

Who Really Cares? Urban Youths' Perceptions of Parental and Programmatic Support

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the perceptions of parental and programmatic support among 20 urban youth. Existing literature indicates that educators often place blame on parents for their perceived lack of involvement in their children's schooling. However, the participants identified their family members (e.g., parents, siblings) as providing them with the greatest amount of support throughout their schooling experience. Additionally, more than half of the sample participated in the Upward Bound program and attributed their educational success to the support they received as program participants. These participants defined support in various ways including emotional encouragement, academic assistance, and college preparation help. Schools should examine parental involvement from a broader perspective to encompass the role parents of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds play in their children's education and tap into these support systems to meet their students' educational needs. Finally, the role of college preparatory program staff should continue to be assessed as a support system for urban youth.

Key Words: urban youth, family support, college preparatory programs, cultural capital, Critical Race Theory, parents, high school students of color

Introduction

African American and Latino students continue to evidence a significant achievement gap when compared to their White counterparts. Throughout the

educational pipeline, educators need to be aware of the need for rigorous academic preparation for African American and Latino students (Vega & Moore, 2012). African American students tend to underperform on standardized tests and have lower grade point averages (GPAs) compared to White students (Whaley & Noel, 2012). African Americans have higher dropout rates and, among those who graduate, are less likely to enroll in and graduate from college than Whites (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). The Latino population continues to grow and is the nation's largest "minority" group (Gándara, 2010; Zurita, 2004). The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that by 2021, one of four K–12 students in the U.S. will be Latino (Gándara, 2010). Unfortunately, this group's educational attainment is not commensurate with their rapid growth. Minimal access to preschool contributes to this educational gap (NCES, 2009).

Poverty accounts for the significant gaps in educational success among African American and Latino youth; however, "poverty in and of itself is not the issue, but what it typically denies is access in terms of positive role models and other social resources" (Madyun, 2011, p. 23). With poverty comes risk factors including a lack of health insurance, poor nutrition, low parental education, and attendance at low-resourced, highly segregated schools with less qualified teachers (Gándara, 2010). According to the Pew Hispanic Center, Latinos have the highest high school dropout rate of all racial and ethnic groups (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). Latino and African American students alike participate in Advanced Placement (AP) classes at a low rate. They tend to be underrepresented in AP classes and attend highly segregated schools with low student enrollment in AP courses (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). The low academic performance of African American and Latino students in elementary and secondary schools has strong implications for their college readiness skills. However, social support from persons, including families and college preparatory program staff, may provide African American and Latino students with the assistance they need to achieve academic success (Jacobson & Crockett, 2000; Reid & Moore, 2008; Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2008). In order for these students to contribute their full potential to society, factors contributing to this gap need to be further examined.

As part of a larger study investigating the educational experiences of students of color, this exploratory study examined perceptions of support, specifically from their families and the Upward Bound program staff, among 20 urban youth attending high schools in the Midwest. Student perceptions are important and can impact how they function within the school setting, yet they are often absent from the literature. A qualitative study was most appropriate in developing an understanding of the support systems available to students of color. This study sought to provide relevant information about students'

perceptions of support systems to educators, researchers, and parents. Further, it sought to develop ways for educators and parents to tap into supports for collaboration in breaking down inequities in achievement for students of color. The researchers explored the following questions:

- (1) Who provides urban youth with the most support?
- (2) In what ways do these persons provide urban youth with support?

Review of the Literature

Family Support

African American and Latino parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds face many challenges when it comes to participating in their children's education. A common misconception among educators is that because many of these parents are not physically present at school functions, they do not value education and do not care about their children's schooling (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). The emphasis on traditional forms of participation neglects culturally diverse perspectives and deflects attention from the schools' responsibility to establish effective parental involvement programs for marginalized groups (Singh et al., 1995; Valencia, 1997). It places an unreasonable burden on low-income parents to engage in activities at school, when they face significant obstacles to this type of participation (Knight, Norton, Bentley, & Dixon, 2004). Contrary to this popular perception, research demonstrates that parents of urban youth want to be involved in their children's education (Trumbull et al., 2001), but frequently experience obstacles to direct involvement at their children's schools (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; García-Coll et al., 2002; Huss-Keeler, 1997; Lopez, 2001; Trueba, 1988; Vega, 2010).

Obstacles that made direct involvement difficult for low-income, African American parents included time, transportation, lack of financial resources, and lack of awareness of school activities (Williams & Sánchez, 2011). These parents reported that they cared about their children's education, but noted that school events and meetings frequently occurred in the middle of the day or during their shifts when they could not leave their jobs to attend. Minority immigrant parents reported more barriers to participation and were subsequently less likely to be involved at school when compared to native-born parents (Turney & Kao, 2009). Barriers among immigrant Hispanic families included inconvenient meeting times, safety concerns, not feeling welcomed by the school, problems with transportation, not being able to get time off from work, and linguistic barriers. These barriers are similar to those that Williams and Sánchez identified for African American parents. Additionally, the pervasive fear of deportation often impedes immigrant parents' participation in public

settings such as schools (Menjivar & Abrego, 2012). Turney and Kao (2009) also found that time in the United States and English language proficiency were positively associated with involvement among immigrant parents.

Despite barriers to direct parental involvement among low-income parents of students of color, some parents are able to attend school events, and others provide support in different ways. Findings from Yan's study (1999) revealed that, despite coming from disadvantaged home environments, African American parents demonstrated higher or equivalent levels of parent involvement than did White parents. Further, Wilson (2009) found that African American students' perceptions of parental monitoring (e.g., asking about school activities, monitoring friends) were related to their achievement.

Finally, strategic and formal attempts by schools to involve parents can have positive effects for schools, parents, and students. The Futures and Families (F&F) program, a bilingual outreach program designed to provide college information to Latino parents, narrowed the information gap, enhanced family social networks, and challenged inequalities in schooling (Auerbach, 2004). The Latino parents felt supported and less isolated from their children's school due to their participation in the F&F program. Therefore, schools need to work against barriers to parental involvement to create a strong sense of community. Collaboration between families and schools is extremely important for the success of African American and Latino youth. Decreased communication may create misunderstandings and affect the ways parents and school personnel interact and participate in the schooling process (Patel & Stevens, 2010). However, when school staff and family members recognize sources of school-related support, they are more likely to tap into those sources and support students cooperatively (Hilgendorf, 2012).

College Preparatory Programs: Upward Bound

Students from low-income backgrounds, underrepresented groups, and potential first-generation college students tend to lack experiential knowledge about college. They are often underprepared, uninformed, and overwhelmed by what they should know to successfully navigate their high school experience (Reyes & Nora, 2012; Tym, McMillion, Baron, & Webster, 2004). Consequently, numerous college preparatory programs have been developed to help these students. One example of these types of college preparatory programs is the Upward Bound program, a federally funded educational program created under the *Higher Education Act of 1965*. It is designed to support students in their preparation for college entrance and "provide opportunities for participants to succeed in their precollege performance and ultimately in their higher education pursuits" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., "Program Description," para. 1).

The Upward Bound program offers academic instruction in mathematics, sciences, language arts, and foreign languages. During the school year, students attend weekly in-school meetings with Upward Bound staff and participate in college visits and community service projects. Additionally, during the Summer Institute, students receive intensive academic support and learn about the resources available for students on college campuses; they receive a small stipend as well. The social and cultural capital gained from college preparatory programs such as Upward Bound may play a critical role in the college readiness process for low-income and/or Latino students (Cates & Schaeffe, 2011).

Existing research examining the effectiveness of the Upward Bound program indicates mixed findings on students' academic achievement and college performance. A series of reports prepared by Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) presented findings from a national evaluation of the Upward Bound program's effectiveness from 1999–2009. An early MPR report demonstrated that students remained in Upward Bound for only a short time due to transportation issues, taking a job, and time conflicts (Myers & Schirm, 1999). Grimard and Maddaus (2004) revealed similar findings; many students failed to participate in the Upward Bound summer program because they were able to make more money in other settings. Other concerns included being away from home and fear of being in an unknown setting, such as the university. Increased efforts to raise awareness about the potential long-term benefits of Upward Bound may lead students to participate and remain in the program.

Results consistently showed, throughout the MPR reports, that Upward Bound increased postsecondary enrollment and completion for students with lower initial educational expectations (Myers & Schirm, 1999; Myers, Olsen, Seftor, Young, & Tuttle, 2004; Seftor, Mamun, & Schirm, 2009). Longer participation in the program was associated with higher rates of postsecondary enrollment and completion. These findings indicated that students from underrepresented backgrounds who sought out programmatic support through Upward Bound represented a strongly motivated part of the target population. Due to their motivation, they accessed needed assistance, graduated from high school, enrolled in college, and completed college at rates consistent with the total youth population. An emphasis on recruiting less motivated students who are not receiving precollege support may help address educational inequalities (McElroy & Armesto, 1998). Additionally, Upward Bound cannot achieve these objectives of augmenting academic and sociocultural strengths for students from underserved backgrounds alone. Instead, an emphasis on hiring high quality teachers at all levels and giving them the tools they need to do their job effectively, including meaningful professional development, is necessary.

Theoretical Frameworks

The researchers utilized Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (1986) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) as theoretical frameworks for this study. Bourdieu's work provides a context for examining the effects of social class position in society (Lareau, 2003). Bourdieu (1977) indicated that individuals from different social classes are socialized differently. These experiences influence the amount and type of resources or capital a person receives and utilizes when exposed to different situations in life. Bourdieu indicated that an individual's social position is not the result of attributes such as intelligence, hard work, effort, or talent. Rather, activities that occur in the home (e.g., discussions, participation in organized activities, negotiating) are awarded unequal value in dominant society due to the alignment of childrearing practices in privileged homes and those standards imposed by institutions such as schools (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau, 2003). Lareau (2003) found that White and Black middle-class families engaged in purposeful practices to foster their children's skills. The working class and poor families perceived child development as occurring spontaneously. These families were concerned with providing comfort, food, and shelter. The social status of one's family is not a determinant of one's future, but has strong implications for life experiences and outcomes.

Bourdieu (1986) described cultural capital as the knowledge, beliefs, and sense of self closely linked to a person that is valued by society as well as the culture a person lives in, values, and wants to fit into. This notion is problematic for low-income students of color who do not have access to the capital of the middle class and elite class that is valued in society. Living in impoverished neighborhoods often prevents low-income students from developing the cultural capital associated with academic success throughout the educational pipeline. The participants in the current study reported coming from low-income backgrounds, and the majority of their parents had not attended or completed college. The participants also encountered struggles navigating the public school system.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) serves as a means to challenge the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), for example, African American and Latino youth. The pioneers of CRT, Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado, argued that racism is an endemic part of American society (see Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). It is deeply rooted through historical consciousness and ideological choices about race (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Consequently, it directly molded the U.S. legal system and the ways people think about the law, race,

and privilege (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced CRT into the field of education because institutional and structural racism seems to be built into public schooling, imposing a position of inferiority for students of color.

The three main goals of CRT include: (a) presenting storytelling/narratives as valid approaches through which to examine race and racism in the law and society; (b) arguing for the eradication of racial subjugation while simultaneously recognizing that race is a social construct; and (c) drawing important relationships between race and other axes of domination (Milner, 2007; Parker & Lynn, 2002). CRT narratives provide readers with a challenging account of preconceived notions of race (Parker & Lynn, 2002). The voices heard in narratives acknowledge the importance of personal and community experiences of people of color as sources of knowledge (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Through participants' stories, their experiences become reality for those who ignore the prevalence of racism in society.

The second goal of CRT is the recognition that race is not a biological concept; instead, it is socially constructed. Race is defined by societal perceptions of groups of people and is constantly changing. Critical race theorists attempt to explain the consequences of systemic, policy-related racism and work to disrupt and transform policies, laws, theories, and practices through the exposure of racism (Milner, 2007). Finally, the third goal of CRT is to examine the intersectionality of other underrepresented areas, such as feminism and sexism. CRT is used to uncover injustices and instances of disempowerment among other marginalized groups. Using CRT as a framework for the current study provided students with the opportunity to make their concerns heard, related to levels of support.

Methodology

Participants

Twenty youth from six high schools in a large, urban public school district in the Midwest participated in the present study. Twelve participants were female, and eight were male. Pseudonyms were used to preserve the identities of the school district (e.g., Crawford City school district), high schools (e.g., Baker, Evergreen, Miami, Stanley, Waterford, Watson), and all individuals mentioned. Thirteen of the 20 students participated in the Upward Bound program's Summer Institute at a large Midwestern university. These 13 students attended Baker, Evergreen, Miami, Stanley, and Waterford High School. The remaining seven students attended Watson High School; they were chosen because the Upward Bound program's Summer Institute participants included

only one Latino participant. Watson High School had the largest percentage of Latino students in the district so students were recruited from this setting.

To recruit participants from Upward Bound, the lead researcher presented the purpose of the study at lunch to all students in the Summer Institute. At Watson High School, the lead researcher worked with the school psychologist and English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher to recruit participants. One participant with a high level of English proficiency was recruited from the ESL classroom; she assisted the lead researcher in identifying the remaining six participants during her lunch period. Additional students from the ESL classroom were not recruited for inclusion in the study due to their low levels of English proficiency. All students who returned a signed parental consent form and assent form and were available to be interviewed participated in the study. If a student was at least 18 years old, he or she signed and returned an adult consent form to the researcher.

Of the 20 participants, 10 self-identified as African American, two as Biracial or Multiracial, and eight as Latino. Five of the eight Latino students were born outside of the United States. The majority of the participants' (15) self-reported GPAs were in the above average and average range (A, 100–90; B, 89–80). All of the participants in the study indicated that they received free/reduced lunch. Additionally, the participants were between 15 and 18 years old; 15 students were 16 or 17 years of age. Thirteen of the participants lived in one-parent/guardian households, and of the 13, nine students resided with their mothers. Finally, 13 of the participants' parents had completed middle or high school, one attended a trade school, and six attended some college (i.e., a two- or four-year institution).

Data Collection

Document Collection

Prior to each individual interview, the lead researcher administered a brief, biographical questionnaire to the participants. These questionnaires included information on student, community, and family demographics. The biographical questionnaire allowed the researchers to obtain an ecological perspective about the participants and their home and school environments. Prior to each individual interview, the participants created pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and protect their identity. The lead researcher also gathered data (e.g., attendance rate, graduation rate, demographics) on the school district and the six high schools the participants attended from the state department of education's website.

Interviews

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to gather in-depth information on the educational experiences of the students. Using an interview protocol prevents the researcher from imposing his or her interests on interviewees and ensures the participants are all asked the same questions (Seidman, 1991). The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Each individual interview lasted approximately 25 to 45 minutes and focused on a variety of topics; however, for this article, the researchers only utilized the interview questions that focused on this study (e.g., Who provides you with academic support? Who helps you select courses? Who is helping you achieve your future goals?). The interview questions were adapted and modified from Sanders' 1997 study and are available from authors upon request.

Researcher Subjectivity

Because subjectivity is consistently present during the research process, scholars should systematically address their subjectivities (Peshkin, 1988). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four trustworthiness criteria for qualitative research to ensure reliability and validity: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The following methods were utilized to ensure the trustworthiness of the research process and findings: prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing. This study began in the summer of 2009 and continued from February to May 2010. The primary researcher spent a considerable amount of time engaging with the participants prior to, throughout, and after the interview process (e.g., during lunch period, school-related activities) to build trust and rapport. Triangulation methods were implemented through the study including the use of multiple data collection methods, multiple investigators, and multiple theoretical frameworks. Participants were provided with a copy of their interview transcript to conduct member checks and ensure the accuracy of their statements. Additionally, the primary researcher used her co-authors to debrief throughout the study.

Data Analysis

Using grounded theory, this study utilized the constant comparative analytic approach for data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data collected from the first interview was coded and compared to each subsequent interview for emerging themes and patterns. The lead researcher and her research partner began analysis with the assignment of codes that reflected common themes within the data; those that appeared to pertain to the same phenomena were categorized (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The codes were then

compiled into a codebook, which included definitions of each code and examples. These codes were examined until complete agreement of assigned codes was achieved between the lead researcher and her research partner. Participants were provided with interview transcripts to conduct member checks and confirm the accuracy. None of the participants changed or added anything as they felt the transcripts accurately portrayed their experiences.

Results

Throughout the interviews, the participants consistently mentioned how relationships and support from people, such as their family members and the Upward Bound program staff, enhanced their schooling experiences. These relationships are discussed in the sections that follow.

“Do your best”: Familial Support

The majority of the participants’ parents/guardians completed middle school or high school and resided in one-parent/guardian households. Most of the adult figures in their lives could provide only limited academic assistance and college preparation help. This finding became evident when students discussed the persons that helped them the most with their schoolwork and selecting classes. Only three of the 20 students mentioned that members of their family assisted them the most with schoolwork. For example, Junior [African American, 10th grade, B GPA, Evergreen High] lamented, “My mom helps me with my homework...she knows a lot of stuff, so she’ll help me. My dad, he’s not the best, he wasn’t the best at school, so [he] just leaves it alone.”

Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B GPA, Watson High] described the minimal amount of involvement his parents had with his schoolwork. He shared, “... they see my report card, if it has a bad grade lower than a C, they would ask, but besides that, nothing much. I don’t involve them that much; they’re working and doing all that. So there’s no point, and if I can do it on my own, then there’s no need.” Linda [Latina, 12th grade, B GPA, Watson High] discussed the challenges that her parents faced in helping her academically due to her parent’s language barrier and busy work schedules. She said, “My mom doesn’t speak English, so she can’t help me at all. My dad does, but he’s usually not home, so he doesn’t help me.” The majority of the participants could not ask their parents/guardians for academic support due to low educational levels, busy work schedules, and language barriers.

Only one student, LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C GPA, Waterford High], indicated he received assistance in selecting courses from a family member, his older sister, who had recently completed high school. He

stated, "My family in general does not really play a big role, but my sister, she really, she focuses on it hard. Like she'll ask me, 'When are y'all scheduling classes?' and she'll ask me for a copy of my transcript, and she'll make a prototype schedule for me of what she thinks I should have."

While only three students indicated that their parents/guardians were able to provide them with specific academic help, when the researcher asked the students, "Who is helping you to reach your goals?" all 20 of the participants reported persons in their family. For example, Mia [Latina, 11th grade, A GPA, Baker High] indicated that her family provided her with strong words of encouragement and held her to high standards by telling her, "You're going somewhere in life, you're not gonna be working in McDonald's when you're 23 years old." She explained that her mom had not attended college nor had anyone else in her family; therefore, they wanted her to achieve more than they had. Elizabeth's [Latina, 12th grade, B GPA, Watson High] mother also had similar words for her by telling her, "I'm the mirror, look at me, don't be how I am right now. Do your work; just graduate from high school first, then go to college." In reference to her mother, Amy [Biracial, 11th grade, B GPA, Baker High] stated, "She didn't go to college, so she doesn't know much about that kind of thing. So she says, 'do your best' about everything." Although the majority of the participants' parents had not attended college, they did not want their children to struggle or work low-paying jobs in the future. They held high aspirations for them and offered words of encouragement such as "Do your best."

Four students indicated that their parents provided them with assistance in pursuit of their college goals beyond emotional support. For instance, Thomas [African American, 11th grade, C GPA, Baker High], who was interested in becoming an engineer, told the researcher, "My mom, she knows a couple of people who are engineers, so I talk to them about their job and what I need to do to get there." Tommy [African American, 12th grade, A GPA, Waterford High] stated, "She's [mom] the one who gave me the idea to open my own managing firm." Junior [African American, 10th grade, B GPA, Evergreen High] shared, "When I told her [mom] I wanted to go to Purdue [University], she started looking at Purdue's website at their engineering stuff." Additionally, Talayah [African American, 11th grade, C GPA, Evergreen High] stated, "When I first told them [her parents] what I wanted to do when I get older as a career, they made me research it."

"I was always taught to just challenge myself": Upward Bound Program

The majority (13) of the students in the study participated in the Upward Bound program. When the participants were asked, "Who is helping you to

reach your goals?”, 10 of the 13 participants in the Upward Bound program lauded the support of the program staff. When the lead researcher asked the students how Upward Bound was helping them to achieve their goals, they mentioned,

They’re getting you there. They’re pushing you, they’re like, you’re gonna do this, you cannot have no free time, you need to be studying. — Mia [Latina, 11th grade, A GPA, Baker High]

Being in Upward Bound, I was always taught to just challenge myself... Upward Bound helps me because they believe in me; it gives me the courage to go on. They’re positive, they’re always complimenting me, they’re always, how could I put it? Keeping me up and letting me know that I’m gonna be somebody—giving me the extra push, and they prepare me for college with the work and just the schedule and everything. — Lisa [African American, 12th grade, A GPA, Evergreen High]

They letting me know what I need to do to get to college, to stay in college, experience, letting me know what I might encounter when I attend college, the obstacles I’m gonna have to overcome...not partying all the time...letting me know what kind of applications I have to fill out, sign up for financial aid, good ways to study, that’s it. — James [African American, 11th grade, B GPA, Miami High]

In Upward Bound, we went on a couple of college tours, we look at colleges, and some of the colleges were engineering colleges, and Ms. Laura [program director] had me go to a couple of workshops, and I met a couple of people who do engineering. — Thomas [African American, 11th grade, C GPA, Baker High]

From these statements, it is clear that the Upward Bound program staff had a very strong influence on how these students’ perceived their futures. Many participants discussed how the program pushed them to do their best and challenged them to be better students. Consistent with the purpose of the program, the students received college preparation through the courses they enrolled in, college visits, and workshops. They were also provided with information about financial aid, as well as the realities of the college experience, such as when James [African American, 11th grade, B GPA, Miami High] mentioned, “not partying all the time” and study skills.

Further, Talayah [African American, 11th grade, C GPA, Evergreen High] shared,

Upward Bound is helping me. They’ll ask us what we want to become, and they’ll put all of us in groups of what we want to become. They’ll have a guest speaker come into that group and talk to them about it to

make sure that person really wants to do it. Upward Bound had someone come talk to me because I'm the only one that wants to do it [forensic science], and he showed me pictures; he thought it was gonna freak me out, but I guess it didn't. He helped me; we started dissecting frogs, and he said, "Act like this is a dead person." So it helps a lot.

Monique [African American, 11th grade, C GPA, Stanley High] also reported that the Upward Bound program staff encouraged the students "to hurry up and pick a college and made the juniors do their applications cuz we got one more year. So they're trying to make us ready for college life."

Compared to non-Upward Bound participants, differences existed in the area of support from friends. While all participants noted support from their family and relatively little support from teachers and other persons (i.e., coaches, mentors, neighbors, school counselors), eight of the 13 Upward Bound participants reported seeking support in achieving their goals from their friends, while only one of the seven non-Upward Bound participants reported this finding. Additionally, the non-Upward Bound participants did not report any support from college preparation programs similar to Upward Bound.

Discussion

Current research literature is sparse with regard to exploring urban students' perceptions of educational support from their own perspectives. Considering the structural inequities present in the public school system that affect the achievement of students of color, it is vital to understand student perceptions as well as how educators can tap into supports and enhance collaborative relationships. While findings are not generalizable to other students of color, the study employed techniques to ensure trustworthiness described in the methodology section and contributes to the field despite this limitation. In examining the question of "*Who really cares?*", participants overwhelmingly identified their families and Upward Bound staff as supportive of their educational goals. Contrary to common perceptions of low-income parents' involvement, these families demonstrated involvement in their children's education, and the participants valued familial support and the various forms in which it was provided (e.g., emotional encouragement, academic assistance). Additionally, parents used their struggles as an example to show their children that education is the key to success and having a better quality of life. This finding has not been well examined in research; it would be beneficial for greater understanding if students of color, in fact, perceive their parents' struggles and challenges related to poverty and low educational attainment as a motivating factor. Further analyses are also required to better understand the relationship between academic success and the diverse forms of familial support provided to urban youth.

To a lesser degree, parents gave their children specific advice and assistance regarding homework and accessing college and career information. Participants shared that their parents had them research colleges and programs of interest, had them talk to professionals in their children's field of interest, and discussed ideas about potential career paths. The participants who received this type of support participated in the Upward Bound program. Their parents may have provided increased assistance because the Upward Bound program required parental attendance at events. As a result, the parents may have felt more empowered with the cultural capital necessary to share with their children and assist them in preparing for college. This hypothesis is consistent with Moore's (2006) recommendations to parents suggesting that access to information such as the importance of knowing different career options available to their children and being aware of their children's academic progress positively influences academic success.

Overall, this study underscores the need for educators to understand that students may perceive that their parents are supportive and to acknowledge the ways in which parents are involved with their children's education. Current literature (Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009; Williams & Sánchez, 2011) and Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital have documented barriers to parental involvement for low-income youth. Nonetheless, while barriers to direct in-school involvement including limited English proficiency, busy work schedules, and low education levels prevented academic support such as assistance with homework and selecting classes, participants shared that their families still provided support and encouragement.

Participants in the Upward Bound program found the staff to be supportive and indicated that they developed increased confidence in their ability to be successful in the future. The Upward Bound program offered intensive college preparation, which participants considered to be beneficial. While Upward Bound is considered by some to be a deficit-based program (Pearl, 2002), without it, participants would lack access to such rigorous college preparation. The experience of participating in the program demonstrated the investment these students were making in their futures. The effects on student achievement in college after Upward Bound participation remains mixed; however, researchers have found increased participation in higher education (Pitre & Pitre, 2009), increased postsecondary enrollment and completion for students with lower initial educational expectations (Myers & Schirm, 1999; Myers et al., 2004; Seftor et al., 2009), and a greater willingness to seek out supports on campus (McLure & Childs, 1998). These findings may indicate that because participants experienced support from persons that cared about them, they felt more comfortable seeking out support when they reached college campuses.

From a CRT framework, the participants' lack of access to support in school may indicate the institutional racism inherent in public schooling. Because these students came from low-income backgrounds and their parents did not complete college, they lacked the college knowledge that is passed along from parent to child in middle-class homes. The schools they attended were also low resourced, and consequently, participants did not report receiving support from school personnel in achieving their future goals. Urban public schools, particularly those that serve students from low-income backgrounds, lack much-needed resources such as high quality teachers and school counselors to support all students (Gándara, 2010; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). School counselors, in particular, have knowledge about pathways to higher education and should be instrumental in providing these students with such guidance. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2012) recommends a student to school counselor ratio of 250:1; however, the national average is 470:1 (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012). The participants' narratives in the current study emphasize the urgent need for collaboration between school personnel and existing supports such as family and college preparatory programs. Further, there is a need for increased support and access to college information in schools.

To strengthen the findings of the study, future research should address the viewpoints of families, school personnel, and college preparatory program staff. Additionally, the effectiveness of college preparatory programs on academic achievement in college should be evaluated, as the literature is wrought with mixed findings on the benefits of programs such as Upward Bound. It is clear that the participants valued the support received from their parents, and this should not be minimized. However, students and parents alike, particularly those from urban low-income backgrounds, must have equitable access to college knowledge if increases in postsecondary enrollment and completion among students of color are to be achieved.

Conclusion

The current study explored perceptions of *who really cares* among urban students of color. Participants reported that parents/family members and Upward Bound program staff were supportive of their educational goals and aspirations and offered assistance in various ways. Collaboration among schools, families, and college preparatory programs, such as Upward Bound, can help increase the academic success of urban youth. It is important that schools function as communities that involve teachers, students, school personnel, and parents. Building strong partnerships with families can afford these youth increased ac-

cess to postsecondary education, empower parents with college knowledge, and enable school staff to reach students with limited college knowledge. In order to help students of color be successful, schools should tap into who students perceive really care about them and recognize the types of supports students receive from these sources. Schools can then provide supplemental assistance in areas where students are lacking support.

For many years, research has focused on the importance of school–family relationships for student success and has recommended that discussions take place to outline how schools perceive parental involvement and what they expect from parents (Patel & Stevens, 2010). Schools should provide training to their staff on cultural issues that may impact direct school involvement. This would be beneficial in helping school personnel understand the barriers related to expected participation such as lack of trust, deference to authority, and degree of acculturation (Guerrero & Leung, 2008; Peña, Silva, Claro, Gamarra, & Parra, 2008) and also understand the need to be flexible in how they expect parents to be involved. Parents want to be involved and want their children to be successful and attend college, but they may require direction in terms of expected participation. Additionally, they may not feel their support is valued if they hold lower education levels, so schools should make efforts to make parents feel worthy of the assistance they can provide at home.

Providing liaisons to facilitate communication for parents who do not speak English and holding meetings in local community centers for parents lacking transportation would be beneficial (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). Schools can provide explicit opportunities for involvement (e.g., parent meetings, social events, workshops, volunteering, family movie night) and offer childcare and incentives (e.g., raffles, food) at events, which may increase parental attendance and participation at school functions. Communicating with parents when scheduling events, offering events on multiple dates and times (e.g., morning, afternoon, evening), expanding communication options (e.g., email), and improving advertising of school events can increase parental participation at school (Williams & Sánchez, 2011). Family–school collaboration demonstrates positive implications for increased access to college preparation information.

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