. Methodologically, my work departed from other study designs in its inclusion of parents' and children's voices. No other research incorporated parents and children. Therefore, in examination of parenting and academic achievement, the findings remained authentically family focused and highly relevant for African American middle class families. Data collection incorporated interviews, observations, and artifacts; the rigor of my research contrasted tendencies in the literature to singularly utilize data sets, school perspectives, or mothers' perspectives. Dynamically, findings from the present study remain applicable to other groups due to the study's qualitative design. Additionally, data included parents' perceptions of the research study itself, indicating our work together influenced their thinking regarding parenting and academics, as well as their hopes that study outcomes would be applicable for families across racial and social class boundaries. This work is significant because parents' participation heightened their awareness of powerful influences on the academic outcomes of their preadolescent children. I hope this empowerment continues to be transferred to their engagement and that schools and practitioners might embrace parental engagement described by participants in other settings.

Study Implications

This ethnography contributes to the field of parenting and engagement literature by offering a body of work that purposefully prioritized the voices within families over that of school organizations, particularly regarding the dynamics of parental engagement. Parents and children discussing connections between engagement and performance presented a powerful narration calling attention to unique perceptions of parent engagement among middle class African American families, and playing a vital role in academic achievement. The present research study influenced participants' and my own ideas about parenting and engagement, and shared with practitioners, might shape educators' cooperation with families regarding student performance. More research like the present study is needed in the field of parenting literature because detailed findings could contribute greatly to identifying factors continually contributing to gaps in achievement for middle class African American students.

Examination of influences on academic achievement involved simultaneous consideration of multiple and intersecting factors likely contributing to gaps in the academic outcomes among African American students from middle class families. Though impossible to determine the precise combination of influences leading to the academic success of any one child, the present work identified patterns of parental practice relating to academic achievement. Similarly, Angela Duckworth described her findings relating to success in her discussion of *grit*, a quality representing the passion and perseverance of individuals to work towards long term goals (TED, 2013). Her research suggested that when students clung to their goals, they tended to excel in other areas of their life; Duckworth reported this finding to be consistent for all of her participants. It follows that perhaps *grit* should be examined in the context of family and

parental engagement to ascertain the likelihood of success among students in African American families, particularly the middle class.

Implications for practice include challenging schools to increase and diversify opportunities for parental engagement prior to formal schooling, offer resources, facilitate workshops, solicit feedback, and forge stronger home/school/community partnerships. Another option involves sharing the family's perspective in relation to child-rearing and learning. This represents a gap in the research I aimed to address, by deconstructing parental perceptions and describing the impact of parenting upon academic achievement. My greatest hope for this research study and its outcomes rests upon applications for families and practitioners. Equipped with detailed information regarding helpful parenting practices contributing positively to academic achievement, families and school personnel become empowered to cooperate more effectively on behalf of children. One participant stated that this is really the reason why we do it—for the children—and I could not agree more. Parental demonstration of love provided a family foundation on which parents built formations of structure, expectations, and support. Prescribed methods of parenting defined by participants, promoting relationships within the family, and academic success at school, applied in other families and across educational settings could alter the landscape of parental engagement and comprehension of this engagement by school officials. It follows that students' academic experiences become enhanced, and families continued in their advocacy through authored practices and active parental engagement in home, community, and academic spaces.

Limitations

Having described the significance and contributions of my work to the field of parenting research and ethnography, I also acknowledged limitations of the study. Participant selection

utilizing the community nomination processes incorporated a method for recruitment, which targeted highly-invested families; however this process also excluded other families invested in their engagement. Further, screening for self-identifying middle class African Americans and the perceived academic success of their preadolescent children remained quite subjective qualifications. Though acceptable for qualitative research study, heavy reliance in my work on participant perceptions and narratives, submission of participant-selected artifacts, and researcher interpretation permitted bias. Therefore, application of research outcomes within and beyond similar populations may be limited.

Review of the literature revealed parenting practice to be influenced by race and gender; however, participants minimized their discussion of the influence of race and gender on their preadolescents. Further, family structure surfaced primarily in parental discussions of childhood experiences, instead of in the context of parenting their own children. Focus on parental engagement concentrated discussion on educational influences from the participants' perspectives, a subjective assessment of African American participants. Therefore, study focus limited comprehensive exploration of other influential factors and the inclusion of discussion regarding gender, and adverse influences of race related experiences, from a school perspective, for example.

Though suited for qualitative study, collaboration with four families represented a small number of participants. Generalization of findings for other families should be approached cautiously; discussions including at-risk students or single parent families differs from my research. Regarding sibling differences, application of study outcomes may be minimal, due to my focus on a single preadolescent child in each family. Without the benefit of family observations, the complexity of family relationships cannot be adequately assessed; therefore,

inclusion of this component would add another dimension to research examining parenting and engagement. Limitations described here do not negate the validity of findings for the specific population under study; contrarily, this work presents opportunities for the investigation of factors beyond the scope of the present research study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Building upon the work from a research perspective opens up a multitude of possibilities for future work in the realm of child-rearing and academic achievement. Research involving parents and their children's academic outcomes should include participant or video observation to gain a more focused perspective of daily interactions within participant families. Also, the inclusion of school viewpoints might offer a balanced view of parental engagement and academic achievement. Combining family observation, data from school personnel, and even family interviews would provide further insight into school influences on academics. Family interviews would incorporate interaction between family members regarding practices and engagement to balance individual interview data as there would be a conversational component with shared ideas and responses. Aforementioned elements incorporated into research design with middle class African American families and preadolescents, and explored in greater detail would contribute significantly to the body of parenting research.

Other endeavors to contribute to the field of parenting research should involve individuals from other racial and social class categories. My research focused solely on middle class African American families, therefore it would be interesting to compare and contrast study outcomes with that of European American, Mexican American, and/or Asian families identifying as middle class, upper class, or working class to ascertain their patterns of parenting in support of their children's academic performance. Moreover, with additional time and resources,

researchers could expand their focus to include each child in the family, instead of looking only at preadolescents. This way, differences in parenting among siblings can be considered in the findings, perhaps to isolate other influential factors regarding student outcomes. A concentrated ethnography with different populations would enrich the research database for application in schools and communities supporting families and in recognition of parental engagement across cultural and social class classifications.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT PHONE SCREENING

I am a graduate student under the direction of Associate Professor Cheryl Fields-Smith, Ph.D. in the Department of Educational Theory and Policy at The University of Georgia (UGA). As a former teacher and school counselor, I am highly interested in the ways in which parents support their children at home and school. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study entitled *Parenting in Preadolescence: An Impression of Child-rearing and Academics in African American Middle Class* that is being conducted under the auspices of Dr. Cheryl Fields-Smith, Associate Professor at UGA. The purpose of this study is investigate the influence of parenting perceptions upon the academic outcomes (including performance and behavior) of successful preadolescent students in African American middle class families, with an emphasis on perceptions of parenting as predictors of academic success. Participants must be African American parents (ages 20-70); self-identifying as middle class; whose preadolescent child (ages 7-12) is an academically successful student. Your participation will involve two parent interviews, one family observation, one parent discussion group and consent for one child interview by the researcher. Before we meet to discuss your interest and participation in detail, I'd like to ask you a few questions to determine your eligibility for participation in this research study.

1. Are you between the ages of twenty and seventy?
2. Are you of African American descent?
3. Do you self-identify as middle class?

4. Are you currently parenting a preadolescent child between the ages of seven and twelve?
5. Do you perceive your child to be academically successful?
6. Are you interested in participating in this research study?

Thank you. Based upon your affirmative responses to the previous questions, I find you eligible/ineligible for participation in this research study.

[If the parent is ineligible] Thank you very much for your time.

[If parent is eligible] Will you let me know a time and place that we can meet to further discuss your participation in this research study and I will inform you of the details of the work, a process known as informed consent. Thank you very much for your time.

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

INFORMED CONSENT AND PARENTAL PERMISSION

PARENTING IN PREADOLESCENCE: AN IMPRESSION OF CHILD-REARING AND ACADEMICS IN AFRICAN AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES

Researcher's Statement

I am asking you and your child to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not, and whether or not you will consent to your child's participation, as well. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to learn more deeply about how parents interpret their support of their children's learning. At the foundation of these parent-child interactions are parenting beliefs and practices that, in some ways, influence school outcomes. You and your child are being asked to participate because the target group of this research study are African American parents, self-identifying as middle class, and their academically successful preadolescent children.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate…

- Your participation will involve two parent interviews (up to 90 minutes each), one family observation (60 minutes), one parent discussion group (90 minutes) and permission for an interview with your child by the researcher. Also, you are invited to share multiple documents as evidence of your child's academic performance in school, including, grade reports, teacher notes, test scores, etc.
- Your child's participation will involve one interview (45 minutes) and the family observation, already mentioned.
- Interviews will include questions about your home environment, family interactions, and your child's academic behaviors/results. Examples of the most personal adult and child interview questions follow: How do you approach guiding your child(ren)'s behavior at home? Does this approach involve consequences? Can you think of an incident in which you used this approach and tell me a story about it? What have your parents taught you about behavior? What happens when you do not follow their rules?

Risks and discomforts

- Minimal risk and discomfort may occur as a result of you and your child's participation in this study.
  - Psychological risks might include potential feelings of stress/discomfort, anxiety, and hesitancy regarding sharing information about family interactions and home based observations. These feelings might spill over into your own family relationships or into your interactions with the researcher.

- ❖ Social risks include any unlikely breach of confidentiality that may result in embarrassment or stigmatization within your or your child's social group or affect social status as a result of having participated in the described study.
- ❖ A group discussion or interview is a component of the research study. Parents may repeat comments from this discussion outside of the group at some point in the future.

- In order to decrease any psychological risk, I will be open and honest with you and your child throughout the research. Also, I will ask and follow up with you and your child to ensure that I am not unnecessarily increasing any feelings of anxiety, discomfort or stress. This will further be addressed by maintaining a professional but supportive relationship with all participants, as my goal is to leave a positive impact. Social risks will best be minimized by maintaining discretion and confidentiality and requesting that group participants keeping the group discussion confidential. Though I will stress the importance of keeping statements confidential, this cannot be guaranteed.

Benefits

- Ultimately, the findings from this project may provide information on your parenting practices and any correlation to your child's academic outcomes. Also, you might become more reflective of your efforts in support of your child's schooling.
- Resulting data may influence the educational experiences of families and consequently, student academic outcomes and yield a bank of knowledge and resources for the purpose of equipping students and families of future generations with knowledge for support at home and academic achievement at school.

Incentives for participation

Participants will not be paid for participation in the research study. However, during the study, your family will have access to academic support in the form of tutoring and advocacy, should these services be requested of the researcher.

Audio/Video Recording

Interview sessions and the discussion group will be recorded on audio and transferred to written text for data analysis. These typed interview transcripts will be filed securely and electronically, and kept indefinitely. The audio recordings will be stored in a secure location and destroyed five years following the completion of the research study. Please provide your initials below if you agree to have the interviews and discussion group audio 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.

Privacy/Confidentiality

Confidentiality and anonymity in the research and any reports, published or otherwise, are important for the protection of your privacy and the privacy of your family. All data will be carefully stored and pseudonyms (nicknames) and codes will be utilized in place of easily identifiable information, prior to submission of reports for review. Personal, easily identifiable information will not be included in study documents, but you may see family descriptions including the following: gender, age, family structure, social class, neighborhood description, United States region, etc. I will have access to data and plan to secure data in a locked closet and/or encrypted files for the duration of the study.

I will not release identifiable information or results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law. That being said, I am a mandated reporter; suspicion of child abuse or neglect *must* be reported to the proper authorities. Otherwise, it is my duty to protect your privacy and maintain confidentiality of all collected data and documents.

Taking part is voluntary

You and your child's involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, 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.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is a Ph.D. candidate under the supervision of an Associate Professor at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. *If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson.*

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study and to allow your child to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered. *If you have any questions or concerns regarding your child's rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson.*

Your Child's Name: _____

Your Signature: _____ Date _____

Your Printed Name: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Researcher: _____

Please keep your copy of this document for your records.

APPENDIX C

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Assent Form for Participation of Minors in Research

Dear Student,

We are doing a research study to find out how children like you learn to work with your parents and perform in school. We are asking you to be in the study because you are an academically successful preadolescent African American student of a self-identifying middle class parent. If you agree to be in the study, you will allow me to work with your family for three months and learn more about how you are doing at home and at school. I will ask you questions about your home, school and family and you will talk about your parents and learning. You will allow me to watch you and take notes during family time, mostly at home. Being in the study may affect your family's support of you in school and other people's understanding about how families like yours raise successful students. We also hope to learn something about families that will help others in the future.

You do not have to say "yes" if you don't want to. No one, including your parents, will be mad at you if you say "no" now or if you change your mind later. We have also asked your parent's permission to do this. Even if your parent says "yes," you can still say "no." Remember, you can ask us to stop at any time. Your grades in school will not be affected whether you say "yes" or "no."

When we write about what we learn from you and your family, these reports will be shown to my supervisor and other teachers/professors at the University of Georgia and to other people interested in the research. We will not use your name on any papers that we write about

this project; that information will be private/confidential for the protection of you and your family. We use another name so that other people cannot tell who you are.

You can ask any questions that you have about this study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can ask next time.

Name of Child: _____ **Parental Permission on File:** ☐ Yes ☐ No

(For Written Assent) **Signing here means that you have read this paper or had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign.**

Signature of Child: _____ **Date:** _____

(For Verbal Assent) **Indicate Child's Voluntary Response to Participation:** ☐ Yes ☐ No

Signature of Researcher: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX D

Participant Checklist for Document Collection

Any of the following documents may be useful in supporting the academic progress of your child. Please check to see if you have any of them or can gain access to them and provide to the researcher. These documents (or artifacts) will help to paint a better picture of who your child is academically, in addition to information your family has or will share regarding school performance. You might find that you have all, none, or some of the documents below—or you may even have others that you would like to share. Anything you have will be of use in the study. Per our informed consent, any data collected during the course of this study will be stored securely up to five years and then destroyed. Please address any concerns about confidentiality to the researcher, supervising professor, or university office, as indicated on your cover letter and informed consent documents. Thank you!

- ☐ Progress or Grade Reports
- ☐ Attendance Reports
- ☐ Communication from teacher regarding student progress (emails or notes, for example)
- ☐ Conference or Meeting Summary sheets
- ☐ Standardized Test Results
- ☐ Benchmark Test Results
- ☐ Student Planner or Weekly Communicator
- ☐ Student Awards
- ☐ Placement Tests
- ☐ Other documents to support reported student progress

APPENDIX E

Parent Interview Protocol

The interviewer will introduce her/himself. Discuss purposes of the research, including the desire to learn more about parenting and its perceived impact upon student learning in preadolescence. Ask participants what they hope to gain from participation in such an interview remind them that it is an open forum in which members practice candor and mutual respect. Questions of the researcher are welcome (distribute notepads/index cards for participants to note comments and questions). However, to respect everyone's time, these ideas may need to be held until later or when statements are most relevant to the discussion. The researcher will record the session in its entirety and/or document detailed notes. The ideal location for parent interviews is in a quiet area of the home. Allow a ninety minutes for each interview session.

Session #1

1. Please introduce yourselves and tell me about your family.
2. Describe for me a typical day in your family. (If necessary, follow up with prompts regarding schedules.)
3. How would you describe your parenting methods? Can you think of a story that demonstrates your approach to parenting with your child?
4. In what ways have your own race, culture, or upbringing influenced your parenting and family life?

5. How do you approach guiding your child's behavior at home? Does this approach involve consequences? Can you think of an incident in which you used this approach and tell me a story about it?
6. What did you consider important for your child to learn at home before attending formal schooling? In what ways do you feel that you prepared your child for school?
7. What are some connections between these early activities at home and your child's current school academic performance? Can you think of an example that demonstrates one of these connections?
8. Will you tell me about learning activities which you initiate in support of your child's education at home outside of school hours?
9. Please summarize your child's current academic performance. What makes your child a successful student?
10. How do you communicate with the school/teacher and vice versa? Please describe an example.
11. How do values factor into the way that you parent? What about love?
12. In a word, phrase, or sentence, please summarize your perceived influence upon your child's academic performance. Would you care to elaborate?
13. Are there other factors that you can think of that are influencing your child's learning? What about love in the parent-child relationship and outcomes of these interactions?

Session #2

14. Please describe the role of extended family and friends, if any, in the life of your family and your child's education.

15. How do you currently involve yourself in your child's school or learning community? What opportunities are you given for parental involvement (or engagement)? What connections do you see the school making between learning and home? Can you think of some specific examples? Are there ways in which you would like to be more involved?
16. What community resources or personnel have you found to be useful for you as a parent? Are there some resources that you wish were available to you?
17. Will you discuss with me your concept of capital? By this I mean which resources and tools, tangible or symbolic, do you attribute your success and ability to successfully navigate social institutions, such as school, work, home, church, family, government, etc. (Researcher may offer further detailed examples if necessary.)
18. With which social class group do you identify? How and why do you identify with this particular class? Does your income, education, race or occupation influence you?
19. How does this social class identification compare with that of your upbringing, your extended family members presently, and within your own social circles?
20. Is there anything additional that you would like to include that may have been overlooked by the questions presented?

APPENDIX F

Minor Participant Interview Protocol

Discuss with students the purpose of the activity and interview to include the researcher's desire to learn more about parenting and academic performance in school. Encourage them to answer truthfully and endeavor to create an atmosphere of comfort and safety. Remind participants that parental consent was obtained (showing parent signature is appropriate) and that there are no wrong answers; their opinions are important! Allow a maximum of 45 minutes of time, with one break in the middle.

1. Please describe your family.
2. Tell me about a regular day in your life and the life of your family. (If necessary, follow up with prompts regarding schedules.)
3. Tell me about your parents? What do they do that makes them good parents and is there anything that you would change? Will you give me some examples?
4. What have your parents taught you about behavior? What happens when you do not follow their rules? Will you tell me a story about one time when you did or did not follow their directions and what happened next?
5. Will you share any learning activities that you did at home before you went to school for the first time? Is there learning that you participate in with your family outside of learning that takes place at school? How did your parents prepare you for school?
6. How do you feel about school? What do you think about your teacher? What about the learning, which parts do you enjoy the most? And the least?

7. Tell me how you are doing in school academically. Will you describe your academic strengths and weaknesses? (Reference school work, homework, peer relations, behavior, tests, grade and teacher reports, as well as personal opinion.) Do you think you are successful? What makes you feel that way?
8. What are your learning routines at home? (Refer to family routines throughout the week if needed.) How do they help you? What would you change to improve in school?
9. How do you communicate with your teacher? In other words, what things do you say to your teacher to let her know that you need help or want to do better with your school work? Tell me a story about one time when you spoke to your teacher about your progress in class.
10. How do you get the things that you need in order to be successful in school?
11. Are there ways that your family is involved in your community? Tell me about them and are any of these activities school or study related? (Tutoring, perhaps?)
12. How do your parents participate in your schooling? For example, do they volunteer at your school, or visit the school for activities, or attend parent teacher conferences and meetings?) Are there more ways that you would like your parents to be present?
13. Will you tell me about ways that you feel you/your parents/your family are different from your extended family/classmates/other neighborhood families? What are you feelings about these differences? Anything else that you would like to share about your family and school?

APPENDIX G

Parent Group Discussion Protocol

The *purpose* of this group discussion is to gain a sense of sociocultural and community aspects of African American parenting, middleclass*ness*, and student outcomes.

The *goal* of the discussion group is to *initiate* and *stimulate* conversation among parent participants regarding their parenting culture within a social context.

The estimated *length* of the group discussion is one and one half hours.

The *participants* include African American parents of successful preadolescent students self-identifying as middle class citizens.

Introduce researcher(s) and invite participants to introduce themselves (and feel free to use a pseudonym if this increases comfort). Ask participants what they hope to gain from participation in the group discussion and remind them that it is an open forum in which members practice candor and mutual respect. Questions of the researcher are welcome (distribute notepads/index cards for participants to note comments and questions). However, to respect everyone's time, these ideas may need to be held until later or when statements are most relevant to the discussion. The researcher will record the session in its entirety and/or document detailed notes.

Topics and discussion questions include the following:

- Group Discussion Hopes
- Parenting Style/Expressions of Parenting Practices
- Family Rituals and Traditions

- Examples of Family Resilience
- Viewpoints Regarding Social Class and Class Identification
- Racial Socialization Ideation
- Support Structures and Obstacles
- Thoughts Regarding Schools and Teachers
- Role of Parenting in Child's Schooling and Outcomes
- Generational Perspectives
- Gender, Personality and Sibling Dynamics
- What is Missing?
- Summary and Questions

Potential Inquiries include: What do you hope to gain from your participation in this group discussion? In a few words describe your parenting style? What actions are typical of your parenting? Would you say that your family has certain traditions, rituals or learning practices? How have you overcome family? What concerns do you have regarding your child's schooling experiences? How do you define and describe social class? How has class and race influenced your parenting and your family? How would you describe your role in your child's academic performance? In what ways are you drawing from your own upbringing and childhood experiences as a parent? What are your thoughts about schools and educators, broadly and specifically? Have you taken any time to reflect upon or discuss topics following our interview sessions? What further questions do you have for yourself, the group members or the researcher today?