

Gearing up to Clear the Path:
Understanding Black Students' Motivation for Pursuing
Post-secondary Education Through a Critical Race Theory Lens

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand Black students within the Class of 2023 at Cleveland Heights High School (CHHS) motivation for pursuing a post-secondary education through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) and Counter-storytelling. CHHS is identified as a comprehensive high school where students have access to a rigorous, engaging curriculum that will prepare them for college and career. CHHS is located on the East side of Cleveland and has a predominately Black student population. Despite the district and CHHS efforts to cultivate a college going culture, the college enrollment rate is around 46 percent. This study utilized a qualitative Critical Race Methodology (CRM) as a guiding framework in order to negate the deficit thinking stereotype that U.S society has unjustly placed on Black students in their pursuit of higher education. CRM in education challenges biological and cultural deficit stories through counter-storytelling, oral traditions, historiographies, etc., (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p.37). Utilizing this framework allowed Black students to see their life experiences as a source of value and a beneficial asset.

By understanding students' motivations for pursuing a postsecondary education will in turn help build systems of support as they prepare to tackle perceived post-secondary barriers. Study participants are a part of the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP). The students that participated in the study met the following criteria: participate in Gear Up, Black male or female, and first or second-generation college student. This study utilized an action research framework. In order to gain a better understanding of how college and career readiness workshops impacts students understanding and motivations to pursue a postsecondary education;

students participated in a five-week long college and career readiness summer program. Students created personal narratives through the lens of counter-narrative storytelling. Counter-narratives are important means to document and share how race influences the educational experiences of people of color (Miller et al., 2020, p.273). The findings were analyzed using verbatim participant responses and four major themes emerged. The implications of this findings and recommendations for future research are provided in the final chapter.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the often overlooked and silenced Black students that have lived and experienced an unjust educational system in the U.S. A system that prides itself on being for all but in reality, only serves a few. This work is dedicated to any student that was ever made to feel like “school was not for them” because of the deficit thinking mindset that continues to plague our educational system. This work is dedicated to the amazing K-12 educators that gave me the courage to believe in myself academically and to shoot for the stars (Dr. Renee Wilson, Rachel Coleman, Sandra Dixon, Barbara Townsend). Finally, this is dedicated to my former and future students, I hear you and I see you and most importantly I will continue to fight for the change you deserve.

To my John F. Kennedy High School family – students and leadership from 2018-2020, thank you all for allowing me to become a part of the schools’ culture. I am a better educator because you all pushed me to think past my own understandings. You all challenged me every day in different ways and I am so grateful for it.

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Tony and Carla, we have gone through the trenches together and we have lived in survival mode our whole lives; it is time to live. Our brother died at 34, we have to

continue to live and prosper for him. Thank you both for loving me as your baby sister and I supporting me through this process. First-generation millionaires!

Tammara and Jarita, thank you ladies for showing me that teen moms are more than the stereotypes that society has unjustly placed on us. Tammara you were the first teen mom that I knew that graduated high school and handled yourself with class and grace. No matter what life through at you continued to push forward. Rita were the first young mom that I knew to graduate from college. You opened up a world to me that I did not know I could be a part of. The first time I stepped on Kent State University's campus was because of you and I will always love you for exposing me to the world of higher education. Because of you ladies, I was able to walk confidently into the unknown.

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CHAPTER 1

You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them.

–Maya Angelou

INTRODUCTION

Students' participation in postsecondary education is becoming increasingly important for both individual successes and for the economic future of the nation (Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2011). With the national focus on increasing postsecondary enrollment and career readiness, issues surrounding college access and student preparation becomes a major hurdle in achieving this goal for many students and families (Knaggs, Sondergeld, & Schardt, 2015). Latorno Hines et al. (2011) echoes this sentiment in their research, as they indicate, for the first time ever in the United States, most stakeholders agree that the priority of K-12 education is: preparing all young people for college and career.

In the past decade, much research has focused on defining and measuring college readiness (Duncheon, 2018) and barriers to college access that underrepresented students face (Mitchall, 2015; Loza, 2015; Cilesiz & Drotos, 2016). These potential roadblocks include lack of properly trained school counselors, lack of parental and community support, increased costs that challenge affordability, generating greater educational debt, and unequal educational opportunities. Each of these barriers will be further explained in the literature review section. Throughout this chapter, I will provide an overview of the national context surrounding college access, the role college access organizations play in changing and increasing college access for underserved and underrepresented and provide an overview of the local context. The chapter concludes with the introduction of

the intervention, review of the problem statement, research questions, theoretical framework and the significance of this study.

National Context

College access programs have been identified as one such effective outreach initiative (Dyce et al., 2013), offering a bridge between high school and postsecondary education for traditionally underserved groups (Stillisano et al., 2013). Due to the increased pressure to increase postsecondary enrollment, the National College Access Network (NCAN) was formed. NCAN was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 1995 by nine founding members that wanted to share best practices and spread college access and success services around the country (National College Access Network, n.d.). The founding members were: (1) CollegeBound Foundation (Baltimore, MD), (2) Cleveland Scholarship Program (now College Now Greater Cleveland), (3) The Boston Plan for Excellence in The Public Schools Foundation (now uAspire), (4) College Assistance Program of Dade County (Miami, FL) (now College Assistance Program, Inc.), (5) I KNOW I CAN (Columbus, OH), (6) Philadelphia Schools Collaborative (succeeded by Philadelphia Education Fund), (7) Scholarship Fund of Alexandria (VA), (8) Tidewater Scholarship Foundation (Norfolk, VA) (now Access College Foundation), and (9) The Winston-Salem Foundation (now Crosby Scholars Program). NCAN's mission is to build, strengthen, and empower communities committed to college access and success so that all students, especially those underrepresented in postsecondary education, can achieve their educational dreams through a two- or four-year degree or high-quality certificate program (National College Access Network, n.d.). In order to meet the goals of their mission, NCAN has developed four strategies to fulfill the goal:

1. Enhance the capacity of the college access and success field with high-quality data, innovative ideas, and accessible tools.
2. Bolster the skills and competencies of college access and success leaders and practitioners through professional development.
3. Advocate for improved college completion rates by amplifying a range of policy solutions and increasing member engagement.
4. Foster relationships within communities and across sectors that support college access and success for underrepresented students.

National College Access Network (n.d) reports that by 2020, 65 percent of U.S. jobs will require some form of postsecondary education, but only 47 percent of U.S. working-age adults hold a postsecondary credential as of 2016. These numbers represent the serious need to address the factors limiting and preventing inner-city youth from pursuing postsecondary education. To further explain the severity and need for postsecondary, National College Access Network (n.d.) states that “Postsecondary education is also increasingly the only route to upward mobility. The lowest income Americans who obtain a college degree are five times more likely than their peers to escape poverty”. The goal and purpose of all college access organizations is to work to overcome the barriers to postsecondary access so students can gain the postsecondary credentials they need to embark on successful careers and build America’s future (National College Access Network, n.d.).

Role of College Access Organizations

College Now Greater Cleveland is a non-profit college access organization focused on increasing postsecondary educational attainment through college and career

access advising, financial aid counseling, and scholarship and retention services (College Now Greater Cleveland, 2018). CNGC was the first college access organization of its kind in the nation and a national leader and has served as a model and best practice for other organizations around the country (College Now Greater Cleveland, 2018). Mitchall (2015) cites a study that found “those schools that offered more school-based assistance with filling out applications, financial aid forms, writing essays, and allowing days off for college tours had students who were more likely to enroll in a four-year institution rather than enrolling in a two-year college or not at all” (p.59). External college access programs are delivered in three models: 1) Out-of-School-Time Programs 2) In-School and Out-of School Time Partnerships and 3) In-School Collaborative Programs (Akunvabey, 2018, p. 40). CNGC provides in-classroom curriculum-based workshops and after-school programs to middle and high school students focused on building a student's college and career knowledge base. The importance of school-based college access support for underserved populations cannot be overstated (Mitchall, 2015, p. 59). Akunvabey (2018) adds “without targeted interventions that specifically value the social and cultural capital that Black and Latino students possess; these disparities continue to persist through college completion” (p. 9).

Local Context

There are currently sixteen counties that are located in Northeast Ohio, ranging from rural to urban, low-income to affluent. These sixteen counties combined, have a high school student body population of 166,592 in grades nine through twelve (Ohio Department of Education, 2016). Due to the large student body population, this study will focus on the following county: Cuyahoga. According to the United States Census Bureau,

Cuyahoga county has 1,248,514 residents. The racial breakdown of the county includes: White alone (63.8%), Black alone (30.5%), Asian alone (3.2%), and Hispanic or Latino (5.9%). The educational breakdown based on the percent of adults over the age of 25 includes: high school graduate or higher (89.1%) and bachelor's degree of higher (31.5%). The median household income of Cuyahoga county is \$46,720 and 18 percent of the population are living in poverty. The educational and income breakdown of the county shows the need for increased postsecondary degree attainment for future prosperity of the region.

There are thirty-one school districts located in Cuyahoga county with a total high school student population of 48,060 (Ohio Department of Education, 2016). Within the Cuyahoga county school districts, one school was selected: Cleveland Heights High School (CHHS) located within the Cleveland Heights - University Heights School District (CHUH). CHHS has a total student body size of 1,706 students in grades nine through 12 that are classified as currently enrolled and attending full-time. This study will focus on students in the cohort 2023, which includes roughly 400 students.

The state of Ohio Department of Education publishes school district report cards, in order to hold school districts accountable and to keep families informed on school district progress. The school report card is focused on six key areas: 1) Achievement; 2) Progress; 3) Gap Closing; 4) Graduation Rate; 5) K-3 Literacy; and 6) Prepared for Success. The grading scale used for the report card is: A = 90-100 percent; B = 70-89.9 percent; C = 45-69.9 percent; D = 25-44.9 percent; and F = 0-24.9 percent. The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) for the purposes of the state district report card, defines the graduation rate component as the percentage of students who successfully finished

high school with a diploma in four or five years. Most relevant to this study, the state report card includes a prepared for success component which provides information on how schools prepare students for different pathways of college and career success and insights on how those students do once they leave high school. The most recent school report card that has been published is for the 2018-2019 school year. The CHUH and CHHS have continuously received a grade of “C” or lower on the state report card in the following areas: achievement, progress, gap closing, graduation rate, and prepared for success. Important to understand for this study is that the graduation rates and preparing their students for life after high school for CHUH and CHHS align with similar urban and suburban school districts in the state. See Appendix A for more details on each report card.

To help improve and understand the grades on the state report card (achievement, progress, gap closing, graduation rate, and prepared for success), CHUH has formed a College and Career Task Force. The College and Career Task Force began forming in January 2020 by CHUH Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby with the backing of the school board. The purpose of the College and Career Task Force to study, analyze and make recommendations regarding high school graduation requirements, systems for college and career planning, and increasing the number of students who matriculate to college and career directly after high school. The following sections will give a more in-depth overview of CHUH, CHHS, and the new initiative to increase post-secondary enrollment.

Cleveland Heights - University Heights School District

The Cleveland Heights - University Heights School District is a public-school district in Ohio that serves mostly all the students within the cities of Cleveland Heights

and University Heights. During the 2018-2019 academic year, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) reports that there were approximately 5,148 students enrolled in the CHUH district. Of those 5,148 enrolled students, 70.9 percent were Black, 3.7 percent were Hispanic, 18 percent were White, non-Hispanic, 5.5 percent were Multiracial, 1.9% were Asian or Pacific Islander and 100 percent of the students enrolled are classed as economically disadvantaged (Ohio Department of Education, n.d.). CHUH is made up of six elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school.

This study focused on Cleveland Heights High School (CHHS) which is self-identified as a comprehensive high school where students have access to a rigorous, engaging curriculum that will prepare for college and career. CHHS is located on the East side of Cleveland and has a predominately Black student population. There are currently 1,706 students enrolled full-time in grades 9-12. CHHS offers nearly 20 Advanced Placement (AP) and honors classes for all major courses (i.e. Math, Science, English/Language Arts, and History). CHHS participates in College Credit Plus (CCP) and AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination); both of these programs allow students to participate in college level courses and focus on establishing a strong foundation for success in college and beyond. Despite the district and CHHS efforts to cultivate a college going culture, the college enrollment rate is around 46 percent. This research study focused on the class of 2023, who are students currently in the 10th grade at CHHS. Understanding early on in a student's high school career what motivates them to pursue or not pursue a post-secondary education, is key to developing holistic college and career programs throughout the district.

GEAR UP

The Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is a federal discretionary grant program managed by the U.S. Department of Education. The mission of the GEAR UP program is to significantly increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP provides six-year or seven-year grants to states and partnerships to provide services to high-poverty middle and high schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The GEAR UP program serves an entire cohort of students beginning no later than the seventh grade and follow the cohort through high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2019), there are two types of GEAR UP grants offered: state and partnership grants:

State grants are competitive six-year matching grants that must include both an early intervention component designed to increase college attendance and success and raise the expectations of low-income students and a scholarship component. Partnership grants are competitive six-year matching grants that must support an early intervention component and may support a scholarship component designed to increase college attendance and success and raise the expectations of low-income students.

GEAR UP utilizes a cohort student model, which consists of two approaches: the whole-grade approach and public housing approach. The whole-grade approach involves all the students in a particular grade level that attend an eligible school, and the public housing approach involves all students in a particular grade level that reside in a public housing (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Below are the cohort parameters regarding project services and the originating school:

Project Services:

- Projects must provide services to at least one grade level of students (e.g., all 7th graders); In other words, if the project plans to serve 7th graders, it must offer services to every student in the 7th grade;
- Begin services no later than 7th grade. Projects can opt to provide services to students in pre-K through 7th grade in the first year of the project. However, projects cannot provide services to 8th and 9th graders in the first year;
- Ensure services are provided through the 12th grade to students in the participating grade level;
- Ensure services are provided through the student's first year of attendance at an institution of higher education (IHE) (available with a 7-year grant award);
- After the students complete the last grade level at the originating target school, the project must continue to provide services to the school that a substantial majority of cohort students attend; and
- Provide services to students who have received services under a previous GEAR UP grant award but have not yet completed the 12th grade.

Originating School:

- The originating school is the target school where the services begin. It must (1) have a 7th grade class and (2) have at least fifty percent of the students enrolled in the school must be eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

There are three cohort design types that a grant can utilize. The single grade cohort which serves just one class. The multi-cohort which starts with two grade levels and continues to serve them throughout the grant. Lastly, the feeder pattern cohort which starts with a single grade the first year and picks up another grade class each year. All GEAR UP projects must provide services through high school graduation or a student's first year of attendance at an institution of higher education, if the project has a performance period for 7 years (U.S Department of Education, 2019).

The Cleveland Heights - University Heights School District recognized the importance that postsecondary education plays in the role of eliminating the continued cycle of generational poverty. In partnership with College Now Greater Cleveland and

the Ohio Department of Education, CHUH wrote a grant proposal to become a GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) Partnership site. The GEAR UP partnership grant was awarded and with a whole-grade cohort approach and single grade cohort design. Based on the parameters for a GEAR UP grant as outlined above, the class of 2023 was selected as the target cohort. The grant known as GEAR UP 2 New Heights (GU2NH) began in 2018, the students seventh grade year and will follow this cohort through their first year of college. The goal of GU2NH is to increase the knowledge students have pertaining to college and careers, increase student familiarity with college and career readiness tools, motivate students to take, persist with and succeed in rigorous classes, and to assist students and families to learn about career clusters tailored to the student interest. Since the implementation of the grant, students have individual and group access to a College and Career Advisor, participated in college visits, career exposure trips, completed college and career readiness assessments through Naviance, enrollment in more rigorous coursework has increased, and participated in summer enrichment camps. At the time of this study, the class of 2023 will be finishing their freshman year of high school and entering the summer of their tenth-grade year. These resources are extremely important not only for first-generation college students but all students, as they lack the much needed social and cultural capital to navigate college. The GU2NH program is significant to and impacts this study because students have been exposed to college and career readiness preparation for the past two years and should have increased college knowledge capital compared to their counterparts at non-GEAR UP high schools; which may impact student's motivation to pursue or not pursue a postsecondary education.

Intervention

This study utilized an action research framework. Action research focuses on identifying a local problem of practice and developing an intervention/innovation to address that problem. Action research is demanding, complex and challenging because the researcher not only assumes responsibilities for doing the research but also for enacting change (Pine, 2009, p. 234). The central problem in this study is understanding minority students participating in the GEAR UP program motivations to pursue a postsecondary education. In order to gain a better understanding of how college and career readiness workshops impact this student population understanding and motivations to pursue a postsecondary education; students participated in a five-week long college and career readiness summer program. To cultivate a culturally relevant/responsive environment and curriculum, the themes for each week were designed in order to value the students own lived experiences and the daily lessons selected allowed the student to use their own prior knowledge experiences in order to develop a blueprint for post high school that values them. Culturally responsive curriculum “communicates to the students that their culture is valuable to the classroom and allows them to find more success with the content when they are able to make personal connections and utilize their previous knowledge to develop an understanding of new content” (Fuhrman, 2020, para. 9). The college and career readiness workshops utilized College Now Greater Cleveland’s (CNGC) high school curriculum for college and career readiness and the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP) ACT[®] approved college and career curriculum. Each lesson provided learning objectives, an interactive activity, and allowed time for reflection of the activity. Narrative data was collected from the two

participants in the form of three journal writing prompts. The purpose of the writing prompt was to allow participants to articulate in their own voices how this experience has or has not impacted their postsecondary decisions. During the summer program participants created personal narratives through the lens of counter-narrative storytelling. Counter-narratives are important means to document and share how race influences the educational experiences of people of color, whose stories counter the stories of the privileged that are considered normal and neutral. (Miller et al., 2020, p. 273). The College and Career Readiness summer program intervention allowed the researcher to answer research questions one and two by getting reflective and narrative data from participants and provide students with the resources to make informed decisions regarding their postsecondary plans.

Problem Statement

The achievement gap and subsequent foci on the quantitatively measured deficits of black youth have amounted to one of the least productive conversations in contemporary education discourse, given that the amount of time, energy, and resources spent on the issue have barely made an impact (Lozenski, 2017, p.163). If we are to address and make a positive long-lasting change in the lives African American students from this well-worn path to of generational poverty and lack of education, it is critical to gain an understanding of the educational experiences of the youth in order to build and sustain a college-going culture at schools (traditional and alternative alike).

This study will contribute to and allow educators to view the problem of Black students' limited participation in postsecondary education from the perspective of Black

students and, in doing so, would open possibilities of critical reflection and dialogue about factors that may not have been considered in previous dialogues.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study, sought to answer questions on how students lived experiences from their past and present may or may not impact their postsecondary education. The research questions for this study are as follows:

Research Question 1: How and to what extent does Black high school students' motivations for pursuing a post-secondary education change or remain the same during their participation in college and career readiness summer bridge program?

Research Question 2: How can Black students' voices and experiences inform a college and career program designed to increase their preparation and access to higher education?

Significance of the Study

Cleveland has seen an increase in violence especially among children and against children (Pagonakis, 2020), so making sure students understand that some form of postsecondary education (trade school, professional certifications, community colleges, etc.) is an option for everyone is key to making a difference in the Black community and for society as a whole.

This study is relevant for the continued improvement of Black students experience in PK-12 education. Promoting a college-going culture is important to increase graduation rates and postsecondary enrollment. As Gollnick and Chin (2017) points out “education is a key to upward mobility and financial security in adulthood” (p. 100). For this study I analyzed Black students' motivation for pursuing a postsecondary education from their own perspective using a Critical Race frame avoiding traditional ‘deficit’ approach, which views “BME (Black Minority and Ethnic) students’ lower

attainment as a consequence of their failure to adjust or adapt, or a lack of ability” (Bunce et al., 2019, p. 3).

CHAPTER 2

Without intentional efforts to combat old ways and norms, ... institutions ... reproduce dominant social ideas, hierarchies, and systems of oppression.

—Monique W. Morris, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls*

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES GUIDING THE STUDY

The lack of college access and post-secondary degree attainment by Black students can be explained by a variety of factors. The first step in understanding how and why Black students are making their post-secondary decisions is understanding how systemic and institutional racism plays a role in their decision making. Yosso et al. (2004) found that “for at least the past decade, CRT scholars in education have theorized, examined, and challenged the ways in which race and racism shape schooling structures, practices, and discourses” (p.3). In this dissertation, a critical race theory (CRT) framework is used as a lens to analyze the narrative data collected from the student participants to get a better understanding of how race and racism has shaped their desire and willingness to pursue a post-secondary education. Counter-narrative storytelling is also described as a tool to overcome and challenge societal deficit thinking, through a CRT lens (Miller et al., 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Beachum, 2018; Cuevas et al., 2013; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004, Dukes, 2017; Knight-Manuel et al., 2019). Chapter two will provide the following scholarly and theoretical knowledge guiding the study: (1) the state of Black education (2) implications and barriers to college access, (3) CRT, (4) community cultural wealth, and (5) counter-narrative storytelling.

State of Black Education

Current research suggests that there needs to be a greater focus on understanding the perspectives of first-generation students and the urban high school contexts (Duncheon, 2018; Temple, 2009), building and sustaining a culturally relevant college-going culture (Knight-Manuel et al., 2019), and creating new accountability measures that seek to hold schools responsible for percentages of students who graduate from high school and enroll in college (Knight-Manuel et al., 2019). McKillip, Rawls, & Barry (2012) point out that “to help prepare students for college particularly those who lack the social capital from other sources, students need ongoing access to and individualized engagement with college preparatory knowledge and information” (p. 56). It is important to note that this study was not designed to negate the myriad of educational challenges and disparities experienced by Black students. Conversely, the intent of the study was to acknowledge the broad range of experiences for first- and second-generation African American college students without focusing solely on deficit experiences.

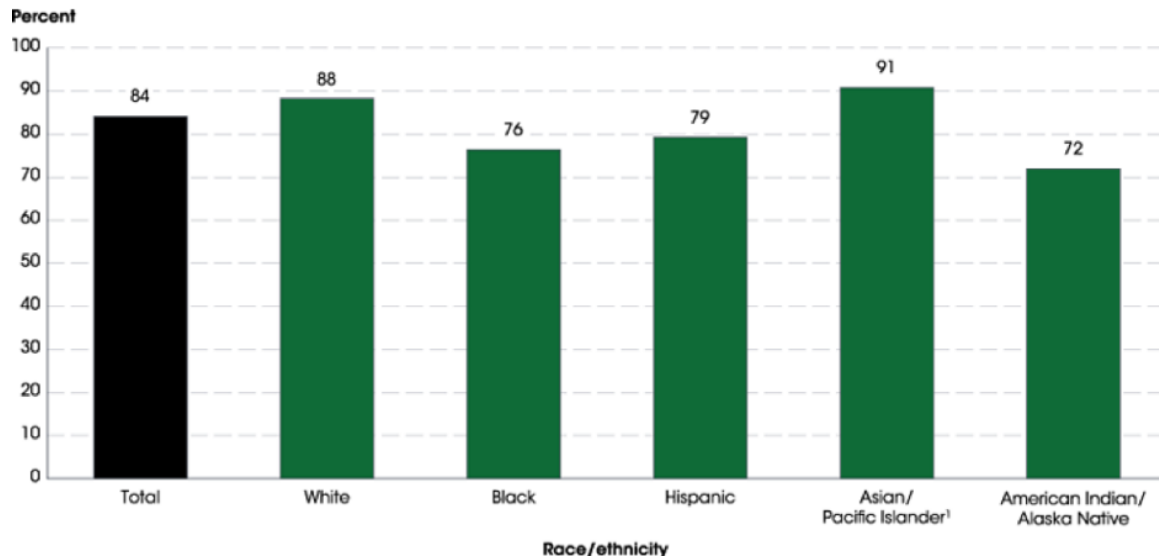
Black Education. The history of Black education in America is an interesting combination of encouragements, disappointments, suppression, contradictions, and paradoxes (Crosby, 1976, p. 208). Lozenski (2017) cites Anderson (2004) in which they use the following analogy to describe Black education in America “The history of black student achievement in America has been like a ‘110 Meter Hurdles’ race, as soon as you cross one hurdle its [sic] time to for the next one that is just as demanding and even more important for reaching the finish line” (p. 168). Students in urban public schools are subject to even greater challenges when trying to pursue a post-secondary education than their peers in suburban school districts. The Cleveland Heights - University Heights

School District is classified as suburban by the State of Ohio. However, the district has similar demographics and faces similar challenges as urban school districts; such as a high level of students classified as economically disadvantaged, majority of the student body identified as a part of an underrepresented minority group, and low college enrollment amongst minority students. Knight-Manuel et al. (2019) cite Eskenazi, Eddins, & Beam (2003) who found that “at the root of disparities of high school completion and college-readiness indicators is the reality that many Black[1] and Latino students encounter markedly inadequate educational opportunities in high school” (pp.36-37). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), for the 2015-16 cohort Black student graduation rates are significantly lower at 76 percent compared to the national average of 84 percent (See Figure 1). The National Center for Education Statistics (2018), further breakdowns the inconsistencies in graduation rates between Black and White students by state (See Appendix B). In the state of Ohio, the disparities are even more pronounced, the graduation rate for Black students was 67 percent compared to 88 percent for White students for the 2015-16 cohort. For a national picture of this trend, the state with the largest gap between Black and White students was Wisconsin (64 Black students vs 93 White students) and the state with the lowest gap in graduation rates was Wyoming (81 Black students vs 82 White students). Although a gap persists in each state, there is no state gap larger than a 30-point difference, meaning that there is still time to turn things around. Griffin (2006) found that “although the literature discusses barriers that Black high achievers [applies to average achieving Black students] face and the role that social support plays in mitigating the impact of these factors, there is less understanding of what pushes these students to continue to strive for academic

excellence and pursue their goals despite these challenges" (p. 385). This study contributed to identifying barriers that will help to address the graduation gap issue.

Figure 1

Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate for public high school students by race/ethnicity for 2015-16



NOTE: The ACGR is the percentage of public high school freshmen who graduate with a regular diploma within 4 years of starting 9th grade. The Bureau of Indian Education and Puerto Rico were not included in the U.S. 4-year ACGR estimates. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Student Expectations. Adolescents’ academic expectations have been shown to predict educational outcomes, and thus are an important factor in understanding educational disparities (Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013, p. 1399). Lozenski (2017) found that “a diachronic analysis suggests that each historical moment in black education suffers from the same structural problems stemming from (1) the economic necessity of black miseducation, (2) the lack of control of black education by black people, (3) the denial of critical models of education that critique structural white supremacy, and (4) the degradation and omission of the African experience from curricula” (p. 177). Students in

urban public education are held to the same standards and expectations as their peers in suburban and affluent school districts across the country, despite the daily trials and tribulations they face. Black and Latina/o youth attending urban public schools continue to experience limited access to higher education, even as increased accountability measures call for school communities to develop college-ready graduates (Knight-Manuel et al., 2019, p. 36). Despite these increased expectations and accountability measures, many urban school districts (Cilesiz & Drotos, 2016; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009; Knaggs, Sondergeld, & Schardt, 2015) are still failing to prepare inner-city youth to prosper, succeed, and graduate from college. Lozenski (2017) passionately states that “we must search for alternative explanations to educational disparity that do not look to the nation-state as the ultimate protector and insurer of black equality. Rather, we must ask deeper questions that illuminate holistic contexts for educational analysis” (p. 181). With the assistance from college access organizations, school districts and students can begin to tackle the barriers to post-secondary enrollment that many of these students face.

Implications and Barriers to College Access

A postsecondary education confers numerous benefits both to the individual and to society, including higher earnings, lower rates of unemployment and government dependency, an increased tax base, and greater civic engagement (Terry Long, 2014). With a college degree becoming more and more imperative to be successful in our society, it is time to start combating the barriers to college access that our children are facing. Applying to college is a complex and difficult process, even for the most academically qualified students (Nagaoka, Roderick, & Coca, 2008). The college search

process is complicated and could easily be an academic subject unto itself (The Joyce Ivy Foundation, 2009). Research on college access and choice highlights the importance of the norms for college, access to college information, and concrete guidance and support, resources that first-generation college students often lack (Nagaoka, Roderick, & Coca, 2008). Below details barriers to college access that students encounter: lack of properly trained school counselors, lack of parental and community support, increased costs that challenge affordability, generating greater educational debt, and unequal educational opportunities.

School Counselor. School counselors are responsible for each and every student in the building and unlike others on campus, they are in a position to focus on the educational journey of each student (Laturno Hines, Lemons, & Crews, 2011). Corwin et al. (2004) cites studies done by Gándara (2002) and Oakes (1985) which found that there is a general distrust of counseling services by minority student populations because they fear that counselors will not understand their particular needs and will advise them into vocational or general education tracks. McKillip et al. (2012) found research that suggests meetings between counselors and student all too often focus on exchanging functional information and students much less often get access to more critical information such as identifying colleges, navigating the application process, and making college decisions. Laturno Hines et al. (2011) conducted a study which took “a close look at the typical role and function of secondary school staff and reveals how so many students get stuck on the path to nowhere” (p. 2). The study revealed that “school counselors are in a unique position to lead and if they fail to work toward equity, and college and career readiness for every student, they can pose the biggest, most devastating

obstacle of all” (p. 8). Laturno Hines et al. (2011) list three key barriers that limit school counselors from leading the college- and career ready agenda at their schools:

1. Pre-service training programs rarely prepare future school counselors in the dispositions, knowledge, and skills required to develop, implement, and evaluate college- and career readiness programs.
2. In many secondary schools, principals do not know how to hire, supervise, or evaluate school counselors.
3. Finally, there is a large discrepancy between how school counselors see their role, both ideally and in reality, and how graduates view the guidance and services they received as students.

In the case of college access, we know that the availability of college-going information and appropriate counseling is essential for college enrollment not just for first-generation students or students of color but for all students (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004).

Parental and Community Support. Students rely on their parents and immediate family for any college knowledge and support they can get (McKillip, Rawls, & Barry, 2012). However, many households in today’s society include two worker parents with limited college exposure. Sociological research on college choice suggests that low-income and first-generation students may have difficulty translating aspirations into enrollment in large part because of differences in access to social capital—they do not have access to norms for college, college knowledge, and guidance and support in their families, communities, and most importantly, high schools (Nagaoka, Roderick, & Coca, 2008).

Affordability. With the rising cost of a postsecondary education and the raise of student loan debt; cost is becoming a major determinant for students want to go to college. Research finds, however, that students' confusion about financial aid and real college costs are a barrier (Nagaoka, Roderick, & Coca, 2008). Working in financial aid for three years at a four-public institution, I unfortunately was able to have a first-hands account on the stress and frustration families feel when it comes to financing a college education. The American Council on Education estimates that approximately one in five low-income students who are enrolled in college and would likely be eligible for Pell grants never filed a FAFSA (Nagaoka, Roderick, & Coca, 2008). Nagaoka et al. (2008) also found that Students who completed a FAFSA had an 84 percent predicted probability of enrolling in a four-year college versus a 56 percent predicted probability for students who did not complete a FAFSA. However, the FAFSA only covers a small portion of the cost of a college education and due to the competitiveness of local and national scholarships, students are still struggling to find ways to cover the financial gap.

Educational Debt. Gloria Ladson-Billings defines educational debt as the systemic inequalities in all of these resources, compounded over generations, owed to those who have been denied access to quality education for hundreds of years (Carter & Welner, 2013). In most states there is at least a three-to-one ratio between per pupil spending in the richest and poorest districts (Carter & Welner, 2013). This information is important in understanding the importance that educational debt plays in postsecondary access. Due to the disparity in funding between wealthy and poor school districts, Darling-Hammond in (Carter & Welner, 2013) found that: (a) Upper-income parents lobby more effectively for academic programs, computers, libraries, and other supports

and tolerate less neglect when it comes to building maintenance and physical amenities;

(b) More affluent schools with better conditions can attract a wider array of applicants.

Which results in high-poverty schools being forced to hire teachers whom are less experienced and less well educated (Carter & Welner, 2013).

Educational Opportunities. The final barrier to postsecondary access is the lack of educational opportunities provided to students. Darling-Hammond in (2013) notes that “the achievement gap would be significantly reduced if low-income minority students were routinely assigned highly qualified teachers rather than the poorly qualified teachers they most often encounter”. She adds that “Without additional resources, schools serving the nation's most vulnerable students are ill-prepared to create the working environments and compensation packages needed to attract and retain experienced, well-trained teachers” (Darling-Hammond, 2013). While poor teacher quality is one major factor in unequal educational opportunities for inner-city youth, Darling-Hammond (2013) discuss the four major resource-linked factors associated for unequal and inadequate educational outcomes:

1. The high level of childhood poverty coupled with the low level of social supports for low-income children’s health and welfare, including their early learning opportunities
2. The unequal allocation of school resources, which is made politically easier by the increasing resegregation of schools
3. Inadequate systems for providing high-quality teachers and teaching to all children in all communities

4. Rationing of high-quality curriculum through tracking and interschool disparities

Understanding these factors will help educators understand how to move away from oppressive factors to inclusive practices that will help change the landscape of urban education. The next section will highlight the four keys to building a college and career readiness program that is beneficial and impactful for all students.

Keys to College and Career Readiness

College and Career Readiness has become a major focus of many school districts across the United States. We expect students to make conscious choices whether to pursue college eligibility early in high school, those who do not choose courses wisely in their freshman and sophomore years find it difficult, even impossible, to be eligible for many colleges (Conley, 2010, p. 2). As a college access organization, College Now Greater Cleveland utilizes various resources to build programs and curriculum to engage and expand students' college capital. David Conley's four key dimensions of college and career readiness will be used as the guiding framework for this study to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. Conley is a professor of educational policy and leadership and founder and director of the Center for Educational Policy Research. His research focuses on a range of topics related to college readiness and what it takes for students to succeed in postsecondary education (Conley, 2010, p. XV). Conley (2010) defines college and career readiness as:

“The level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed - without remediation - in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program, or in a high-quality

certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement” (p. 21).

The four key dimensions to college and career readiness are key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual and awareness skills (Conley, 2010, p. 31). As Conley (2010) points out “In practice, these facets [key dimensions] are not exclusive or perfectly nested... they interact with one another extensively” (p. 31).

Conley (2010) further explains how each dimension impacts college and career readiness:

Key cognitive strategies. The success of a well-prepared college student is built on a foundation of key cognitive strategies that enable students to learn, understand, retain, use, and apply content from a range of disciplines.

Key content knowledge. Understanding and mastering key content knowledge is achieved by processing information so that its structure becomes more apparent and then probing, consolidating, and applying that information by means of the key cognitive strategies.

Academic behaviors. This dimension of college readiness encompasses a range of behaviors that reflects greater student self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control of a series of processes and behaviors necessary for academic success.

Contextual and awareness skills. Contextual factors encompass primarily the privileged information necessary to understand how college operates as a system and culture. This lack of understanding of the context of college causes many students to come alienated, frustrated, and even humiliated during the freshman year and decide that college is not the place for them.

The designed summer college and career readiness intervention will allow study participants to grow and develop in all four key dimensions. Due to the increasing demands placed on school districts and students to meet state and federal benchmarks, unfortunately, the development of key cognitive strategies in high school is often overshadowed by an instructional focus on decontextualized content and facts necessary to pass exit examinations or simply to keep students busy and classrooms quiet (Conley, 2010, p. 32). By conducting summer programming, it allows the students to focus on and start thinking holistically about their plans for after high school without the interference of working on school assignments in conjunction. Conley's college and career readiness dimensions provides a platform for developing the necessary skills to be successful in postsecondary education, it does not cohesively explain why some students remain motivated and others do not; nor do they specifically outline how to foster student's motivation during the college access process (Mitchall, 2015, p. 13). The use of Critical Race Theory within the context of this study will help to shine light on how systemic oppression plays a role on how students make their postsecondary decisions.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory first emerged as a counter legal scholarship to the positivist and liberal legal discourse of civil rights and this scholarly tradition argues against the slow pace of racial reform in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 7). This study will use CRT as a critical lens to understand and explain social inequalities in urban education and the impact these inequalities have on students' postsecondary decisions. CRT in education should be included as making a contribution to praxis, in that it supports action

and reflection in the world in order to change it (Stovall, 2013). Although CRT has its grounding in legal theory, it has been adopted by scholars in education to address issues faced by urban youth of color in schools (Stovall, 2013). There are five major tenets to CRT as it relates specifically to education: The intercentricity of race and racism, Challenge to dominant ideology, Commitment to social justice, Centrality of experiential knowledge, and the Interdisciplinary perspective. The five tenets were developed and continue to be informed by scholars (Yosso, 2005; Solórzano, 1997,1998; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Delgado Bernal, 1998) studying race and racism and which highlight how to use CRT guide research, curriculum, pedagogy, and to challenge the status quo thinking. Yosso (2005) further explains how the five tenets can be applied to education:

The intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination.

CRT starts from the premise that race and racism are central, endemic, permanent and a fundamental part of defining and explaining how US society functions. CRT acknowledges the inextricable layers of racialized subordination based on gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality.

The challenge to dominant ideology. CRT challenges White privilege and refutes the claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity. CRT challenges notions of neutral research or objective researchers and exposes deficit-informed research that silences, ignores, and distorts epistemologies of People of Color. CRT argues that these traditional claims act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in US society.

The commitment to social justice. CRT is committed to social justice and offers a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender and class oppression.

The centrality of experiential knowledge. CRT recognized that the experiential knowledge of People of Color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing and teaching about racial subordination. CRT draws explicitly on the lived experiences of People of Color by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, chronicles and narratives.

The utilization of interdisciplinary approaches. CRT goes beyond disciplinary boundaries to analyze race and racism within both historical and contemporary contexts, drawing on scholarship from ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, law, psychology, film, theatre and other fields.

The detailed explanation of the five tenets exposes the dire need for a real change in educational practices surrounding minority students. Stovall (2013) further explains that it is critical for the activist/scholar to intentionally engage the political exercise of claiming space to tell our story. Two tenets of CRT were used to provide a context for this study: the challenge of dominant ideology and the centrality of experiential knowledge. The perspective of this study allows for the participants to tell their stories and their perceptions of how racism has influenced their educational experiences (Grace, 2016). A major goal of this study is to allow the participants to share their story, in order to develop programs and initiatives to better meet the needs of these students and future students. As a result of this study students were engaged and motivated to address and challenge the systematic inequalities in education, they face on a daily basis by placing value on their own lived experiences.

CRT in education is defined as a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses (Yosso, 2005). CRT has been used as a process of making informed decisions to improve human conditions through critical analysis and action and is not confined to the walls of a school building (Stovall, 2013). CRT adds to efforts to continue to expand this dialogue to recognize ways in which our struggles for social justice are limited by discourses that omit and thereby silence the multiple experiences of People of Color (Yosso, 2005). The Critical Race Theory will be used as a lens in this study to shed light on how systematic institutional racism plays a major role in inner-city youths' postsecondary decisions.

As stated above there are five tenets of CRT and this study focused on two: the challenge of dominant ideology and the centrality of experiential knowledge. Challenging the dominant ideology in CRT again means challenging White privilege and refutes the claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity. The centrality of experiential knowledge in CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of People of Color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination. Yosso (2005) states that "CRT finds that racism is often well disguised in the rhetoric of shared "normative" values and "neutral" social scientific principles and practices. In conjunction with counter-narrative storytelling, the community cultural wealth model will be used to analyze and categorize the corrected data. Loza (2015) conducted a study on the post-secondary experiences of Latino/a students versus their White peers in a small high school through the lens of CRT and the community cultural

wealth Model. He found that “through a critical race theory lens, institutional oppression occurred through the school’s lack of quality Advanced Placement courses, lack of diversity, and insufficient funding for extra- curricular or school activities hindered their acceptance to prestigious universities" (p. 2). Loza (2015) adds that “participants expressed that they overcame these challenges using Yosso’s six community culture wealth factors” (p. 2). By utilizing the principles of CRT, community cultural wealth model, and counter-narrative storytelling, the researcher will be able to authenticate the student participants' responses based on an established theory. I applied CRT as a lens to address and answer the research questions by using the narrative data collected and responses from the given various assessments to better understand the lived experiences of the participants.

Community Cultural Wealth

Community cultural wealth is defined by Yosso (2005) as an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contracts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression (p. 77). Yosso (2005) adds that “these various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth. There are six types of capital associated with community cultural wealth which include: (1) aspirational capital, (2) linguistic capital, (3) familial capital, (4) social capital, (5) navigational capital, and (6) resistant capital. Each of the six forms of capital will be explained further in the literature review section. In combination with CRT, understanding the impact of cultural wealth, will give educators a clearer picture of the challenges and hurdles facing Black youth.

Students in urban school districts face major disadvantages on their journey to a postsecondary education due to a lack of social and cultural capital. As Yosso (2005) points out “one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in US schools is deficit thinking” (p. 75). Yosso (2005) defines deficit thinking as taking “the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education” (p. 75). Due to this way of thinking, educators most often assume that schools work and that students, parents, and community need to change to conform to this already effective and equitable system (Yosso, 2005).

The community cultural wealth model of CRT shifts the center of focus from notions of White, middle class culture to the cultures of Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005). Using CRT as a lens, the community cultural wealth model allows educators to see that Communities of Color nurture community cultural wealth through six forms of capital (Yosso, 2005). Yosso’s (2005) six forms of capital are detailed below:

1. **Aspirational:** Refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers.
2. **Navigational:** Refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions.
3. **Social:** Understood as networks of people and community resources.

These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions.

4. **Linguistic:** Includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style. Reflects the

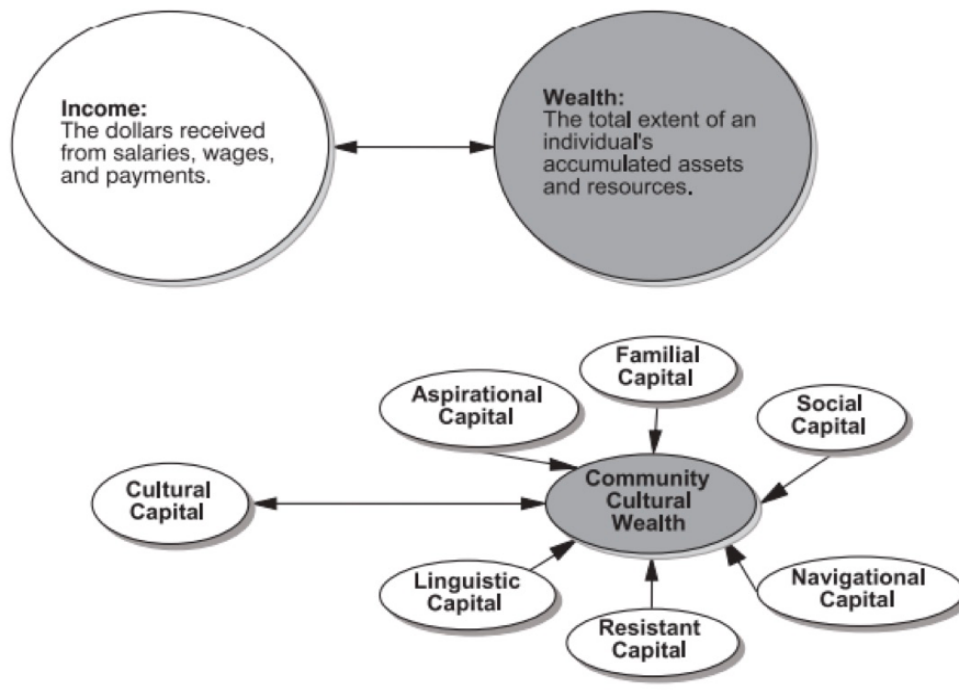
idea that Students of Color arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills.

5. **Familial:** Refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition.
6. **Resistant:** Refers to the knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality.

Yosso (2005) notes that these “various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth” (p. 77). Figure 2 displays a visual representation of the community cultural wealth model.

Figure 2

A model of community cultural wealth



Source: Yosso (2005) p.78

As stated previously, this study focused on two of the five tenets of CRT: the challenge of dominant ideology and centrality of experiential knowledge. The resistant capital element of the community cultural wealth model is a guiding focus of this study. Yosso (2005) states that resistant capital is “grounded in the legacy of resistance to subordination exhibited by Communities of Color” (p. 80). Loza (2015) adds that “Resistant capital is the notion that minority students have the ability to overcome their oppression once they are aware of it. After the student has accepted their oppression, they can use that knowledge to their advantage to overcome obstacles” (p. 49). Cuevas et al. (2013) adds that “these six forms of CCW (community cultural wealth) contradicts the cultural deficit view and provides a framework that demonstrates the vast community cultural wealth within communities of color” (p. 35). All six forms of capital are important to make progress in urban school districts and help to transform oppressive policies. The following sections will illustrate how counter-narrative storytelling in connection with CRT in education is used to understand and explain social inequalities in urban education and the impact these inequalities have on students’ postsecondary decisions.

Counter-Narrative Storytelling

Whether explicitly or implicitly, social science theoretical models explaining educational inequality support majoritarian stories (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 30). The main goal of this study is to understand Black students' motivations for pursuing a postsecondary education by giving them the tools and resources necessary to narrate their own stories. CRT scholars portray the dominant claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy as camouflages for sustaining the self-interest of the

powerful groups in society (Manglitz et al., 2006, para.4). Manglitz et al. (2006) cite Delgado & Stefancic (2000) who make the point that “While majoritarian stories draw on the tacit knowledge among persons in the dominant group”, they also distort and silence the experiences of the dominated (para.5). The use of counter-narrative storytelling will allow participants to share how their lived experiences have shaped their college access journey and how to use that knowledge to push past societal stereotypes. By using counter-storytelling to challenge the status quo, even though it may still be questioned, provides a way to counter the normative voices (Manglitz et al., 2006, para.7).

In many schools classified as “suburban” there is a myth that Black students are receiving equal opportunity and access to programming and resources. However, as Miller et al. (2020) points out “while there is an increasing number of students of color in our K–12 schools, there are also historical and continuing problems of inequity for students of color” (p. 270). They contend that “these practices of inequity and the resulting experiences of institutional racism are captured in counter-narratives voiced by students of color and their teachers” (p. 270). Miller et al. (2020) discovered that “critical race theorists and scholars continue to argue for the importance of drawing on experiences and voices of people of color” (p. 272). They cite Ladson-Billings (2003) who pointed out that “CRT understands that our social world is not fixed; rather, it is something we construct with words, stories, and silence” and Solórzano and Yosso (2002) adds that “critical race theory recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination” (pp. 272-273). Unfortunately, in society underserved and underrepresented youth voices and experiences are often overlooked, and silenced,

and counter-narrative holds promise to expose, analyze, and critique the racialized reality in which those experiences are contextualized, silenced, and perpetuated. (Miller et al., 2020, p. 273). Miller et al. (2020) found through their research that there are two goals for using authentic narratives (1) to convey the voices of those underrepresented in research and (2) to make use of these voices as analytical devices to identify and critique majoritarian narratives, especially those that target people of color (p. 278).

A major objective of this study was to improve college access planning for underrepresented students. According to Miller et al. (2020) “counter-narratives provide great opportunities for students and teachers of color to voice their oppressed experiences that can lead to further critical analysis of the educational system and the society at large by both people of color and the White majority” (p. 283). Lastly Miller et al. (2020), acknowledges that by “helping the participants develop their agency as well as their voices, and encouraging them to come up with alternative solutions and further take actions to implement them, will more effectively promote generative transformative action inside and outside the classroom” (p. 292). By giving students a voice and platform to be able to express how their lived experiences have impacted their lives to this point will help to state to facilitate change within a system that was not designed for them to succeed.

Summary of the revision of the Literature

In summary, the literature review concentrated on five sections: (1) the state of Black education (2) implications and barriers to college access, (3) CRT, (4) community cultural wealth, and (5) counter-narrative storytelling. The researchers highlighted in the literature review suggested that the focus of improving educational outcomes for Black

youth needs to be focused on understanding the actual needs of these students. In their research, Knight-Manuel et al. (2019) found that in order “To counter prevalent deficit-oriented notions negatively influencing the schooling experiences of youth, it is necessary to engage culturally relevant and responsive educational practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Paris & Alim, 2014) that draw upon and support youth’s multiple and fluid cultural identities while preparing them for college” (p. 40). In addition, Goodboy et al. (2016) discovered that “few have acknowledged or examined the importance of students’ motivation for attending college; this dynamic can significantly influence students’ involvement in educational experiences (Vallerand et al., 1993), approaches toward studying (Fairchild, Horst, Finney, & Barron, 2005), and the overall likelihood of completing a college degree (Allen, 1999)” (p. 62). Nelson (2017) drives home the importance of needing to look deeper into what urban school districts need to do to make progress with his statement that “perhaps Black children need neither desegregated schools nor school choice; what Black children actually need is effective education” (p. 73). Utilizing CRT, community cultural wealth model, and counter-narrative storytelling as guide for the intervention and analysis will allow Black youth to have a voice to narrate their stories and struggles in accessing postsecondary education.

CHAPTER 3

The messiness of engaged scholarship often forces researchers/scholars to come to grips with the unevenness of life, while balancing the responsibility of remaining accountable and working in solidarity with community. (Stovall, 2013, pp.572-573)

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand Black students within the Class of 2023 at Cleveland Heights High School motivation for pursuing a post-secondary education through the lens of Critical Race Theory, Community Cultural Wealth and Counter-storytelling. The overall methodological framework for this study combined action research and qualitative Critical Race Methodology (CRM). Action research is defined “as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn” (Mertler, 2016). Creswell (2015) adds that action research is used when “there is a specific educational problem to solve and provides an opportunity for educators to reflect on their own practices”. This qualitative study highlighted where future improvements and adjustments can be made to better support the students at Cleveland Heights.

This study combines Action Research with a qualitative Critical Race Methodology (CRM) as a guiding framework in order to negate the deficit thinking stereotype that U.S society has unjustly placed on Black students in their pursuit of higher education. Using this framework allowed Black students to see their life experiences as a source of community cultural wealth to support their pursuit of post-

secondary education. By investigating their counter-stories, documenting their history, and presenting their stories to the public, students directly challenged the perceptions and stereotypes of the community (Cuevas et al., 2013, p. 39).

Rationale

A qualitative Critical Race Methodology (CRM) study was deemed appropriate for this study because its potential to explore a problem and develop a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). Solórzano & Yosso (2002) define CRM as an approach to research grounded in Critical Race Theory (p. 38). Using CRM acknowledges that we must look to experiences with and responses to racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism in and out of schools as valid, appropriate, and necessary forms of data (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 37). CRM strategically uses multiple methods, often unconventional and creative, to draw on the knowledge of people of color who are traditionally excluded as an official part of the academy. Critical race methodology in education challenges biological and cultural deficit stories through counter-storytelling, oral traditions, historiographies, corridos, poetry, films, actos, or by other means (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 37). The central phenomenon in this study was understanding first- and second- generation students' motivations and persistence on the path to postsecondary education.

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.8). Denzin & Lincoln (2011) adds that qualitative researchers “seek answers to questions that stress how social

experience is created and given meaning” (p. 8). The purpose of this research study was to give a voice and identity to first- and second-generation college students that have been systematically silenced by society. Qualitative methods have historically been used to study society and culture to gain an understanding of the attitudes, beliefs and values of a certain group and has wide ranging implications in educational research. Calzaferri (2011) extends this finding and applied it to rural students to establish that qualitative research gives a “voice to rural students' experiences” (p. 44). This study expanded the usefulness of Calzaferri (2011) study with rural students in qualitative research to include students in urban education. Given the goals of qualitative research and the prior use of these methods in examining college enrollment, the use of qualitative methodologies was appropriate for my exploration of urban high school students and their perceptions of college access (Calzaferri, 2011, p. 44).

Site Selection

For this research, a high school was selected that participates in the federal GEAR UP program in the state of Ohio. The GEAR UP partnership grant focuses on the Cleveland Heights High School Class of 2023. GEAR UP provides six-year or seven years grants to states and partnerships to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The grant follows the Class of 2023 through their first year of college. Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District (CHUH) is classified as a suburban district with low student poverty and with an average student population by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). In the state of Ohio, school districts are assigned one of eight possible classifications (see Table 1). As Table 1 shows, there are 77 school districts within the state of Ohio that are classified as

suburban with low student poverty and average student population. The Ohio Department of Education bases these classifications on 11 measures that were combined into composite measures. ODE (2015) states that these measures were chosen because they each provide an insight into the characteristics that might best describe the makeup of a school district population and/or its community. The 11 measures and descriptions of each are provided in Table 2 below.

Of the 77 school districts determined to be suburban with low student poverty and average student population, they have a minority student population of over 60 percent and the median household income of less than 40 thousand dollars. The school selected, Cleveland Heights High School, is situated in Cuyahoga county, and has the second largest percentage of minority students within the county (82%), student poverty (61%), median income of (\$37,822), and student enrollment (5,907) (Ohio Department of Education, 2015). A high school within Cuyahoga county was selected because of its socio-economic composition, racial composition, and geographic location.

Table 1*2013 Ohio School Districts Typology*

2013 Typology Code	Major Grouping	Full Descriptor	Districts Within Typology	Students Within Typology
1	Rural	Rural - High Student Poverty & Small Student Population	124	170,000
2	Rural	Rural - Average Student Poverty & Very Small Student Population	107	110,000
3	Small Town	Small Town - Low Student Poverty & Small Student Population	111	185,000
4	Small Town	Small Town - High Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size	89	200,000
5	Suburban	Suburban - Low Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size	77	320,000
6	Suburban	Suburban - Very Low Student Poverty & Large Student Population	46	240,000
7	Urban	Urban - High Student Poverty & Average Student Population	47	210,000
8	Urban	Urban - Very High Student Poverty & Very Large Student Population	8	200,000

**Amended January 2015*

Table 2*2013 Ohio School District Typology Measures and Descriptions*

Dimension	Measure(s)	Description
<i>District Size</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Average Daily Membership (ADM) 	ADM measures the number of students served by a school district and the scale of the educational enterprise. These data were transformed by taking log (base 10).
<i>School Poverty</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Percentage of students flagged as economically disadvantaged 	This measures the poverty rate of students actually attending the school district. These data were not transformed.
<i>Socioeconomic Composite</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Median income of the district · Percentage of population with a college degree or more · Percentage of population in administrative/professional occupations 	The three variables combined give a measure of the income, employment, and educational attainment of the residents in the school district. Each measure was standardized and then its z-score averaged to calculate the composite value.
<i>Location Composite</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Population density · Percentage of nonagricultural property value · Population within the district · Incorporation of a city larger than 55,000 (dummy variable) 	The four variables combined give a measure of the population and geographic characteristics of the urban-rural continuum. Each measure was standardized and then its z-score averaged to calculate the composite value. Population density was capped at 5,000 people per square mile to negate the effect of outliers. The higher the value, the more “urban” the district.
<i>Race & Ethnicity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Percentage of African American, Hispanic, Native-American, Pacific Islander or Multiracial students enrolled in the school district 	This is a measure of the racial/ethnic diversity of the student population in the district. These data are transformed by multiplying each value by 100 and taking log (base 10).
<i>Tax Capacity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Per-pupil amount of commercial, industrial, mining, tangible and public utility property value 	This is a measure of a community's ability to generate revenue for schools separate from its residential or agricultural tax base. These data were transformed by taking log (base 10).

Participants

Adolescents are often the subjects of educational research, yet their voices are rarely heard directly (Schelbe et al., 2015, p. 505). The intent of this study was to work with first- and second-generation students participating in the GEAR UP program to explore their perceptions and beliefs about pursuing post-secondary education. Participants for this study were selected using a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling. The premise behind purposeful sampling is that the researcher wants to understand the individual's experiences about a phenomenon or an issue in more depth (Ivankova, 2015). Purposeful sampling also involves intentionally selecting a small number of "information rich" participants (Ivankova, 2015) The participants in this study are considered information rich as they have identified themselves as planning to pursue a post-secondary education after graduation. Convenience sampling is defined by Ivankova (2015) as "selecting individuals who are available and are willing to participate in the study" (p. 184). Due to the climate of the school (i.e. level of maturity, lack of knowledge of research studies) and daily online attendance rates being inconsistent, convenience sampling was determined to be the best fit for this study.

For this study, selected students met the following criteria: within the cohort 2023, first- and/or second-generation college students, those that identify as Black or African American. The rationale for selecting first-generation college students for this study is to get a better understanding of how to start to close the achievement gap for this large often ignored minority group. The reasoning for including second-generation college students for this study is to understand if there are any differences in motivation

between them and first-generation and if they still face similar challenges. Benton (2017) found that there is “limited information about the specific educational experiences, influences, and outcomes of second-generation African-American college students” (para. Abstract) and “little is known about the knowledge and techniques employed by African-American students who are at least second-generation college attendees to successfully navigate the path to college and degree attainment” (p. 10).

At the time of the study, the participants just completed their freshman year of high school and are now 10th graders. There was a total of 20 students that signed up to participate in the summer college and career bootcamp held virtually. These students were a mixture of first- and second-generation college students. All the students that signed-up identified as Black, despite the program being advertised to the entire cohort of 2023. Of the 20 students that participate in the bootcamp, six signed-up to participate in the research study. An informed parental and student consent forms were sent home. (See Appendix F for Informed Consent.)

Intervention and Data Collection

In order to gain a better understanding of this student population perception and/or beliefs about pursuing post-secondary education, students participated in a five-week online College and Career Readiness summer program that ran from July 6, 2020 through August 7, 2020.

1. Journal writing prompt 1 focused on understanding students’ motivation for pursuing postsecondary education and their career goals and aspiration.

2. During Week 3 of the program, students completed Journal writing prompt 2, which focused on having students think about the potential barriers they could face on their post-secondary journey and support systems they may use to help overcome these barriers.

3. During the final week of the program, students completed Journal writing prompt 3. Journal writing prompt 3 sought to have students reflect on their experience in the summer program and to reflect on their motivations for pursuing a post-secondary education. See Appendix D for all three Journal writing prompts. Analyzing the data collected through a CRT lens will allow the researcher to examine the extent to which the participants lived experiences guides or impedes their postsecondary journey.

In addition to journal writing, participants engaged in a counter-narrative interview. The purpose of this counter-narrative interview was to help students understand how a parent/guardian post-secondary journey was impacted and/or shaped by family background, systematic oppression in schools, and support systems. activity is to understand the student perspective. The voices of many Black youth especially in Cleveland, Ohio often go unheard or are undervalued. Counter-storytelling is a tool that CRT scholars employ to contradict racist characterizations of social life and expose race neutral discourse, revealing how white privilege operates to reinforce and support unequal racial relations in society (Manglitz et al., 2006, para.4). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) states that “a story becomes a counter-story when it begins to incorporate the five elements of critical race theory” (p. 39). Within a framework of CRT these “counter-

narratives” have emerged as powerful data sources to present the voices of marginalized communities (Miller et al., 2020, p. 270). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) explains that “counter-storytelling is different from fictional storytelling. We are not developing imaginary characters that engage in fictional scenarios. Instead, the “composite” characters we develop are grounded in real-life experiences and actual empirical data and are contextualized in social situations that are also grounded in real life, not fiction” (p. 36). According to Solórzano & Yosso (2002) counter-stories serve at least four functions:

1. They can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice;
2. They can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems;
3. They can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position; and
4. They can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone.

Often, educational marginalization is justified through research that decenters and even dismisses communities of color—through majoritarian storytelling. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 36). The goal of this study was to understand how the lived experiences of students may have impacted their postsecondary decisions by giving them a platform to narrate their own story.

Students created their counter-narrative stories by interviewing a parent/guardian or trusted adult about their post-secondary journey (Appendix C). The structure of the counter-narrative interviews was adapted from study conducted by Cuevas et al. (2013), in which he utilized counter-storytelling to help Latino students understand how their family's immigration into the U.S. has impacted their educational journal. Questions were also pulled from a study conducted by Espino and Lee (2008), in which they used counter-narratives as an analysis tool to place a spotlight on the Mexican American life stories on their journey to a doctorate degree. The counter-narrative interview template was modified for this study and is divided into three parts: (1) The Beginning/Childhood life, (2) College Journey, (3) Reflection and (4) Advice. After participants have completed the counter-narrative interview, they participated an interview to reflect on the information they gathered, which allowed the researcher to ask further in-depth questions on how the students family history has shaped their experience in education. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) further explains that:

When the ideology of racism is examined and racist injuries are named, victims of racism can find their voice. Furthermore, those injured by racism and other forms of oppression discover they are not alone in their marginality. They become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed, and learning to make the arguments to defend themselves (p. 27).

The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. The interviews were held via Zoom and was audio and video recorded. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Document Analysis

Students that participated in the summer program were asked to complete a pre- and post-college interest survey and submit daily assignments based on their postsecondary journey. These materials helped to create the composite characters for each of the study participants and also served to provide context to the culture, climate, and priorities of the school (Speaks, 2018, p. 50). Miller et al. (2020) points out “counter-narrative can affect change in the educational system, but only if the sharing and analysis of counter-narrative form the basis for transformative action, moving beyond counter-narrative as data and toward counter-narrative as praxis” (p. 284). The next section will take a deep dive into how the data was analyzed to shed light on the participants lived experiences through a CRT lens.

Data Analysis

Critical race methodology in education recognizes that multiple layers of oppression and discrimination are met with multiple forms of resistance (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). As an action research study, the analysis and interpretation processes are conducted in a way to enhance the understanding of a local problem in order to work towards improving practice in the short and long-term. According to Creswell (2015) an action researcher follows this phase for analysis and interpretation:

- The analysis process includes:
 - Identifying themes
 - Coding surveys

- Interviews
- Questionnaires
- Asking key questions
- Doing an organizational review
- Engaging in concept mapping
- Analyzing antecedents and consequences
- Displaying findings
- Interpretation involves
 - Extending the analysis by raising questions
 - Connecting findings to personal experiences
 - Seeking the advice of critical friends
 - Contextualizing the findings in literature and theory

The primary focus of data collection was qualitative in the form of semi-structured counter-narrative interviews. This data was be supplemented with three journal writing prompts. The counter-narrative interviews were conducted via Zoom video conferencing platform. Critical counter-narrative is a methodology for critically analyzing the racialized social reality in the education system and society by narrating the authentic lived experiences of people of color, searching for and acting upon emancipatory solutions, and transforming the educational system in order to provide equitable education for people of color (Miller et al., 2020, p. 275).

The data collected went through a multi-phase coding cycle. Coding allowed the researcher to attach labels or codes to the data. Coding distills data, sorts them, and gives the researcher an analytic handle for making comparisons with other segments of data

(Charmaz, 2014). Specifically, narrative coding was utilized, as it was appropriate for exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences (Loza, 2015, p. 64). The participants were able to construct their own narratives and offer counter-narratives that challenged societal stereotypes and deficit thinking about Black students and their post-secondary aspirations. The resulting data offers rich, thick descriptions of the participants lived experience beyond what is typically displayed through standard in-depth interviews. As the participants stories evolved during the analysis, codes were modified or removed from the study as needed. Saldana (2013) adds that “the process of narrative inquiry is not a solitary research act but a collaborative venture between the researcher and participants” (p. 157). Saldana (2013) cites Gubrium and Holstein (2009) who “advise that researchers analyzing narrative texts should consider not just the psychological, but the sociological contexts of stories collected from fieldwork: “stories operate *within* society as much as they are about society” (p. 158).

The coding of this data was analyzed through a Critical Race Theory lens and influenced by research questions. A CRT framework challenges dominant ideology that supports deficit theorizing (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) therefore I expected to find themes associated with the prevalence of deficit thinking within the school system in regard to postsecondary planning and the support systems in place. As Speaks (2018) highlights in her study on High School Black male “A CRT analysis interrogates the unquestioned use of a White, male majority experience as use for a standard by which people of color are measured (Iverson, 2007); consequently, I was attentive to themes connected to the implications of dominant culture on the participants’ lives” (p. 52). Analyzing the data through a CRT lens allowed me to explore ways in which postsecondary programming

has (or has not) assisted students in formulating a postsecondary plan. The interview questions were structured in effort to generate meaningful responses from the participants. In order to stimulate dialogue around the tenets of a Critical Race Theory lens, interview questions reflected the challenge of dominant ideology and the centrality of experiential knowledge tenets of CRT. The objective of the of the semi-structured interviews, were to trigger thoughts and candid responses that contributed to countering the dominant narrative and deficit thinking around students of color lived experiences on their post-secondary journey.

Quality of an Action Research Study

The use of action research is necessary when a specific local educational problem is trying to be solved. The “problem” in this study is increasing postsecondary enrollment and ultimately college graduation for students of color by giving them a platform to narrate their lived experiences. There are six key elements to evaluating the quality of an action research study. This research study meets the criteria to be classified as a high-quality study. The purpose of this study was to understand Black students’ motivations for pursuing a postsecondary education from the student perspective. This perspective will allow the GEAR UP program, CHHS school leadership, and guidance team to develop programing designed to better prepare students of color and ultimately all students for postsecondary enrollment. Table 7 below provides a detailed description based on indictors or higher and lower quality of each key element.

Table 7

Evaluating the Quality of an Action Research Study

Evaluating the Quality of an Action Research Study		
Quality Criteria	Indicators of Higher Quality	Indicators of Lower Quality
The Key Elements		
The action researcher focuses on a practical problem or issue in the community.	The researcher clearly identified the problem or issue leading to a need for the study.	The researcher does not articulate the issue or problem, leading the reader to wonder why the study was undertaken.
The action research study includes multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data.	The researcher gathers both quantitative and qualitative data and thus includes multiple sources of information in studying the problem or issue.	The researcher gathers only quantitative data or only collects qualitative data and does not use the full potential of responses that both quantitative and qualitative data will provide.
The researcher engages in collaboration with the participants in the study.	The researcher involves the participants in identifying the problem, collecting the data, and advancing the plan for action.	The researcher is the sole problem solver in the study and does not involve the stakeholders or community members in the project.
In the end, the action research report advances a plan for action to address the problem or community need.	The researcher advances at the end of the study a distinct plan of action for addressing the problem or the issue.	The researcher does not present a plan for action at the end of the study but does provide more general recommendations for change.
The action researcher grows professionally as a result of conducting the study.	The researcher's presence is known in the study and reflects on his or her own understanding of the problem or issue and how he or she has grown to understand this problem and issue over time during the study.	The researcher's presence is largely absent in the study, and we do not know how he or she viewed the problem or issue or how it might have impacted his or her life.
The action researcher reports the research in a way acceptable to stakeholders and community audiences.	The researcher clearly presents the action research report in a way that is acceptable to practical stakeholders, such as a one-page overview with bulleted points and general summaries.	The researcher presents the study in a formal research report, complete with detailed methods that may not be easily understood by important stakeholders involved in the study.

Source: Creswell (2015)

Qualitative Trustworthiness

According to Ivankova (2015), there are four criteria used to assess the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study. The first criteria is *credibility* which refers to the extent to which the study findings are believable and promote confidence in their truth. Ivankova (2015) adds that “one of the most important factors in establishing credibility because it addresses the question, how congruent are the findings with reality”. This study focused on allowing the participants to narrate their own stories and verbatim quotes were used to illustrate their lived experiences. The second criteria is *transferability* which refers to the extent to which the study findings are applicable to

other contexts. The goal of action research is to solve or work towards a solution to a local educational problem. While transferability was not a focus of this study, the knowledge acquired can be utilized in similar contexts with adjustments based on the environment. The third criteria is *dependability* which refers to the extent to which are consistent and could be repeated and it assesses the methodological rigor of the study and the adherence to a systematic research process in how the data were collected and analyzed (Ivankova, 2015). An electronic database including notes, documents, or other relevant information was used to ensure dependability of the study (Speaks, 2018, p. 55). In addition, an audio transcription service was used to correctly transcribe participant interviews. The fourth criteria is *confirmability* which refers to the extent to which the study findings are shaped by participants' views and not a researcher's bias, helps assess the neutrality and objectivity of the collected data, and it questions how the research findings are supported by the data (Ivankova, 2015). Employing a CRT methodology and framework allowed me to contextualize the student-of-color experiences in the past, present, and future by strategically using multiple methods, often unconventional and creative, to draw on the knowledge of people of color who are traditionally excluded as an official part of the academy (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 37).

Limitations

As mentioned above there are several strengths and benefits to this research design, however with all research there are limitations. Due to Covid-19 and the restrictions placed on in-person programming; a major limitation to this study is having to conduct this study through virtual platforms. Students in Ohio have been learning and adapting to a virtual learning environment since March 2020; however, as Gabrielle Hewitt (2020)

points out “it’s nearly impossible to create the in-person connection teachers and students are wholly accustomed”. As Calzaferri (2011) found in her study, the greatest limitation to this research is generalizability to the population outside of those who participated in the study. Participants for this study were selected from one high school out of hundreds in Cuyahoga county and only included lower socioeconomic first- and second-generation college students. Calzaferri (2011) points out that due to the small sample size and the demographics of the participants, some might question the transferability of the research findings to other students in similar school districts. However, as Ivankova (2015) clarifies “in action research, any generalizations are contextual because action research findings can be generalizable or transferable only within specific research situations and specific professional contexts”. She also adds that “the outcomes of an action research study may be applicable to other settings, if enough detail is provided for the consumers of research to identify within the study context”. Despite these limitations, the results of this study may not be applicable nationwide, but they will be applicable to the Cleveland Heights University Heights (CHUH) school district as a whole and also to some of the surrounding inner-ring suburban school districts.

Researchers Subjectivity

I am currently employed by College Now Greater Cleveland, as a College and Career Readiness Advisor for the GEAR UP Program. College Now is a non-profit organization that has served Northeast Ohio counties for the past 50 years. The mission for College Now is to increase postsecondary educational attainment through college and career access advising, financial aid counseling, and scholarship and retention services (College Now Greater Cleveland, 2016). I have the pleasure of serving at Cleveland

Heights High School (Heights). CHUH has acknowledged the importance of postsecondary advising and also realizes the time constraints placed on their school counseling staff. My role within the high school is to provide pre-college advising for students and parents, conduct in-classroom workshops, and serve as an informational resource for the school counselor. As the GEAR UP Advisor, when I meet with students and families, we complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), discuss possible career options, complete college applications, search for local and national scholarships, provide social-emotional support and go over any question's families may have about the college process in general.

Research indicates that the disconnection between high school and college is in the effectiveness of pre-college advising or lack of advising a student is receiving while in high school (Akunvabey, 2018; Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004; Mitchell, 2015; Nagaoka, Roderick, & Coca, 2008). My problem of practice is centered on helping students at Heights discover and/or realize what their motivations are for pursuing a postsecondary education and tackling the roadblocks they may encounter. My services as the GEAR UP Advisor allows the school counselor to focus on their other job duties and to have more intentional interactions with students. As the GEAR UP Advisor, I am able to build a relationship with my students and help them to discover and develop their plans for life after high school.

Summary of Methodology

A qualitative approach was utilized as I conducted research through a Critical Race Theory lens to understand motivations for pursuing a postsecondary education. I

conducted an action research study at Cleveland Heights High School by interviewing Black students in the cohort 2023 who practiced in the GEAR UP virtual summer college and career readiness. In addition to interviews, observations, document analysis, and a parental counter-narrative interviews took place. Multiple rounds of narrative coding were utilized to determine the thematic trends. The research focused on understanding how the students lived experiences have impacted their postsecondary journey through a Critical Race Theory lens. This study sought to offer a glimpse into the perspectives of Black students who take an active role in their postsecondary journey. I am hopeful that this research can bring volume to the voices of students who are often overlooked and undervalued (Speaks, 2018, p. 58) and can lead to change in the way we college advise students of color.

CHAPTER 4

Going to school is not the same as going shopping. Parents should not be burdened with locating a suitable school for their child. They should be able to take their child to the neighborhood public school as a matter of course and expect that it has well-educated teachers and a sound educational program.

—Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The overwhelming majority of published scholarship on urban high schools in the United States focuses on problems of inadequacy, instability, underperformance, and violence (Harper, 2015, p. 139). The purpose of this study was to understand Black students within the Class of 2023 at Cleveland Heights High School motivations for pursuing a post-secondary education through the lens of Critical Race Theory, Community Cultural Wealth and Counter-storytelling. The participants lived experiences as freshman high school students at CHHS, post-secondary goals, perspectives, and opinions were examined to negate the deficit thinking stereotype that U.S society has unjustly placed on Black students in their pursuit of higher education. Critical Race Theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study, as it provides researchers an opportunity to study Black students' motivation for pursuing a postsecondary education from their own perspective. The use of this theory thus avoids the traditional 'deficit' approach, which views "BME (Black Minority and Ethnic) students' lower attainment as a consequence of their failure to adjust or adapt, or a lack of ability" (Bunce et al., 2019, p. 3). The importance of the narrative, counter-narrative, and naming of one's own reality in education are essential precepts of Critical Race Theory (Milner, 2007; Speaks, 2018).

The critical race methodology served as a means to allow Black students to see their life experiences as a source of community cultural wealth to support their pursuit of post-secondary education. An assets-based approach was used to analyze the data as opposed to deficit-based approach (Speaks, 2018, p. 59).

The study was conducted virtually during the summer of 2020 with raising tenth grade students at Cleveland Heights High School and consisted of six participants. Table 8 summarizes participant engagement levels with the study. Two of the students participated in a semi-structured interview and completed three journal entries. The participants in the study were chosen because they are members of the Class of 2023, participate in Gear Up 2 New Heights, and self-identify as Black. Black students were chosen for this study as they represent 70.9 percent of the student body and a college enrollment rate around 46 percent.

Table 8

Summary of Participant Engagement

Participant	Consent forms submitted/ Participated in Summer Program	No. of weeks participated in Summer Program	No. of semi-structured interviews completed	No. of journal writing prompts completed	Completed Counter-Narrative Interview
Ashley	Yes	3	0	0	0
Carter	Yes	5	2	3	1
Ariana	Yes	4	1	3	0
Devin	Yes	2	1	0	0
Lola	Yes	2	0	0	0
Bryan	Yes	3	0	0	0

To provide a full perspective of the participants in this study, the next section of this chapter will provide profiles for each participant that include a brief introduction to the participants' general family background, grade point average, and future postsecondary plans. Grade point average (GPA) is being included as a factor because it is a leading symbol of college readiness. According to College Now Greater Cleveland, a college ready student is someone that has a minimum of 2.5 GPA and has scored at least an 18 on the ACT and/or 940 on the SAT. The participants are in the 10th grade; therefore, ACT and SAT data is not available for this cohort. Following the participant profiles, overarching themes that connect to the CRT, Cultural Wealth Model, and counter-narratives that were found throughout the study will be highlighted and expanded upon.

Participant profiles may reference a course called activities called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and extra-curricular activity called the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN). The AVID program has been proven to increase college readiness, preparedness, and retention when compared to the national averages. AVID teachers use research-based best practices. AVID was established 30 years ago and more than 800,000 students in 44 states use the curriculum. The mission of MSAN is to understand and change school practices and structures that keep racial achievement gaps in place. Our goal is to ensure racial differences in achievement are eliminated while improving the achievement of all students. These programs have been established at CHHS for many years and have helped and encouraged hundreds of students to pursue their postsecondary goals.

Participant Profiles

Carter

Carter is the daughter of a lawyer and childcare examiner and will be a second-generation college student. She lives at home with her parents and two siblings, one of which is a freshman in college. She is outspoken and determined to make a difference. Carter is a member of the Free Speech Club. Carter's mother requested that she be placed in the AVID program in sixth grade and has been an active and involved member ever since. Both of Carter's sisters were also participants in the AVID program. Carter has been an active member of GEAR UP since the program's implementation during her seventh-grade year. Carter has participated in over 79 college and career workshops and exposure trips within the last three years. She has a cumulative grade point average of 3.07 at the time of data collection. Carter has been wanting to participate in honors and advanced placement courses but has been discouraged along the way by teachers and guidance counselors. Carter feels that she is being blocked from more rigorous coursework because she is Black, and no one believes she can do it. Carter talks about how her GPA does not represent who she is as a student, but she is bored in her regular classes and admits that her attitude has to change. She has a firm belief and value in trust and respect and once that is broken, she distance herself mentally. She displays a hard outer shell but has a very kind heart. The AVID and GEAR UP programs have helped to develop next-level thinking skills within Carter, which has aided her in developing a blueprint for her life not only for postsecondary but post-college graduation as well. Carter plans to attend college and major in psychology with plans to go onto graduate school. She cannot wait to get out of Cleveland and attend an out of state university. Post-

college graduation she does not plan to return to Ohio but wants to build a new life and identity in a new city. Her goal in life is to bring a smile to the people she will eventually work with and to provide financial security for herself.

Ariana

Ariana resides with her grandmother, aunts, and brothers. Her mother passed away a couple of years ago. Ariana spends lots of time with her father. Ariana's dad has volunteered and chaperoned for several GEAR UP summer program outings. He is a very influential force in her life, and she speaks to how she just wants to make him proud. Ariana's oldest brother Her cumulative grade point average is 2.57 at the time of data collection. This is Ariana's third summer participating in the GEAR UP 2 New Heights summer enrichment program. Ariana will be a first-generation college student and is motivated to change her family story. Outside of the GEAR UP program Ariana does not receive any direct college and/or career advising. Ariana's goals are driven by extrinsic motivation. She is determined and focused to prove her "hater's" wrong and to show the world she is capable of anything. Ariana is a caregiver by nature and has been a future plan of becoming a surgeon. She plans to attend a four-year institution and medical school within the state of Ohio. Ultimately, Ariana plans to reside in Cleveland in order to provide support for her family.

Ashley

Ashley comes from a two-family home that strongly values education and being active within the school community. Ashley will be a second-generation college student, both of her parents attended and graduated from a four-year university. Ashley takes all honors courses, as a freshman took Algebra 2, is an Advancement Via Individual

Determination (AVID) student, and a member of Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN). Her cumulative grade point average at the time of data collection is a 3.27. Ashley finished her freshman year on track to graduate earning seven credits. She plans to attend a Division I four-year university.

Devin

Devin comes from a single parent home and where she lives with her two siblings. Devin will be a second-generation college student. Devin's mom has a great deal of influence in her educational motivation and is active in her future postsecondary plans. Her cumulative grade point average is 3.14 at the time of data collection. Devin plans on attending Kent State University and major in Fashion Design.

Lola

Lola lives with both her parents. She is the oldest of her siblings and has strong family obligations. Lola is a member of the marching band. This is her third summer participating in the GEAR UP 2 New Heights summer enrichment program. Her cumulative grade point average is 1.90 at the time of data collection. Lola struggles academically however is motivated to graduate high school. Lola will be a second-generation college student. She has future plans of attending a two-year college and pursuing a career in Culinary Arts.

Bryan

Bryan resides with his father. He is well mannered and goal oriented. Bryan is a member of MSAN, a student within the AVID program, and works a part-time job. Bryan is enrolled in all honors courses and was placed in Algebra 2 as a freshman. His cumulative grade point average is 2.94 at the time of data collection. Bryan will be a

second-generation college student and plans to work in the financial industry upon college graduation.

Table 5 displays a summary of the participant profiles at the time of data collection. This information provides a picture of each students’ academic performance, is meant to give perspective on the background of their home life, and how the students postsecondary education plans have been shaped so far.

Table 5

Participant Profiles

Participant	Cumulative Grade Point Average	Home Environment	First - or Second-Generation	No. of honors courses during Freshman year	Postsecondary Plans
Ashley	3.27	Two-Parent	Second Gen	3	4-year college D1
Carter	3.07	Two-Parent	Second Gen	0	4-year & grad school
Ariana	2.57	Guardian	First Gen	0	4-year & medical school
Devin	3.14	Single-Parent	Second Gen	0	4-year
Lola	1.90	Two-Parent	Second Gen	0	2-year
Bryan	2.94	Single-Parent	Second Gen	2	4-year

Themes

Maybe stories are just data with a soul

—Brené Brown, TEDx

The stories of Ariana and Carter were analyzed using transcription, narrative coding, and thematic inquiry. These two participants were the only two to complete the individual interviews and the three journal writing prompts. Carter was the only

participant to complete the counter-narrative interview. Narrative Coding incorporates literary terms as codes to discover the structural properties of participants' stories (Saldana, 2013, p. 145). I expected to observe themes around familial influence, the culture of school, the experiences offered through the school, and relationships cultivated through the school (Speaks, 2018, p. 67). Once the narrative codes were created, the codes were then analyzed through the lens of the studies focus on two of the five tenets of CRT: the *challenge of dominant ideology* and *centrality of experiential knowledge* and the resistant capital element of the community cultural wealth model. This will allow Black students to see their life experiences as an invaluable resource to support their pursuit of post-secondary education. By investigating their counter-stories, documenting their history, and presenting their stories to the public, students will directly challenge the perceptions and stereotypes of the community (Cuevas et al., 2013, p. 39). Speaks (2018) adds that by "Employing a CRT analysis also helped to explore ways in which culturally relevant programming has contributed to the success of participants" (p. 68).

Aligning the narrative codes identified through interviews, journal writing prompts, document analysis with the community cultural wealth model and the CRT framework, four major themes emerged. When analyzing the data an assts-based approach was used to understand the emerging themes instead of a deficit-based approach. Thought Leadership (2021) explains that "an asset-based approach focused on strengths. It views diversity in thought, culture, and traits as positive assets". The following table summarizes the themes and sub-themes that emerged and provides verbatim participant examples. The themes and sub-themes that are displayed in the table sought to answer the guiding research questions of this study; which is, what motivates

Black students to pursue a postsecondary education and how can Black students’ voices and experiences inform a college and career program designed to increase their preparation and access to higher education. By conducting in-depth individual interviews and analyzing summer program materials of the students within the class of 2023 at Cleveland Heights High School, the participant’s views are evident. The themes created allows for adequate acknowledgement of participant voices 1) Aspirational Goals; 2) their School Experience; 3) Support System; and 4) Personal Beliefs and Perceptions.

Table 6

Summary Table of Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme	Example Response
Aspirational Goals	1a. Helping others 1b. Resiliency 1c. I did that 1d. Self-determination	Failure looks like: Not getting into the college that I'm working hard for. You know. Not scoring as high as the people that have scored the highest, not being in the top 20 or whatever.
School Experiences	2a. Teachers 2b. AVID 2c. Personal Connections 2d. Trust 2e. Opportunities 2f. Belief that they can succeed 2g. Never available 2h. Selective information sharing	And I think sometimes, I think the good teachers outweigh the bad teachers, but it doesn't make it right that there are still teachers out there that are not good.
Support System	3a. AVID teachers 3b. GEAR UP Advisor 3c. Family	The AVID teachers, and probably just you. Nobody else cares. Um, when I tried to start a conversation with y'all, y'all actually seemed interested and like y'all cared and weren't tryna give me like a two-word answer like everybody else.
Personal Beliefs and Perceptions	4a. Prove it to myself 4b. Financial security 4c. Good support system 4d. Prepared to make postsecondary decision	I have to go to college and make good connections so I can give myself the life I want. Like connections with teachers and, um, other people. Just so that I can get a position nice enough to again achieve the lifestyle I want to be going.

In expressing their lived experiences as it relates to their college going journey, Ariana and Carter’s narratives revealed the need for cultivating and sustaining a culture of trust and respect with teachers, administrators, and community partners; building and developing students intrinsic and extrinsic motivations; and developing strong support

networks at home and school. Their narratives also highlighted the positive experiences that have shaped their postsecondary journey, the next section will provide an in-depth look into how Ariana and Carter's lived experiences led to the creation of the themes for this study.

Aspirational Goals

From critical race theory perspectives, knowledge can and should be generated through the narratives and counter-narratives that emerge from and with people of color (Milner, 2007, p.391). One of the six forms of cultural community capital is aspirational capital. Yosso (2005) defines aspirational capital as the "ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers". Interview questions yielded responses seeking to determine participants motivations and goals for pursuing a postsecondary education. When asked what your postsecondary goal is, both participants quickly responded, "going to college"! While all six study participants confirmed that attending college is their goal, Ariana and Carter identified the need to helping others, proving to themselves they can succeed in college, and making their families proud as additional motivations for pursuing higher education.

Ariana will be the first in her family to attend college. When asked "What you see yourself doing after you graduate from Heights" Ariana's response was "I want to be the first to go to a full 4-year college and I want to prove to my family to never doubt me and that I could do it". Ariana has an understanding that she is more than the labels placed upon her. Ariana expressed these thoughts with the following statement "My career goals are to be able to go to school for four years of undergraduate study, four years of medical school leading to a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) degree, and three to eight years of surgical

residency at a hospital. The steps I need to take to complete my goals are to Pass high school with As and Bs, find a good college with a good medical program and study hard”.

Carter is a second-generation college student and her reasoning for attending college was slightly different. Carter’s response to the question was “I have to go to college and make good connections so I can give myself the life I want”. Carter’s feeling of “needing” to go to college in order to have a better life, is an example of Black students following the path of normalized societal expectations. As Milner (2007) points out “from a critical race theory perspective, race and racism are so ingrained in the fabric (Ladson-Billings, 1998) of society that they become normalized” (p. 390). Many Black students that I have worked have expressed the need to “prove” someone wrong as their source of motivation when planning for the future and uses that as a way to fight back against societal deficit mindset and countering the master narrative. The master narratives about urban students and schools are replete with notions of low academic achievement, poverty, and violence (Dunn et al., 2018, p. 6). As an active member of the Free Speech Club at CHHS, Carter has no filter on expressing how she feels about anything. Carter negates the deficit thinking stereotype of urban students being low academic achievers and being content with mediocrity. Carter states that “Not getting into the college that I’m working hard for. You know. Not scoring as high as the people that have scored the highest, not being in the top 20 or whatever”. For Carter, being anything less than top 20 is unacceptable and in her mind creates a sense of mediocrity. Carter is a second-generation college student, and the master narrative would have you believe that her postsecondary aspirations are solely due to having prior family background of

postsecondary success. Carter values her families experience but her motivations her purely intrinsic for pursuing a postsecondary education. Carter is motivated and focused on making sure she can provide and maintain herself with the lifestyle she believes she deserves.

Ariana and Carter’s students stated that another goal was to help the unheard. Ariana emotionally expressed “Because I'm gonna help people. Like, I'm gonna be like the surgeons helping people or doctors caring for people and stuff like that. I just wanna see someone smile, like yep, I did that. Like, I put that smile on their face, like. You know?”. Carter echoed this sentiment with her response “I just really want to help people who are unheard. And most of the time those people are people that have those mental illnesses or diseases or maybe disabilities”.

CRT helps us understand that making informed decisions to improve the human condition is “inherent to this process is cultivating the community's capacity to utilize their own skills and expertise to address issues and concerns that threaten their existence” (Stovall, 2013). Ariana and Carter at the young age of 15 years old, have realized that their purpose in life is to serve and give back to the community that has historically oppressed and overlooked them. This can be partly attributed to the school climate promoting being a citizen and stressing postsecondary enrollment. CHHS has an academic model that all students have access to a rigorous, engaging curriculum that will prepare them for college and career and students to join at least one after school activity to broaden their networks, learn leadership skills and experience the joy of contributing to a valued mission.

As mentioned earlier the college enrollment rate for CHUH cohort 2018-2019 is about 46 percent. Of that 46 percent, college enrollment rate for White students were 68 percent and for Black students it was 41 percent. Beachum (2018) writes that:

Similarly, the notion of racism as permanent also explains why many educators have low expectations for students of color. This component of CRT supports the notion that there can be a lingering bias against students of color. Again, because of how we are all socialized in U.S. society, educators can internalize negative stereotypes, images, and perceptions of people of color (Harro, 2000; Tatum, 1997). This can result in having low expectations for these students as well as viewing them through a deficit lens (p. 10).

Ariana and Carter have expressed their own reasoning for pursuing a postsecondary and how their lived experiences have contributed to their postsecondary plans. The next section will place a spotlight on the students' experience in school and how influential this relationship has been on their postsecondary outlook.

School Experience

In current educational research and practice, marginalized students are often blamed for their poor educational outcomes by well-meaning educators who lack the efficacy to help them (Kennedy and Soutullo, 2018, p. 12). CRT challenges the master narrative on the inability of students of color to excel in academic settings (Stovall, 2013). There are six characteristics of deficit thinking (Kennedy & Soutullo, 2018) that plagues our educational system:

1. **Victim-Blaming:** Assets “person-centered” reasons for school failure; students’ personal characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, socioeconomic

status, language of origin) are assumed to be the basis for the student's poor school performance

2. **Oppression:** Provides evidence that those who are doing the victim blaming (i.e., educators) will have undue power and authority over those who are blamed (i.e., at-risk students), which can result in an oppressive power hierarchy
3. **Pseudoscience:** Occurs when deficit-oriented views are validated through researchers' and educators' inappropriate use of supposedly supporting evidence or data, which have been obtained or interpreted through a presumed deficit-oriented model
4. **Temporal Changes:** Ascribes students' failure to a set of accumulated deficits that are environmental or cultural in nature and that change depending on the current discourse around inferiority (e.g., genetics, family structure, culture, class)
5. **Educability:** Finds deficits in the ability of students to benefit from interventions; deficits are used to predict inadequate progress and as justification for the prescription of limiting remediation
6. **Heterodoxy:** Challenges the presumed orthodoxy of deficit thinking and its entrenchment in society and education by revealing places in which deficit thinking can be challenged and orthodoxy can be dismantled

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) add that "many teacher education programs draw on majoritarian stories to explain educational inequity through a cultural deficit model and thereby pass on beliefs that students of color are culturally deprived (Kretovics & Nussel,

1994; Persell, 1977)” (p. 31). As a former student, current parent, and advisor within CHHS, I have observed administrators, counselors, and teachers that are dedicated and focused on student success for every student and instrumental in dismantling the societal barriers for their minority students. This is evident in the amount of academically challenging courses and support systems set in place for students. CHHS offers nearly 20 advanced placement (AP) courses, students can earn college credit while in high school, students that are struggling academically have the option to participate in alternative school which allows them to work at their own pace, and a team of guidance counselors and social workers who provide academic, social, and college going support for students. The high school graduation rate throughout the last five years at CHHS has been around 89 percent, which shows that the school is preparing students enough to graduate. The district is continuing to experience extremely low college enrollment rates for their graduates despite their efforts to push a college going culture. Ariana and Carter both had strong positive and negative feelings when expressing their school experience. Both participants stated that trust has been a major factor in their school experience. In the dialogue section, I am the researcher-interviewer referred to as Ms. Carmen, this is how students address me during the summer programs to provide a more relaxed environment. Ariana tells the following story about one of her Black teachers and how she has influenced and shown her that she could be successful:

Ms. Carmen: Were there any classes or teachers that had an influence on you or impacted you whether it was good or bad?

Ariana: Um, probably say, Miss Johnson (*teacher name has been changed for privacy*).

Ms. Carmen: Okay, how did she influence you?

Ariana: Um, because, like, she be like, telling us about how she was like struggling in her, um, high-school days. Because like, she always say she was the fat kid out of the um... class. And so like, that just... influenced me because it was like, I could be that kid. But just not fat.

For Ariana, building and sustaining respect and trust is a key value for her. The story Ariana shares about her teacher in that moment allowed her to see herself in a different light and to believe that she could do anything. Miller et al., (2020) cites Fairbanks (1996), who “argued that by giving voice to previously silenced groups, and by describing the diversity of their experiences, readers gain insight into their own practices, experiences, and biases” (p. 273). Miller et al., quotes shows the need for not only our students to find value in their lived experiences but for Black teachers to also be vulnerable enough to share a piece of themselves and how their experiences have shaped their paths. There was a pause in the interview and Ariana again stated that “I could be that kid”. Carter discussed how the impact of one teacher changed her view of world history and ultimately Black history in America:

Ms. Carmen: Were there any classes or teachers that had an influence on you or impacted you whether it was good or bad?

Carter: Um. Probably. I gotta think. Probably, um, world history, just learning about, um, all this like, just learning about history that is like it didn't happen that long ago, but the history books made it look like it did.

Ms. Carmen: Interesting.

Carter: She called it the whitewashing of history books. That's what she said.

Ms. Carmen: So, what did you think about learning that history has been whitewashed?

Carter: I think, um, it's just horrible, it's just like, and then the thing that got like the whole class kinda was like "Wow", was when we learned about Martin Luther King and all that stuff. And they'd show us pictures and the pictures were in black and white. But those pictures could have been in color, 'cause they weren't that long ago, and they could've come in color. But they wanted us to think it was so long ago and we've progressed so much when we really haven't.

Ariana and Carter both shared influential experiences that they had with teachers which allowed them to self-reflect and understand the world from a different vantage point. They learned that there is value in asking questions and challenging dominant storylines. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) pointed out that counter stories help readers critique unfair practices and pinpoint transformative possibilities from the standpoint of traditionally silenced voices (Miller et al., 2020, p. 273). Ariana and Carter's overarching goal is to provide a voice for the unheard and help their communities and this can be attributed to their lived experiences within CHUH.

Cleveland Heights High School is home to approximately 1700 students from various racial, social-economic, and familial postsecondary backgrounds. The high school is about the size of a small private liberal arts college. Being a student in a large school environment can have its challenges. The participants both expressed feelings of potentially being left behind. Carter expressed "It's just a lot of people in, like, a little bit of space. And just things move very fast, like, so, you gotta move fast with it or you get left behind". Ariana's fears of being left behind was related to her perceived belief in

inconsistent disciplinary actions. Ariana states “the school, it's okay. Like, it's cool, like... I, I don't know how to explain it. It's like, they choose when they wanna discipline you.” She further explains that “like, they wanna be cool with you one day, and then the next day, they all up on your tail about something. Like, why ain't you just tell me that yesterday when we was cool?”. Seen against the tenets of CRT we understand that giving this research (*lived experiences*) credence would be an admission of the centrality of race, not just in the lives of people of color but within the unspoken and privileged norm of Whiteness (Manglitz et. al, 2006, para.7). Carter and Ariana were adamant that without the guidance and support of programs like AVID and GEAR UP, they would miss out on information and would not be as far as long on their college and career postsecondary journey.

The focus and programming surrounding college and career readiness can be seen throughout high school. CHHS students have access to 13 Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs which offers juniors and seniors practical, hands-on experience and certification opportunities. The AVID program within the CHUH district focuses on establishing a strong foundation for success in college and is used as a premier example of best practices around the city of Cleveland and surrounding suburbs. According to Shawn Washington, the AVID department chair at the high school, of the seniors within the 2018-2019 graduating class that have participated in the AVID program 100 percent have applied to a four-college and 94.6 percent were accepted at a four-year college and planned to enroll. The district has strong partnerships with Community Based Organizations (CBO) such as College Now Greater Cleveland and Open-Doors Academy, that are active during the school day and provide after school time

activities. The GEAR UP program is another great example of the district's focus on students' postsecondary journey.

In order to push forward research and practice in educational equity because the “voice” component of CRT, according to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), provides a means to communicate the experiences and realities of the oppressed— “a first step on the road to justice” (Miller et al., 2020, p. 273). Carter, our second-generation college student, has been involved in the AVID program since sixth grade and both her older siblings participated in AVID. Ariana and Carter have both been actively involved with the GEAR UP program since seventh grade. Ariana has participated in the GEAR UP summer enrichment/algebra bridge program each year.

Both students finished their first year at CHHS, and I posed the following question: According to your school administration, there are a lot of opportunities provided at the high school for: free SAT prep, college readiness programs, um, help with college applications, college to career programs... Do you know about any of those?.

Upon first reaction both students responded no but after a short pause both acknowledged that they know a little bit about programs due to AVID and GEAR UP.

Ariana: Uh... what... wait, like, like, the career techs and stuff like that?

Ms. Carmen: Yes, how'd you find out about career tech?

Ariana: Gear Up! Yeah...

Ms. Carmen: Okay, so you... there are a lot of... those programs do exist at the high-school and, you know, Gear Up is a part of that, a little bit... um... Why do you think you haven't heard about some of the other stuff?

Ariana: Um, probably because they don't talk about it a lot, or, enough for people to know, or they don't, like, they don't make it their priority to say it on the announcements or hang 'em up around the school so people can see it... or send out emails, or stuff like that.

Carter's response followed alongside Ariana's experience.

Carter: I know about some of 'em, not all of those. I knew about the, uh, the free SATs and that's it.

Ms. Carmen: Okay. How'd you hear about that one?

Carter: Through AVID, she was telling us about all of it.

Ms. Carmen: So, is that where you find most of your information about college stuff is through AVID?

Carter: Yeah, I've noticed that, like, I'm pretty much ahead of everybody else who isn't in the program. Like people don't really know the basic stuff of it, which is sad but...

Ms. Carmen: Do you think your classmates that aren't in AVID are at a, at a greater disadvantage?

Carter: Yeah, they are.

As a critical race researcher and educator, I recognize and acknowledge that “educational institutions operate in contradictory ways, with their potential to oppress and marginalize coexisting with their potential to emancipate and empower” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). The AVID program was designed and has been successful in working with the middle of the road students, building relationships with the student and families, and helping students push and elevate themselves academically. The students that participate

in AVID have a clear advantage over their peers that are not involved in any direct and intentional college and career readiness programs. The biggest and only disadvantage to the AVID program is that the program only accommodates 300 students and with a student body population of 1500, there are a lot of students being left behind. For students like Ariana that do not have the privilege of being an AVID student, has GEAR UP to help and prepare them along their postsecondary journeys. As with AVID, a major disadvantage for the GEAR UP program is that it only serves the class of 2023; again, leaving a huge gap in individual college and career readiness development. By understanding the students school experience, we can take this information and use it to develop programs that will help expose and increase all student's postsecondary readiness.

Support System

As Carter and Ariana expressed their aspirational goals and how their school experiences, one common recurring theme was the impact that their school support system had on them. As I mentioned previously, CHHS offers an abundance of academic and social support for their students through the guidance counselors and school psychologists. Both students shared that building and maintaining trusting relationships with adults has impacted their ability and desire to utilize the built-in support systems provide by the district. Overwhelmingly the biggest support that participants mentioned as impactful along their postsecondary journey has been AVID teachers and their GEAR UP advisor.

Carter and Ariana highlighted teachers as a strong source of support due to their ability to engage, make personal connections, and belief that they can be successful.

When asked to further explain, Carter responded:

“The AVID teachers, and probably just you (*Ms. Carmen*). Nobody else cares. Um, when I tried to start a conversation with y'all, y'all actually seemed interested and like y'all cared and weren't tryna give me like a two-word answer like everybody else”. Ariana added that “I know you and because like... Yeah, because. I do, because you, I think you are smarter than my other teachers or them other people in the building... And like, you know more stuff about college, or colleges, than them”. She further explains “‘cause they just be talking about the little small colleges they went to, but you be expanding the colleges, talkin' about college, in like, Texas and stuff like that. So yeah”. In building and sustaining strong support networks, it’s imperative to lean on our students and families, in order to understand their needs. The importance of counter-narrative in recentering the experience of marginalized communities impels us to consider how storytelling of this kind might generate action (Miller et al., 2020, p. 272). Our students spend almost 13% of their waking hours at school, by helping them become change agents in their own lives will help to build in school support networks that are actually utilized and valued by the student body. Ariana and Carter’s forthright comments provides perspective into the student experience with current in-school networks and highlights the importance of valuing their voices. They believe that they are more than the stereotypes society sees them as and we have to surround our students with people that will help them cultivate and harvest this belief.

Carter and Ariana were asked to further explain their experience with the other support systems at the high school and how trust can be built and maintained with adults. Without hesitation both participants agreed that the following characteristics are what they value: 1) they have to be able to relate to the adult they are speaking with; 2) respect, they are not looking for people to lecture them; and 3) they need someone that wholeheartedly believes in them. Carter and Ariana both expressed their experiences with the guidance staff and acknowledged that they had no idea the school had a psychologist.

Ariana: Truthfully? Um... they is no help, at all. Like, literally, I talked to my guidance counselor once and I barely was talking, she was doing the talking. Call me in there because I had a D and called my grandma on the spot. The disrespect. I did not like that.

Ms. Carmen: Oh...

Ariana: Like, she didn't even say, "Okay, well you got until next week to bring that D up or I'm calling your grandma" no, she straight up called her. Um... Miss... Miss... Miss straight up called her, telling her about some... I'm off track. Girl!? It's the first week of school!

Ms. Carmen: Um, so how do you think that influences your choices, like, with college, because like GEAR UP your guidance counselor, is supposed to be your source to helping you get to where you wanna go. How do you think, like, that has influenced your relationship?

Ariana: And, I don't think, I don't think it did, but, if it do, well then.... I'm screwed because Mm-mm (negative) She ain't never got time. Never.

Carter unfortunately had a first similar experience.

Carter: They are never in their office, so, I mean, the only time you'll be able to talk to 'em is if they're looking for you.

Ms. Carmen: When you were scheduling your classes, since you haven't met with them individually, how did that process go, with them not knowing really what you want to do long term?

Carter: Um. They just kinda recommended me to like the basic stuff they recommend to everybody. And then asked me what I wanted to do.

Ms. Carmen: So how do you think that influenced your choices for classes, since you only met with her once? Um, because there's really nowhere else that lists the classes offered. How do you think that helped or hindered you making your decision?

Carter: I think she was tryna keep me in the basics, 'cause, um, I guess y'all would know what I wanna be, so when I was asking for, I guess a harder class, she described it as, she was kind of reluctant and kinda forcing, not forcing, but suggesting I go somewhere easier.

Ms. Carmen: Um, that's interesting, how did that make you feel?

Carter: Offended 'cause she thought I was stupid. I'm not.

As a former student over 13 years ago now, I share the feelings and experiences that Carter and Ariana shared. As the GEAR UP advisor, I have had countless meetings with Black students that share those feelings and experiences of being offended. Many of our Black students feel constantly judgment, criticized, and disrespect on a daily basis; which has led to feelings of resentment and students not utilizing the services and resources provided by the school. Carter's feeling of being offend is valid and is her way of

expressing and negating the deficit thinking mindset that she felt her counselor was trying to burden her with. She knows she can do more and just wants the chance to prove it. Ariana mentioned that she only visited her counselor one-time due to an incident at the start of the school year, which led to Ariana feeling disrespected and offend and has created a break in a very important bond. Students that are left feeling alone are indirectly forced into believing that they have to learn and discover on their own and potentially miss out on college and career readiness opportunities and programs designed specifically for them. If Carter and Ariana were not involved in AVID or GEAR UP, they would miss out as so many students currently do on opportunities that will help them develop their post-high school game plan. With the high school being the size of a small private liberal arts college, it is easy to implement programs and put into place systems that are intended to help all students but that also comes with the responsibility to make sure the systems in place are actually working for all students. One of the six forms of CCW is social capital, which states that peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions (Yosso, 2005). Building students' social capital prior to them taking off on their postsecondary journey is a key in helping them understand that they can trust, confide in, and lean on the adults outside of their immediate circles.

Personal Beliefs and Perceptions

Outside of the school setting, Carter and Ariana mentioned that family support is key to their postsecondary success. The fifth for of CCW is familial capital, which refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition (Yosso, 2005). While Ariana will be classified as

first-generation and Carter as second-generation college students, pursuing a postsecondary education in both of their families is top priority. Carter's family pushes her to take her academic seriously, actively participate in school activities, AVID, and to be involved in GEAR UP. Ariana's grandmother plays an active role in her education and has signed her up for the past three summers for the GEAR UP summer enrichment programs. As Manglitz et. al (2006), points out "Counter-stories facilitate social, political, and cultural cohesion, as well as survival and resistance among marginalized groups" (para.5). In the second journal writing prompt, participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

What are some potential barriers that you could potentially face when trying to pursue a postsecondary education?

Carter: The challenge I might face is not being motivated. I am very scared to fail because that means you're a failure and that is not what I want to be.

Ariana: I Feel some barriers that could potentially face trying to pursue post-secondary education are the challenges that could be thrown at me.

What support would you need to overcome these barriers?

Carter: I don't know what I would need to overcome this fear. I think I just need time and to fail some more.

Ariana: Supports I would need to overcome the challenges I might face during postsecondary education is being able to have a support group like my family because if I was to give up on postsecondary education, I would want my family to be there for me.

The theme of failure was present in both of the participants responses however despite that fear they are not letting go of their dreams to better themselves and keep focused on their long-term goals. However, majoritarian stories lead society to believe that Black students cannot and do not have the self-motivation to be more than their present circumstances. Counter-narratives are able to achieve educational equity by giving voices to silenced and marginalized populations aimed at informing and educating dominant and elite groups, geared toward the ultimate goal of revealing the truth that “our society is deeply structured by racism” (Delgado, 1990, p. 98) (Miller et al., 2020, p. 273).

Although Carter and Ariana come from vastly different socio-economic backgrounds, both acknowledged that to change their long-term financial outlook, going to college is the only option for them. Carter wrote in her journal post “I would like to make good money as well. I have to go to college and make good connections so I can give myself the life I want. Such as a nice size house and car while being comfortable”. Ariana’s response was “If they (family) still got somethin' to say then so be it. I mean, it is what it is, but once I become a surgeon, they better not be asking for any of my money, 'cause they're gonna be broke, and poor, and sad, 'cause they ain't gettin' nothin' from me. Yep, I'm gonna be that family member. The rich auntie”. As Gollnick and Chin (2017) points out “education is a key to upward mobility and financial security in adulthood” (p. 100) and our students are vividly aware of this.

The Class of 2023 ended their freshman year of high school having experienced a worldwide pandemic, mandatory stay-at-home orders from the Ohio Governor, and participated in virtual learning for the first time. They expressed their frustrations with online learning, having to learn Google Classroom, Google Meet, Zoom, and a multitude

of other online learning platforms. The biggest issue being a lack of social interactions. I assumed that the pandemic and shutdown orders would be gone by the time the GEAR UP summer program started but as history tells us I was wrong. I did not think any students would sign-up for the summer college and career readiness bootcamp due to it having to be virtual. Luckily, I was again wrong! I fell into the master narrative that Black students do not have enough resilience to push past their current circumstances. However, as both participants expressed “we still have a future to work on and this is not going to last forever”!. After spending five-weeks in a virtual summer college and career readiness program, participants were asked what three things they learned:

Ariana: Three things I have learned during the summer program are that you’ll need to be financially independent, you need a backup plan & you should have a really good support group.

Carter: In this college readiness program I learned that college is hard if you make it hard. All year long our teachers have been telling us how hard college is going to be and you will have no time for anything else, but this course put things into perspective. I have also learned the things that I like and dislike in schools and how to narrow down to the most perfect schools for me.

Both participants mentioned that their perspective grew and developed over the course of the summer program. Now that the program has ended and participants have learned more about themselves, they were asked what their motivations are for pursuing a postsecondary education.

Ariana: My motivation for pursuing a postsecondary education is to be the first to go a full 4 years in college & I want to prove to my family to never doubt me and that I could do it.

Carter: I keep myself motivated for college by knowing that I never want to see this place again and to do that I need great grades and test scores.

Lastly, participants were asked, if they had to decide on a college to attend today, do you feel prepared to make that decision?

Ariana: If I had to decide on a college today, I would be prepared to make that decision. I would be able to make that decision because I already have 5 colleges in mind that I would like to attend or be accepted into. (Yale, Spellman, Howard, Ohio State, Trinity College).

Carter: If I had to make the decision today to go to college, I would feel confident to do so.

As Solórzano and Yosso (2002) explained, once the data have been compiled, the researchers create composite characters to help tell the counter story. Thus, although grounded in the voices of the participants like other forms of counter-narrative, the resulting counter story puts those voices in dialog with the researchers' knowledge and experience, including their own experiences as members of a marginalized group (Miller et al., 2020, p. 278). The participants of this study gave candid and honest responses of their lived experiences as Black students in pursuit of a postsecondary education.

Participants expressed how their resilience, family support, and desire to have a better life has superseded the negative stereotype of deficit thinking that is too frequently placed on Black students. As Carter proclaims "I keep my grades together. I try and do, like, extra-

curricular activities. I stay after school when I need to. Um, I keep trying to keep good with my teachers as best as possible, 'cause sometimes I can't 'cause they annoy me”.

Summary of Findings and Counter-Narrative Analysis

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) believe “counter-stories serve at least four functions as follows: (a) They can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice, (b) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems, (c) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position, and (d) they can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone” (p. 36).

Through in-depth interviews and journal writing prompts from students at CHHS in the Class of 2023, the participants' views have been made clear. They shared their stories and lived experiences of their aspirational goals, school experiences, support systems within the school system, and their personal beliefs and perceptions. The participants' narratives revealed that due to their resilience, self-motivation for success, having adults that care and are able to build personal connections, and support from home has fostered their desire to pursue a postsecondary education. The data from this study suggests that the college going climate that the Cleveland Heights -University Heights School District and Cleveland Heights High School has cultivated through academic rigorous programs, use of community resources, and a focus on academic and social support has positively influenced the participants desire to pursue higher education.

The data also suggests that due to the large size of the school, how information is shared, unconscious and conscious biases, and the daily presence of microaggressions, Black students at CHHS are negatively being impacted and their postsecondary options limited. Participant responses provided evidence of self-awareness of society's perceptions of Black males versus their own authentic identity (Speaks, 2018, p. 87). Verbatim reflections from the individual interview and journal responses were used to illuminate these themes and the countering of the dominant narrative around the lived experience of people of color supports the tenets of Critical Race Theory (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). In the final chapter, I discuss the findings, offer recommendations for educators and policymakers, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world

—Nelson Mandela

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter I discuss the findings of this study on understanding Black students within the class of 2023 at Cleveland Heights High School's (CHHS) motivations for pursuing a postsecondary education. The findings of the study were examined through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens with a focus on allowing the students to narrate their own lived experiences through counter-narrative storytelling. A brief overview of the background and summary of the study is provided prior to discussion of the study limitations. Following this section major findings and subsequent implications for practice and action research will be presented. Chapter 5 will conclude with opportunities for future research and opportunities to enrich the field of college access.

Background and Summary of Study

In this study, I explored the Black students' motivations for pursuing a postsecondary education from their own perspectives. There currently is limited research on understanding the perspectives of first-generation students and the urban high school contexts (Duncheon, 2018; Temple, 2009), building and sustaining a culturally relevant college-going culture (Knight-Manuel et al., 2019), and creating new accountability measures that seek to hold schools responsible for percentages of students who graduate from high school and enroll in college (Knight-Manuel et al., 2019). However, as Speaks (2018) notes there is an "abundance of research on the underperformance of Black males (Brooms, 2016; Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Harper &

Associates, 2014; Howard, 2014; Huerta, 2015; Milner, 2007), this study was necessary to challenge the dominant culture and deficit thinking surrounding Black's students' motivations to pursue postsecondary education.

In our society, urban/inner-city Black students are the visible-invisible minority that are pushed and pulled through an educational system that was never designed for their success. The use of CRT allowed the student participants to narrate their own educational stories, sources of motivations, and goals with the ultimate aim of disrupting master narratives concerning their desires for postsecondary education. Cleveland Heights High School is considered an inner-ring suburban district. The inner-ring school districts are districts that surround the city of Cleveland and have a predominantly Black population with the exception being Shaker Heights. The inner-ring suburbs as well as the city of Cleveland are plagued by systemic and individual-level racism and classism that cast areas that are predominantly Black as less valued and less deserving of investments in high-quality economic, housing, and educational opportunities (Lebovits, 2020). To compound these negative stereotypes unjustly placed on these neighborhoods, the unfair and unjust practices of the EdChoice voucher program continues to push the deficit thinking narrative placed upon predominantly Black school districts. The Ohio EdChoice Scholarship Program allows students living in the boundaries of designated schools to receive vouchers to attend private schools; it started as a way to provide education options for students whose local schools were considered "failing" by the Ohio State Report Card grading system (CHUH, 2020). The EdChoice voucher program is guided by a belief that systemic inequities can be resolved through "better" decision making (a claim that has been fully debunked by scholars, activists, and minority groups)

and offers a flawed resolution for racist policy making (Lebovits, 2020). The impact of the EdChoice on the Cleveland Heights-University Heights school district has caused a huge financial burden resulting in personnel and programming cuts. CHUH (2020) reports they “lose \$6,000 per new high school student and \$4,650 per new elementary school student using EdChoice due to a freeze in state funding for the next two years. This has amounted to an approximate loss of \$7.2 million this fiscal year”. CHUH (2020) also notes that “The vast majority (more than 93%) of EdChoice students within the CH-UH City School District boundaries have never attended our public schools. This means that they were never factored into our budget to begin with”. The EdChoice program was designed on the surface to help those in failing school districts, however due to the biased and systemic oppressive policies that lead to the creation of the Ohio State School Report Card grading system; districts like CHUH are paying a heavy burden. Unfortunately, programming for students “is at risk of being affected - extracurricular activities, class sizes, AP class options, athletics, and more”. The cuts to funding will also impact the district's ability to contract with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) like College Now Greater Cleveland to provide essential college and career readiness services. This study highlighted the importance of CBOs and federal grant programs like AVID and GEAR UP in helping to develop and establish a college going culture and provide a support network for students and families.

GEAR UP 2 New Heights program has hosted a summer bridge program for the cohort of 2023 at Cleveland Heights High School since 2018. The mission of the GEAR UP program is to significantly increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. This was the first year that the

summer program was virtually. The five-week summer college and career readiness was designed to allow students to go on a self-discovery journey that would help them develop a blueprint for life after high school. During the five-week program, a total of 20 students participated. Of those 20 students, six students returned parental consent forms to participate in the research study and two students completed the required components of the study. See Table 8 for summary of participant engagement. The two participants that completed the study (Arianna and Carter) provided candid responses to the narrative interview questions and journal responses, which allowed the student voice to shed light on how their lived experiences have impacted their postsecondary journey to this point. The Arianna and Carter's responses were taken verbatim and analyzed through a CRT lens in order to answer the guiding questions for this study: 1) How and to what extent does Black high school students' motivations for pursuing a post-secondary education change or remain the same during their participation in college and career readiness summer bridge program?; and 2) How can Black students' voices and experiences inform a college and career program designed to increase their preparation and access to higher education? The guiding frameworks that provided context for this study included two tenets of CRT: challenge of dominant ideology and the centrality of experiential knowledge, the resistant capital element of the community cultural wealth model, and counter-narrative storytelling. Counter-stories facilitate social, political, and cultural cohesion, as well as survival and resistance among marginalized groups (Manglitz et al., 2006, para.5).

Limitations

The online environment was a severe and major limitation not only for this study but for the students within the class of 2023. The summer of 2020 was their summer leading into their 10th grade year and a crucial time in understanding and really starting to build a solid blueprint for life after high school. The theme for their 10th grade year is self-reflection/self-discovery and the summer program was designed to be a jump start on the work I would be asking them to complete in the Fall of 2020. Due to the coronavirus, the abrupt school closure in March 2020, and being forced into online learning; the students almost immediately became frustrated, overwhelmed, disengaged, scared, and uncertain about the future. By May 2020, zoom fatigue had set in and virtual attendance for students dropped. Zoom fatigue occurs due to the overuse of videoconferencing and the lack of real-time connection with others and for students the social engagement aspect of school is why they attend in the first place. Current research shows that due to coronavirus and the state mandated shutdowns, students and educators were experiencing an increase in emotional, social, and physical exhaustion (Johnson, 2021; Walker, 2020) and that the end of year school closures were assumed to be equivalent to starting the summer break in March and approximated by typical summer learning loss rates (Kuhfeld et al., 2020, p. 555). Kuhfeld et al. (2020) found in their research that “students lost about a month of learning over the summer, with lower-income students falling behind middle- and high-income students in reading (Alexander et al., 2001; Cooper et al., 1996)” (p.550). Kuhfeld et al. (2020) study adds to current research that indicates “summer is a particularly variable time for learning, with far higher variability in growth rates during the summer than the school year (Atteberry & McEachin, 2020; von Hippel

et al., 2018; In fact, some students actually show learning gains during the summer.)” (p. 550). The summer melt started earlier than expected and trying to get students on board to participate in a virtual summer program was an uphill battle despite the relationships that I had cultivated with the students. I was able to offer two-driving school scholarships for students that completed the 5-week college and career readiness program, weekly incentives, interactive activities, and students received a \$15 DoorDash lunch gift card each Friday for participating daily. While the program was not exclusively to students that identified as Black, those were the only students that signed up to participate. Debunking the deficit view of thinking; Black students do care enough about their education to apply and participate in programming designed to prepare them for their postsecondary journey.

Another limitation was the sample size for the study. While meaningful themes emerged from multiple narrative coding cycles, richer data would have been gathered if all 20 students that signed up for the summer program participated. The two students (Arianna and Carter) that completed the study had great diversity in their backgrounds, given that Arianna is a first generation, from a lower-socioeconomic background, and being raised by her grandmother and Carter being a second generation college student, from a middle class socio-economic background, and raised in a two-parent home. If more students who shared similar backgrounds participated in the study, there would have been more opportunities for comparisons and personal anecdotes on the impact of unjust systems. Despite the limited participation in this research study, my experience working in the field of college access in various school districts from affluent to economically-disadvantaged is aligned with the findings of this study.

The last limitation and biggest disadvantage was virtual engagement and participants not wanting to turn on their video camera. Walker (2020) cites Dr. Brenda Wiederhold, a clinical psychologist who found that “Our brains are used to picking up body language and other cues, not to mention increases of dopamine, that are experienced during face-to-face communication,” explains Wiederhold. “On a video call, something is off, and our subconscious brain is reacting to that. Communication isn’t in real time, even though we may think it is”. I was not able to pick-up one social cue, body language, and whether the students were absorbing the content fully. While most students did not turn on their cameras during the daily sessions in the summer program, the research participants did turn on their cameras during our individual interview sessions. Being able to visually see the participants during their interviews allowed me to engage, observe, and reflect upon how the students non-verbal cues impacted their responses. Through consolidating their experiences and creating a place to be candid and open, participants were able to narrate their own lived experience, which ultimately allowed me to develop themes that can be used to create a counter-narrative to the contrasting stories that Black students lack motivation to pursue postsecondary education.

Major Findings

There were four overarching themes that emerged regarding students motivation to pursue a postsecondary education from the individual interviews, journal writing prompts, and document analysis: 1) Aspirational Goals; 2) their School Experience; 3) Support System; and 4) Personal Beliefs and Perceptions. The themes that emerged collectively demonstrate how the participants' lived experiences have impacted their desire to pursue a postsecondary education despite the deficit thinking mindset placed

unjustly upon them. The themes were discussed independently in Chapter Four and verbatim participant responses were used to provide confidence and validity to each theme. The first major finding aligns with the aspirational capital of the community cultural wealth model (CCW). The second and third major findings aligned with the resistant capital of CCW. The fourth major finding participants challenged the dominant narrative and deficit thinking mindset. Each finding will be briefly discussed and connectedness to CRT and the CCW will be provided through participant voice.

Aspirational Capital

The guiding frameworks that provided context for this study included two tenets of CRT: challenge of dominant ideology and the centrality of experiential knowledge, the resistant capital element of the community cultural wealth model, and counter-narrative storytelling. However, the aspirational capital of CCW shined through all participant verbal and written responses. The resiliency in aspirational capital is “evidenced in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstance, often without the objective means” (Yosso, 2005, pp. 77-78). Through daily interactions and document analysis, all 20 students that participated in the summer program displayed high levels of aspirational capital. Each lesson, activity, and invited speaker was designed or selected to help students self-reflect on what their goals and motivations are in life post high school.

Every participant acknowledged that with the guidance and encouragement from their families and support systems have contributed to their development of positive and high levels of expectations for their postsecondary success. This theme is present even across the diverse backgrounds of the participants. Arianna will be a first-generation

college and Carter a second-generation college student and despite this difference both share the same motivation for attending and ultimately graduating from college. Both participants credited this aspirational goal to their family backgrounds.

Resistant Capital

The resistant capital refers to those knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Yosso, 2005). The resistant capital element of the community cultural wealth model was evident in all six of the Black students that participated in the virtual summer college and career readiness program. They all expressed their frustrations with online learning but acknowledged the importance of staying focused on their long-term plans despite the unprecedented times we are living in. During the summer program, we discussed the George Floyd killing, the social and racial justice protests, and racial divide within our own community. We discussed how applied knowledge is power and the students all suggested that the way to make an impactful change was to continue their education and not fall into society stereotypes of being uneducated, thugs, and lazy. As shown on the participant profiles in Table 5, all six participants post high school plans include attending a college or university. Additionally, two of the most significant factors that contributed to participants staying focused on their goals were their support system and securing financial wealth and stability. Participants mentioned that their support system and foundation included: parents, family members, AVID teachers, and CBOs advisors.

Carter was the only study participant that completed all aspects of the research study including the counter-narrative interview. Through the analysis of the counter-narrative, it is clear that Carter's familia support has shaped and developed her resistant

capital and strong desire to pursue a postsecondary education. For the counter-narrative interview, Carter interviewed her mother who grew up on the east side of Cleveland in the Glenville neighborhood. Carter's mother grew up with both parents and as Carter puts it they "lived a simple life - living paycheck to paycheck like most African American families at the time". Neither of Carter's grandparents attended college but they placed a high value on education for their children. Carter's mother attended a predominantly Black school with mostly Black teachers. Typical for the times (late 60s to early 70s), her high school did not talk a lot about colleges but focused more on preparing students for the workforce. Carter's mom was aware of her family's financial situation and knew that there were certain colleges she could not go to because her parents could not afford it. Combined this with a lack of college planning, Carter's mom did not think college was possible to go to. This was not due to a lack of willingness or desire but due to racist and knowledge banking done by the dominant culture. Carter's mother knew to change her financial outlook she needed to further her education. So she in turn looked for ways to save money and to educate herself. Her family encouraged her to go after her dreams and told her "to go if she had the chance to go". Indirectly challenging the dominant narrative and deficit thinking mindset. Miller et al. (2020) cites Solórzano and Yosso (2002) who pointed out that "counterstories help readers critique unfair practices and pinpoint transformative possibilities from the standpoint of traditionally silenced voices" (p. 273).

While Carter's mom did not have any formal college and career readiness training, she had the support of her family and a strong desire to change her life story. She has in turn instilled those same values into her daughters and understands the value of making informed decisions. This is evident by Carter and her two sisters' all being a

part of the AVID program since middle school and Carter's active participation in GEAR UP. Additionally, when asked: If college is in your future plans, are you concerned about the money needed for college? Carter's very candid response was "No, I am not concerned with the cost. My parents would let me know if I should be concerned"! Carter has built up a strong resistant capital which can go a long way in fighting systemic racism and preventing anyone (teachers, counselors, or societal stereotypes) that tries to stop her from achieving her goals.

Challenging the Dominant Narrative

CRT shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged (Yosso, 2005, p. 69). If Black students were collectively disinterested in their futures and pursuing a postsecondary education, high school graduation rates would be substantially lower. However, the graduation rates of Black students specifically at CHHS have remained consistently average at nearly 89 percent and the college-going rate of roughly 46%.

The average graduation rate and college-going rates, leads me to believe that the use of traditional methods of passing valuable information along through flyers, announcements, in-classroom announcements, mailings, etc., are shown to be ineffective in increasing awareness of college and career readiness events and programming amongst Black students. The dominant culture view would lead us to believe that this is the fault of the student and/or parents not caring or just simply disengaged. Yosso (2005) found that "deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for

poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education" (p. 75).

Arianna clearly articulates the inadequacies of disseminating important information through traditional methods and ultimately the need for change. She describes missing opportunities and deadlines because she could not hear the morning announcements. Carter notes that she is only aware of programming opportunities because she is in AVID and involved in activities. Carter clearly outlines the need for systemic changes in how we address the needs of our students. Summer bridge programming through community partnerships, intentional in-class college and career lessons, and having the students take an active role in their own learning; is a great way to ensure all students are receiving the same content and are being prepared to make sound postsecondary decisions. As Wenger (1998) points out "it is more important for students to have experiences that allow them to take charge of their own learning than to cover a lot of material". The traditional ways of interacting with and engaging students are no longer effective, and our students deserve better.

This research study has shown that Black students are in desperate need of intentional and culturally relevant college and career readiness advising. Culturally relevant college and career readiness advising places a focus and values the lived experiences that the students and their families bring to the table. Educators most often assume that schools work and students, parents, and community need to change to conform to this already effective and equitable system (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). If school districts built programming and curricula that were culturally responsive and more

closely aligned with developing and nurturing the aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant forms of capital in Black students, then more students would recognize and acquire the skills needed to develop a blueprint for their lives post high school graduation. Employing a CRT analysis helped to explore ways in which college and career programming has contributed to countering the master narrative.

Implications for practice

K-12 schools and districts must consider the value that working in partnership with CBOs and federal grant programs brings in shaping and cultivating a college going culture. This is especially true for underrepresented students that may avoid speaking to school counselors or teachers out of mistrust. In addition, regardless of the high school structure, school counselors and in-classroom teachers simply do not have the time during the school day to provide individualized personal development and college and career readiness planning for every student. This puts Black students at an even greater disadvantage and continues to place and keep many of them in a last place position in society. In a 2012 interview Dr. Clayton Christensen, professor at the Harvard Business School discussed the theory of disruption and how if we “teach them (students) how to think instead of what to think, they can come up with their own solutions” (Schaffner & Christensen, 2012, 6:30). In order to build and sustain a college going culture there has to be “a shared perspective among educators that the purpose of the school is to modify its program to accommodate the student rather than attempting to get the student to behave in ways desired” (Kennedy and Soutullo, 2018, p. 12) and required by the dominant culture.

By facilitating and allowing our underrepresented students to have an active role in their own learning, we as educators can help them continue to counter the dominant narrative and build a blueprint for themselves to break generational curses and overcome the societal barriers that stand in their way. But first we must come to terms and deal with our own implicit and explicit biases. Kennedy and Soutullo (2018) echoes this sentiment and have found that “in current educational research and practice, marginalized students are often blamed for their poor educational outcomes by well-meaning educators who lack the efficacy to help them” (p. 12).

The Cleveland-Heights - University Heights School district offers an overwhelming amount of resources and support systems for academic and social growth for their students and families from all backgrounds. The high school offers nearly 20 advanced placement courses, four world languages, college credit plus, 13 career technical education programs, AVID program, honors diploma, and partners with a variety of community based organizations to increase college and career readiness. The graduation rate shows that students are grasping the information enough to earn their high school diploma, but the college enrollment rate tells a completely different story, and this is where the disconnection lies. The students have silently been letting us know that just providing the services and listing them on the website is not good enough. As the participants in this study have shown, there is a need for strong support networks and a need to build relationships with families to understand how the familia background has or is influencing the students’ postsecondary decisions. The use of summer bridge programs is a great way to increase student engagement and allow them space outside the academic year to focus on their goals. The students that participated in the 2020 Gear Up program

over the course of five-weeks were able to go on a self-discovery journey and ultimately create an outline for their postsecondary path. Working in partnership and not in silos, schools, students, families and community partners can work to debunk the deficit thinking view and instead value the student voice and their lived experiences to learn how to have meaningful conversations that will help students build a blueprint for their postsecondary success.

Personal Lessons Learned as an Action Researcher

Society continues to push and build upon a narrative of Black students' academic disinterest and academic shortcomings without even asking Black students their thoughts or considering that the current structure of education does not work for them. The educational system in the U.S was not built for Black students and hundreds of years later continues to systematically oppress and devalue the knowledge and wisdom Black students bring into the classroom every day. Therefore, it is on the people of the United States to evaluate our own perceptions and beliefs to ensure we are not furthering systems and structures of oppression (Speaks, 2018, p. 14). Action research practitioners have a great opportunity to help shape and change the systemic racist and oppressive policies that are plaguing urban and suburban education. The goal of action research is to identify a local program and work to develop a long-term solution for that problem. Action researchers seek to empower, transform, and emancipate individuals from situations that constrain their self-development and self-determination (Creswell, 2015).

This research study has shown me the importance of viewing students as a valuable member of the school's community of practice. Action research for college and career readiness in conjunction with Critical Race Theory will allow practitioners to view

educational issues not just from their vantage point but to include the voices of their students to challenge the dominant narrative and finally start to push the needle of change. As Mertler (2016) shares “educational decision-making is no longer reliant upon “instinct and reaction; it now has a basis in hard data, gathered primarily from those whom we are charged to educate” (p. 3). Miller et al., (2020) argue that “we argue that the potential of counter-narrative to achieve educational equity remains limited by the lack of a unified methodology, including a central praxis and clear goals to support action beyond the collection or construction of counter-narratives” (p. 292).

If the goal of action research is to address a local issue then the student voice must be included for any changes to be sustained long term. The hard data states that Black students are not entering college nor earning college degrees at the rate of their White counterparts. The cyclical nature of action research and CRT makes for a great pairing. Action research is a cycle of inquiry and reflection which includes: 1) Identifying the problem; 2) Develop a plan of action; 3) Collect data; 4) Analyze data and form conclusions; 5) Modify your theory and repeat the cycle; and 6) Report the results (Kolk, n.d).

The three elements of the critical counter-narrative methodology form a hermeneutic process in which the CRT theoretical model of inquiry conditions the critical reflection and generativity for transformative praxis, the praxis reformulates the goals of educational equity, the goals inform reformulation of the praxis, and the reformulated praxis informs reflection on the theoretical model of inquiry (Miller et al., 2020, p. 291). By merging action research and CRT, educational researchers are then able to give life and perspective to the “numbers”. We can then learn on a larger scale why and what

motivates Black first- or second-generation college students to pursue a postsecondary education; instead of developing programs we assume will benefit students.

Mertler (2016) states that “the true benefit of action research as professional learning is that it provides the mechanism for an educator to focus on his or her professional growth specifically on the aspects of the teaching-learning process that have been identified by the teacher as being in immediate need” (p. 9). I wholeheartedly agree with this statement but would push further to say that the development of self and personal growth is the true benefit.

When venturing into this study, I had no clue the emotional 18-foot rollercoaster I would have to face. As I dug deep into understanding how society and the dominant culture has systematically used education to continue to marginalize and criminalize Black youth, it forced me to become vulnerable and give voice to my own lived experiences. With each cycle of the action research process and the reflective nurture of CRT, I had to acknowledge that I used to be a silenced Black youth that no one saw potential in because I was a teen mom and was a victim of this corrupt system. I had to deal with my own imposter syndrome in order to help my study participants find value in their own voice and value in their lived experiences. I had to consider my own counter-narrative and how that has led me to this position today. Action research methods are adapted and changed in response to the practitioners’ objectives to understand a practical problem (Creswell, 2015). Practitioners, educators, and teachers all have an obligation and “should take a critical look at their own interactions with students and communities of color” (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017, p. 277). By giving voice to my own lived experiences with my postsecondary journey and understanding my own motivations as a first-

generation college student, helped me to assist the research participants in developing a richer understanding of their own motivations for pursuing postsecondary education.

Recommendation for Research

It was a privilege to conduct this research study and provide student participants a space to narrate their own stories. The findings from this study validated the need for early, intentional, and direct college and career readiness advising for Black students that values their lived experiences and incorporates a strong support system. There are several recommendations that arise for potential areas of further research. The first recommendation is to expand the sample size of the study, while utilizing the similar qualitative methods. By examining a larger student population, school districts and college access organizations will be to build in-school and summer bridge programs that are designed to target and support a wider variety of students.

Secondly, conducting this research under similar context at a variety of high schools could confirm the deficit thinking mindset that has plagued the U.S educational system and the impact it has on Black students' motivations to pursue postsecondary enrollment. Confirming the deficit thinking mindset that has been intertwined in school policies, teacher education programs, how information is disseminated, and whose culture has value; we can start to rebuild an educational system that has and continues to oppress generations of Black families.

Lastly, future work should focus on conducting longitudinal studies on students participating in federal grant programs that are designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Due to the continued strain on local school district budgets, limited/reduced state funding, and

programs like EdChoice; federal grant programs and partnering with community-based organizations should be leveraged as a way to continue to serve our underrepresented students and make sure they have the tools and resources needed to build a blueprint for their lives post high school. Understanding the long-term impact of these programs, will help to strengthen the fight to increase federal spending on these much-needed programs.

Recommendation for the Field

The recommendations listed below are not comprehensive but provide some insights and strategies to build and sustain a college going culture for underrepresented students that values their lived experiences and free of deficit thinking mindset policies. At the National College Access Network (NCAN) Conference, there are dozens of sessions on ways to increase postsecondary enrollment for low-income, underrepresented, and underserved students. The recommendations presented are based on the findings of this study with GEAR UP students at Cleveland Heights High School and the knowledge and my own lived experiences as a college access professional.

No one is coming to save us!

The Department of Education, in the Higher Education Act of 1965 and 1998, clearly defines a first-generation college student as a student both of whose parents did not complete a bachelor's degree, or in the case of students who live with and are supported by only one parent, a student whose only such parent did not complete a bachelor's degree (Sundquist, 2019). For the nearly a half of century, educators have been trying to figure out how to engage and increase postsecondary enrollment for first generation college students, with only minimum gains made and the gains lessened when the data is broken down by race (Barlis, 2013; Callan, 2018). The systemic racism,

oppressive policies, and the school to prison-pipeline running rampant through education is proof that we have to do more to correct the wrongs of the past and create an educational system that values the voices of all students and the experiences they bring to the table. As I laid out previously, this can be done with intentional culturally relevant college and career readiness advising, building and sustaining partnerships with community-based organizations through summer bridge programming, and valuing the student voice as a renewable resource to challenge and address inconsistencies in practice. In addition, there has to be a push to challenge teacher preparation programs and the deficit thinking mindset that is allowed to grow and ultimately infiltrate our school systems. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) cites Kretovics & Nussel, (1994) and Persell, (1977) who found that “many teacher education programs draw on majoritarian stories to explain educational inequity through a cultural deficit model and thereby pass on beliefs that students of color are culturally deprived” (p. 31). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) provides the following example of how cultural deficit thinking through majoritarian storytelling is used to create and facilitate a false narrative about Black students and education which comes from an African American linguistics professor, John McWhorter:

In a Los Angeles Times article, McWhorter claims that the sad and simple fact is that while there are some excellent Black students . . . on average, Black students do not try as hard as other students. The reason they do not try as hard is not because they are inherently lazy, nor is it because they are stupid... these students belong to a culture infected with an anti-intellectual strain, which subtly but

decisively teaches them from birth not to embrace schoolwork too wholeheartedly (George, 2000). (p. 31)

Darling-Hammond (2009) adds that if “policymakers interested in reforming whole systems for greater performance must invest in strong initial preparation and ongoing professional development” and she further explains that “there are no policies that can improve schools if the people in them are not armed with the knowledge and skills they need”. Teachers are the gatekeepers of information and access to students during the school day, they spend the most time with our students and are positioned to help or hinder a student’s postsecondary journey.

Reaching beyond the classroom

Through my cycles of developing an action research study and experience working in college access, it is evident that the limited invitation into classrooms to conduct meaningful workshops and provide exposure opportunities has impacted underrepresented students in a detrimental way. Many Black students have family obligations, work part-time jobs, and simply are frustrated with an educational system that often views them from a deficit mindset; that providing after-school and weekend opportunities become an additional hurdle and stressors for our students. This can be attributed: to role diffusion with school counselors, high student to counselor ratios, state mandated testing, over testing, dismissal of the importance of college and career advising, and a failure to recognize the deficit thinking mindset in our curriculum and policies. This study has highlighted the need to build a community of support not only for our Black students but for all the students that are hiding in plain sight not receiving the guidance they are rightly entitled to. I have a firm belief in the mantra that it takes a

village and making sure all students have a blueprint for life after school is a community obligation. Through critical dialogue, we can transform college and career readiness preparation from an individual goal to a community wide responsibility. Utilizing critical dialogue as a way to move from the majoritarian narrative “a location for the dispensation of knowledge to passive recipients” and into “a place where knowledge is disassembled, approached from multiple and missing perspectives, and reassembled in ways that create both critical understanding and paths for social change” will help to create a system that values the voice and lived experiences of all people (Hilton, 2013, p. 603).

The US has the highest poverty rates for children among industrialized nations and provides fewer social supports for their well-being and fewer resources for their education (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Increasing college and career readiness of this silenced and marginalized group has advantages for the greater of society. By helping Black students build a postsecondary blueprint that values their beliefs, values, and lived experiences; will in turn help to start to reduce the educational, wealth, and crime and punishments gaps in this country. This can only be achieved if we as a society start to recognize the systemic racist policies and deficient thinking mindset that has been implanted into the US educational system. We as a society have to move past the “assumption that equal educational opportunity now exists” because it “reinforces beliefs that the causes of continued low levels of achievement on the part of students of color must be intrinsic to them, their families, or their communities” (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Effective research-based strategies, such as imbedding a trauma-informed care curriculum into college and career readiness programming may then translate to

practitioners who can work in tandem with students from all racial backgrounds motivations for attending or not attending college.

Conclusion

According to Ryan and Deci (2020) "in schools, students acquire not only knowledge, but also a sense of industry and a set of identities (positive or negative). Confidence, self-esteem, and mental health are all deeply affected by whether what happens in school supports or thwarts basic psychological needs" (p. 4). The findings of this study on raising 10th grade Black students' motivations for pursuing a postsecondary education validated the need to give our Black students a platform to express and provide context to their lived experiences in order to provide a counter narrative to dominate ideology. Black students in all school districts from severely underperforming to affluent deserve to have their voices not only heard but seen as a valuable resource in their postsecondary educational journey. Through counter-narrative storytelling, we can understand our students' lived experiences in a way to help them build a personal blueprint for what their life could look like after high school.

My research study focused on understanding Black students motivation for pursuing a postsecondary education by allowing the students to narrate their own stories. This research was designed to shed a light on the importance of early college and career readiness interventions through summer bridge programming. Additionally, this research study was an effort to place a spotlight on federal programs such as GEAR UP that are designed on valuing the whole student and what they bring to the table. There are many Black students that go onto to attend college each year and just as many that decide not to and jump into the workforce, so what are we doing to understand their underlying

motivations for the postsecondary decisions they are making? By giving agency to the student experience and listening wholeheartedly, we can engage students in a way that will hold their experiences valuable and hence allowing the narrative and long-term outlook for Black youth to be in a sense be rewritten.

The thousands of students that have participated in and currently participate in GEAR UP programs have benefited from college and career planning that focuses on the whole child, that values the family backgrounds in which they come from and focuses on building and cultivating strong support networks. The viewpoints and lived experiences of the six participants of this study are not exclusive to them. Black students are able to see themselves as more than the stereotypes society and the US educational system has placed upon them. They are motivated and influenced to pursue a postsecondary education because of their strong desire to change society for the better, making their families proud, securing a solid financial future and ultimately proving their “haters” wrong. The opportunity gap is defined by Darling-Hammond (2013) as the “cumulative differences in access to key educational resources that support learning at home and at school: expert teachers, personalized attention, high-quality curriculum opportunities, good educational materials, and plentiful information resources”. It is my hope that this study has shed light on the imperative need for personalized early college and career planning for Black students through intentional programming designed to help them construct a blueprint for their postsecondary journey.

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APPENDIX A

CHUH AND CHHS STATE REPORT CARDS

Ohio School Report Cards



District Grade

Cleveland Heights-University Heights City

Districts and schools report information for the Ohio School Report Cards on specific marks of performance, called measures, within broad categories called components. They receive grades for up to ten measures and six components.

Achievement

The Achievement Component represents whether student performance on state tests met established thresholds and how well students performed on tests overall. A new indicator measures chronic absenteeism.

Performance Index
62.6%

Indicators Met
4.2%



Component Grade

Progress

The Progress component looks closely at the growth that all students are making based on their past performances.

Value-Added
Overall Gifted
Lowest 20% in Achievement
Students with Disabilities



Component Grade

Gap Closing

The Gap Closing component shows how well schools are meeting the performance expectations for our most vulnerable students in English language arts, math, graduation and English language proficiency.

Annual Measurable Objectives
73.1%



Component Grade

Graduation Rate

The Graduation Rate component looks at the percent of students who are successfully finishing high school with a diploma in four or five years.

Graduation Rates
86.6% of students graduated in 4 years
90.6% of students graduated in 5 years



Component Grade

Improving At-Risk K-3 Readers

This component looks at how successful the school is at improving at-risk K-3 readers.

Improving At-Risk K-3 Readers
34.8%



Component Grade

Prepared for Success

Whether training in a technical field or preparing for work or college, the Prepared for Success component looks at how well prepared Ohio's students are for all future opportunities.



Component Grade

Ohio School Report Cards



School Grade

Cleveland Heights High School

Districts and schools report information for the Ohio School Report Cards on specific marks of performance, called measures, within broad categories called components. They receive grades for up to ten measures and six components.

Achievement

The Achievement Component represents whether student performance on state tests met established thresholds and how well students performed on tests overall. A new indicator measures chronic absenteeism.

Performance Index
57.3%
Indicators Met
10.0%



Component Grade

D
F

Progress

The Progress component looks closely at the growth that all students are making based on their past performances.

Value-Added
Overall
Gifted
Lowest 20% in Achievement
Students with Disabilities



Component Grade

F
B
C
F

Gap Closing

The Gap Closing component shows how well schools are meeting the performance expectations for our most vulnerable students in English language arts, math, graduation and English language proficiency.

Annual Measurable Objectives
48.6%



Component Grade

F

Graduation Rate

The Graduation Rate component looks at the percent of students who are successfully finishing high school with a diploma in four or five years.

Graduation Rates
86.6% of students graduated in 4 years
90.6% of students graduated in 5 years



Component Grade

C
B

Improving At-Risk K-3 Readers

This component looks at how successful the school is at improving at-risk K-3 readers.

Improving At-Risk K-3 Readers
NC



Component Grade

NR

Prepared for Success

Whether training in a technical field or preparing for work or college, the Prepared for Success component looks at how well prepared Ohio's students are for all future opportunities.

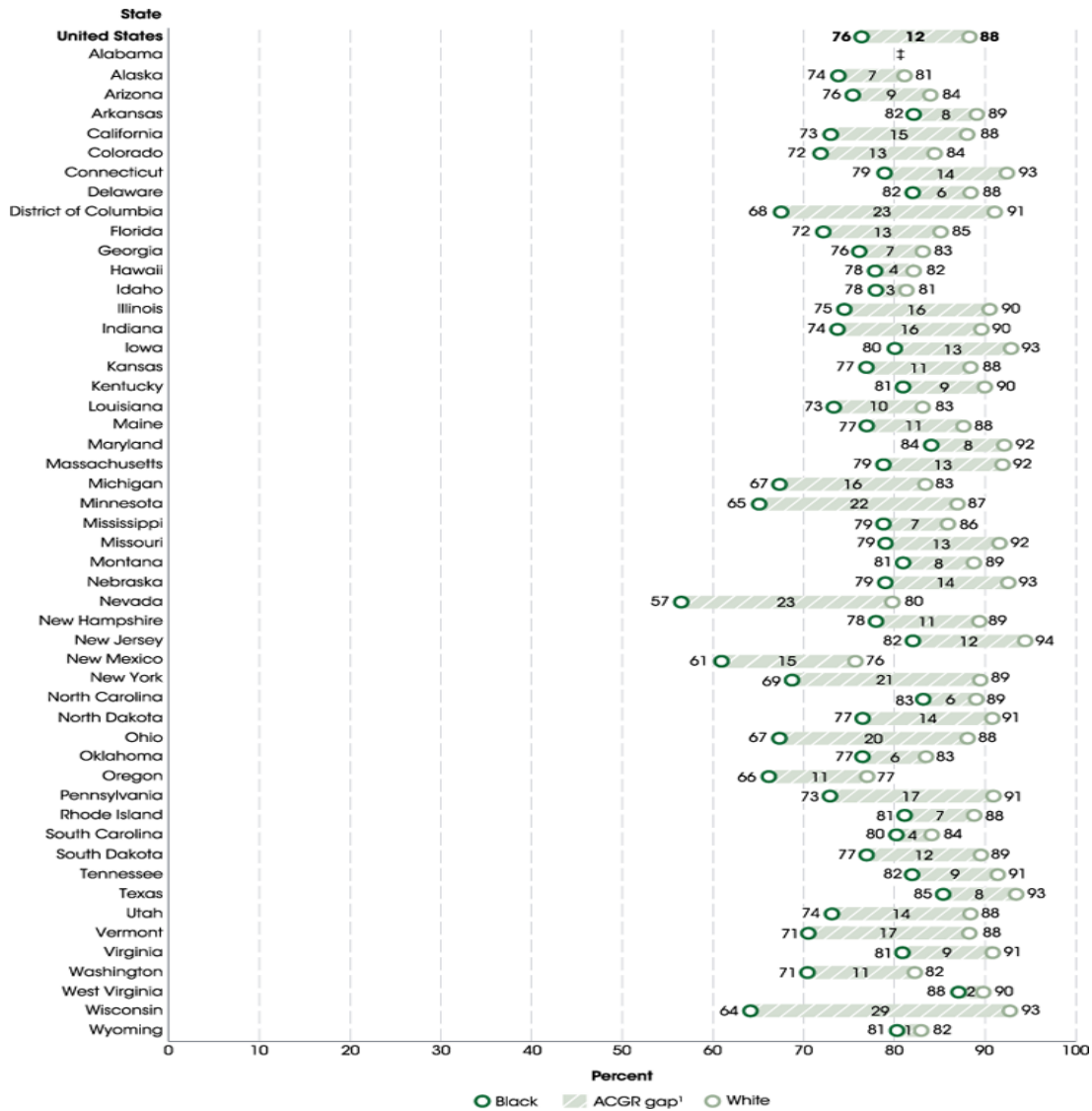


Component Grade

APPENDIX B

ADJUSTED COHORT GRADUATION RATE OF WHITE AND BLACK PUBLIC
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, BY STATE: 2015-16

Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate Of White And Black Public High School Students, By State: 2015-16



¹ The graduation rate gaps were calculated using the most precise graduation rates available for public use, which include some rates rounded to one decimal place and some rates rounded to whole numbers. These gaps may vary slightly from those that would be calculated using unrounded rates.

NOTE: The ACGR is the percentage of public high school freshmen who graduate with a regular diploma within 4 years of starting 9th grade. The Bureau of Indian Education and Puerto Rico were not included in the U.S. 4-year ACGR estimate. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018)

APPENDIX C

COUNTER-NARRATIVE ACTIVITY INTERVIEW GUIDE

Part I: The Beginning/Childhood life

1. What is your full name? Nickname?
2. When were you born?
3. Where were you born?
4. What was life like?
5. Describe your best childhood memory
6. At what age did you start school?
7. What did you wish or dream of learning? What was your best experience in school?
8. What was your worst experience in school?
9. What did you think of your teachers?
10. In what ways did your family shape your educational aspirations?
11. In what ways did your racial/ethnic identity(ies) affect your educational aspirations?
12. In what ways did your socio-economic background affect your educational aspirations?

Part II: College Journey

1. Did you feel there were any obstacles or barriers to believing that college was possible for you?
2. How did you deal with these barriers?
3. In what ways were these barriers connected to your family?
4. What role(s) did your family play as you dealt with these barriers?
5. In what ways were these barriers connected to your racial/ethnic background?
6. How did you deal with these barriers?
7. In what ways were these barriers connected to your socio-economic background?

If participant says that he/she had no obstacles, ask: Why do you believe you did not experience any obstacles.

8. As you were deciding to attend college, could you describe any individuals who helped you in the process?
9. Could you describe any groups (peers, informal, and formal) that helped you in deciding to prepare for, apply to, select, and then attend college?
10. Could you describe any social networks (neighbors, extended family, religious, employers) that helped you in deciding to prepare for, apply to, select, and then attend college?
11. Could you describe any community or school organizations that helped you in deciding to prepare for, apply to, select, and then attend college?

Part III: Reflection

1. Do you consider my education important?

2. What do you think of my school and teachers?
3. What would you do if I didn't go to school?
4. What are your dreams for me?
5. What else would you like me to know?

Part IV: Advice

1. What else do you want to know about that which you do not know?

Questions adapted from Cuevas, P., Knaus, C., Ortiz-Licon, F., & Pizarro, M. (2013). *Applied critical race theory: The impact of a counter-storytelling curriculum* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1468695985/> and Espino, M., & Lee, J. (2008). *Master narratives and counter-narratives: An analysis of Mexican American life stories of oppression and resistance along the journeys to the doctorate* [ProQuest Dissertations Publishing]. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304685809/>

APPENDIX D
JOURNAL WRITING PROMPT

Journal Writing Prompt 1

What are your motivations for pursuing or not pursuing a postsecondary education? What are your career goals and aspirations? What steps do you need to complete to get to those goals and aspirations? Explain in detail.

Journal Writing Prompt 2

What are some potential barriers that you could potentially face when trying to pursue a postsecondary education? What supports would you need to overcome these barriers? Explain in detail.

Journal Writing Prompt 3

After participating in the college and career readiness summer program, what are 3 things you learned? What are your motivations for pursuing or not pursuing a postsecondary education? If you had to decide on a college to attend today, do you feel prepared to make that decision? Explain in detail.

APPENDIX E
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following are the interview questions ask to the participants (individually):

There are two rounds of individual interviews: The first round has to do with Cleveland Heights High School (Heights) courses and departments that influence students' decision. The second round has to do with Heights and the students' plans after high school.

Individual Interview Round 1: Heights Classes Questions:

1. What classes are you taking currently here at Heights and which are you favorite/least favorite?
2. Are there particular teacher/classes that have influenced you while you have been at Heights?
3. What is your opinion of school in general?
4. What other activities or programs are you involved with in the school or in your community (i.e. sports, church, dance)?
5. According to the administration, there are a lot of opportunities provided for you here at the high school (i.e. free SAT'S, college readiness programs, SAT courses, free college applications, college-to-career programs).
Did you know about these programs and if so how?
If not, why do you think you never heard about them?
6. What specifically do you do in your classes related to college or life after high school?
7. What is your opinion of guidance at Heights?
8. How often do you meet with your guidance counselor? Do you think this influences your choices regarding school?
9. What is your opinion of the Gear Up 2 New Heights program?
10. Whom do you feel most comfortable with at school when discussing college or career plans? How did you gain this comfort?

Individual Interview Round 2: College Planning Questions:

11. What is it like being a student here at Heights?
12. What do you see yourself doing after you graduate from Heights?
If it is college: where are you in the process of the college process?
If not: What do you see yourself doing (long terms dreams/goals)?
13. How realistic is this plan?
14. Have you always felt like you wanted to go to college?
If so, when do you remember knowing that you wanted to go to college?
If not, when did you realize that college was not for you?
15. Does your family support you in your decision?
16. Is your decision unique to you or are your friends planning on doing after Heights?
How do your friends feel about you going on to college or going into the workforce?
How do other adults feel about your plan?

17. What are you most excited about in going to college?
18. What concerns do you have about going on to college?
19. If college is in your future plans, are you concerned about the money needed for college?
20. What hurdles/roadblocks do you feel may impact your decision or ability to attend college?

APPENDIX F
INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

PARENTAL LETTER OF PERMISSION

Dear Parent:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Gustavo Fischman in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to understand from a student's perspective how they make their postsecondary decisions.

I am inviting your child to participate in this study. The study will which involve three journal writing prompts, counter-narrative storytelling activity, individual interviews, and focus group sessions. The research study will be conducted July 6th through August 7th. The summer bootcamp will last approximately three hours each day (Monday-Friday). Due to Covid-19, all activities will be held during the summer break and will be conducted through a virtual platform (i.e. Zoom or Google Meet) to protect the welfare and safety of all participants. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. During participant's attendance at the bootcamp, your child will be asked to complete two interviews and two focus group which will each be approximately 30-40 minutes long. Responding to the journal writing prompts will take 20 to 30 minutes to complete. The counter-narrative storytelling activity involves your child interviewing a parent/guardian or grandparent about their experiences in school and how that may have impacted their own post-secondary journey. The counter-narrative storytelling activity will take between 60-90 minutes to complete and is to be completed prior to their second scheduled individual interview. As a part of the summer program curriculum design, students may be asked to complete surveys and assessments, this material may be collected and used for research purposes with all personal identifying information removed. If you choose not to allow your child to participate or decide to withdraw your child from the study at any time, there will be no penalty and it will not affect your child's grade, or the services receive from College Now Greater Cleveland. The results of the research study may be published, but your child's name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to your child, the possible benefit of their participation is an increased motivation to pursue a postsecondary education and a better understanding of themselves as a student. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your child's participation.

The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your child's name will not be known/used. In order to protect confidentiality, they will create a reproducible participant ID. Any identifying information will be deleted upon transcription. The reproducible participant ID is a code made up of letters and numbers, rather than their name for data analysis. The reproducible participant ID will allow the researcher to link their responses to the journal writing prompts, interviews, and focus group sessions. I would like to audio record and video record the interview and focus group sessions. The audio and video recording will be done using the recording feature on Zoom/Google Meet. The interview and focus group sessions will not be recorded without their permission. The students can let me know if they do not want the interview or focus

group session to be recorded; participants can change their mind after the interview or focus group session has started. The audio and video recordings will be deleted transcription. Due to the nature of focus groups, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The researcher is not responsible for any discussion held by the group participants after the focus group session is completed.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child's participation in this study, please call me at 330-714-9831 or Dr. Gustavo Fischman at fischman@asu.edu.

Sincerely,

Carmen C. Daniel

By signing below, you are giving consent for your child _____
(Child's name) to participate in the above study.

Signature

Printed Name

Date

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

WRITTEN CHILD ASSENT FORM

My name is Carmen Daniel. I am a doctoral student at Arizona State University.

I am asking you to take part in a research study because I am trying to learn more about what motivates the class of 2023 to pursue or not pursue a postsecondary education. The research study will be conducted July 6th through August 7th. The summer bootcamp will last approximately three hours each day (Monday-Friday). Due to Covid-19, all activities will be held during the summer break and will be conducted through a virtual platform (i.e. Zoom or Google Meet) to protect the welfare and safety of all participants. Your participation in this study is voluntary. I want to understand from your own perspective why you pursue a postsecondary education. Your parent(s) have given you permission to participate in this study.

If you agree, you will be asked to complete three journal writing prompts, counter-narrative storytelling activity, participate in two individual interviews and two focus group sessions. As a part of the summer program curriculum design, students may be asked to complete surveys and assessments, this material may be collected and used for research purposes with all personal identifying information removed. Answering these questions will take about 20-30 minutes. The interview and focus group sessions will take between 30-40 minutes to complete. The counter-narrative storytelling activity involves you interviewing a parent/guardian or grandparent about their experiences in school and how that may have impacted their own post-secondary journey. The counter-narrative storytelling activity will take between 60-90 minutes to complete and is to be completed prior to your second scheduled individual interview. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be known/used. In order to protect confidentiality, you will create a reproducible participant ID. Any identifying information will be deleted upon transcription. The reproducible participant ID is a code made up of letters and numbers, rather than your name for data analysis. The reproducible participant ID will allow the researcher to link your responses to the journal writing prompts, interviews, and focus group sessions. I would like to audio record and video record the interview and focus group sessions. The audio and video recording will be done using the recording feature on Zoom/Google Meet. The interview and focus group sessions will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview or focus group session to be recorded; you also can change your mind after the interview or focus group session have started. The audio and video recordings will be deleted transcription. Due to the nature of focus groups, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The researcher is not responsible for any discussion held by the group participants after the focus group session is completed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty it will not affect your grade or the services you receive from College Now Greater Cleveland. Likewise, if you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

If you decide to be in the study, I will not tell anyone else how you respond or act as part of the study. Even if your parents or teachers ask, I will not tell them about what you say or do in the study.

Signing here means that you have read this form or have had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study.

Signature of participant _____
Participant's printed name _____
Signature of investigator _____
Date _____

COUNTER-NARRATIVE PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent/Guardian and Grandparent:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Gustavo Fischman in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to understand from a student's perspective how they make their postsecondary decisions.

I am asking you to take part in a research study because I am trying to learn more about what motivates the class of 2023 to pursue or not pursue a postsecondary education. The research study will be conducted July 6th through August 7th. The summer bootcamp will last approximately three hours each day (Monday-Friday). Due to Covid-19, all activities will be held during the summer break and will be conducted through a virtual platform (i.e. Zoom or Google Meet) to protect the welfare and safety of all participants. Your participation in this study is voluntary.

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a counter-narrative storytelling interview that will be conducted by your child/grandchild. Counter-narrative storytelling is a tool used to help contradict and challenge society's racist notions of low academic achievement, poverty, and deficit thinking within majority Black student populated schools. I will be using counter-narrative storytelling to challenge the status quo and deficit thinking that is unjustly placed on Black students. The counter-narrative storytelling activity involves your child/grandchild interviewing you about your experiences in school and how that may have impacted your own post-secondary journey. The counter-narrative storytelling activity will take between 60-90 minutes to complete and is to be completed prior to your child/grandchild's second scheduled individual interview. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be known/used. In order to protect confidentiality, your child/grandchild will label your responses with their reproducible participant ID. Any identifying information will be deleted upon transcription. The reproducible participant ID is a code made up of letters and numbers, rather than your name for data analysis. Using your child/grandchild's reproducible participant ID will allow the researcher to link your responses to the counter-narrative activity to their participant profile.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty it will not affect your child/grandchild's grade or the services you receive from College Now Greater Cleveland. Likewise, if you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

Signing here means that you have read this form or have had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study.

Signature of participant _____
Participant's printed name _____
Signature of investigator _____
Date _____

APPENDIX G
IRB APPROVAL



APPROVAL: EXPEDITED REVIEW

[Gustavo Fischman](#)
 Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe
 480/965-5225
 fischman@asu.edu

Dear [Gustavo Fischman](#):

On 6/6/2020 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	GEARing UP to Clear the Path: What motivates the Cleveland Heights High School Class of 2023 to pursue a postsecondary education
Investigator:	Gustavo Fischman
IRB ID:	STUDY00011973
Category of review:	(7)(a) Behavioral research (7)(b) Social science methods
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carmen Daniel , Category: IRB Protocol; • CHUH District Approval , Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • Focus Group Guide, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Interview Guide , Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Journal Writing Prompt 1, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Journal Writing Prompt 2, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Journal Writing Prompt 3, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);• Parental-Permission, Category: Consent Form;• Written Child Assent Form , Category: Consent Form;
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The IRB approved the protocol from 6/6/2020 to 6/5/2023 inclusive. Three weeks before 6/5/2023 you are to submit a completed Continuing Review application and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 6/5/2023 approval of this protocol expires on that date. When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the “Documents” tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Carmen Daniel
Carmen Daniel