Why We Gather: Educational Empowerment and Academic Success Through Collective Black Parental Agency

Raquel M. Rall
University of California, Riverside

Abstract
Though previous literature has explored the importance of parents in education, scholarship has failed to empirically demonstrate the influence voluntary parent *groups* have on the educational trajectory of Black students. Using institutional agency and community cultural wealth frameworks, the author qualitatively evaluates a Black parent group's self-initiated efforts to influence the academic outcomes of high-achieving students. The author illustrates how one parent organization negotiates an environment in which their racial group comprises less than 5% of the population to effectively guide and support families as their students navigate academic success. Findings show that at least three critical components— accountability, alliances and networks, and legitimacy—are vital in the provision of collaborative support and agency on behalf of high-achieving students.

Keywords*:* high-achieving Black students, institutional agents, community cultural wealth, Black parents, community organization

"Human education is not simply a matter of schools; it is much more a matter of family and group life—the training of one's home, of one's daily companions, of one's social class."

-W.E.B. DuBois, 1903

Historically, the literature has suggested that Black families tend to not be involved in their children's schooling due to cultural dissonance between the family and school practitioners (Brown-Wright & Tyler, 2010; Irvine, 1990; Jeynes, 2007; Turney & Kao, 2009). Furthermore, if these families do participate in school life, the academic effects and extent of their involvement are thought to be unequal to those seen among other racial/ethnic groups (Bauch & Goldring, 1995; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). However, while past deficit-based scholarship has perpetuated the disproportionate focus on the underachievement of Black students, negative portrayal of Black families, and

Corresponding Author:
Raquel M. Rall, Assistant Professor, University of California, Riverside, 900 University Ave. Riverside, CA, 92521, USA.
Email: raquel.rall@ucr.edu

noninvolvement of Black parents (Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Houston et al., 2020; Kim & Hargrove, 2013), a growing list of scholars acknowledges the present and historical causes of the disparity in how deficit-based scholarship evaluates Black and white involvement in schooling (Warikoo & Carter, 2009) and instead focuses on those students who do achieve in academics (Delpit, 2012; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Griffin, 2006; Hampton, 2016; Strayhorn, 2009; Strmic-Pawl & Leffler, 2011) and Black parents who are intentionally engaged in their children's education (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Posey-Maddox, 2017; Posey-Maddox et al., 2021; Rollock et al., 2015; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013).

The focus on high-achieving Black students (Griffin & Perez, 2013; Freeman, 1999; Fries-Britt, 2002; Marsh et al., 2012; McGee & Pearman, 2015) is important as the literature often implies that Black students who achieve success from within predominantly white communities are rarities or have had to ascribe to certain oppositional identities (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1987; Ogbu, 2004). Though the literature addressing the characteristics of high-achieving Black students is growing (Fries-Britt, 2017), more scholarship on such students is needed (McGee & Pearman, 2015; Strayhorn, 2009).

Two notions are clear regarding Black student success from the literature: supportive families are necessary for school achievement, and effective community-based strategies that support and enhance academic success can help prevent school failure (Slaugther-Defoe, 1991). Two issues warrant further investigation in the literature concerning Black parental involvement in education. First, there is minimal information about the specifics of how and why Black *parent groups* choose to support their children in racially inhospitable schooling environments. Second, the research on the influence of *collective* Black parental involvement in children's education is lacking. Group action, collective leadership, and group organization are important means for facilitating Black parental involvement in children's education (Rall & Holman, forthcoming), but parental involvement has yet to be framed from the collective perspective. This study therefore investigates the collective vantage point, shared experiences, and unique cultural aspects of Black parental involvement in education.

Various empirical studies highlight the role of activism and parental involvement in education (Durand, 2011; Garcia Coll et al., 2002; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016; Young et al., 2013), particularly for minority and first-generation students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). However, few emphasize the necessary, unique, sustained, and successful role that Black parents and the Black community can play in the educational attainment of their students (Brandon, 2007; Cooper, 2009; Jayakumar et al., 2013), let alone discuss how Black parents come together to create and define their involvement in educational spaces. Research is lacking on how Black parent groups are formed on the initiative of parents, rather than schools, and how these groups sustain and execute their mission of ensuring their Black students achieve educational success, especially in light of prior research suggesting that Black parents often expect communication to be initiated by the school (Chavkin & Williams, 1993). It is useful to differentiate between the terms used in the literature to describe the relation between parent groups and their children's schools. "Empowerment" goes beyond the powerless "involvement" (Goldring & Shapira, 1993). Parental empowerment in education describes parents' ability to voice their concerns to the schools and demonstrate authority over their child's education (Kim & Bryan, 2017). Hence, it describes a more active and influential parental role (Warren et al., 2009). "Engagement" encompasses more than activity; it calls for a feeling of ownership of that activity (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). For this paper, parental empowerment is the ability to act on behalf of their children and the knowledge of how to do so and ensure their actions are effective. Additionally, consideration of such empowerment was not limited to the confines of school spaces in this study, as families can exert empowerment on behalf of their students within the community as well.

The research presented in this paper serves to counter the dominant depiction of failure, disappointment, and deficiency of Black students in education as well as the absent or inadequate participation of Black parents. This study highlights how Black parental agency in education can result

in positive outcomes for Black students, Black parents, and the Black community. Specifically, the aim of this study was to investigate and describe the intricacies of how a Black parent nonprofit organization shapes the development and mediates the success of the educational trajectory of high-achieving Black students in a suburban community.

This study was part of a larger study that investigated not only the role, function, and success of a Black parent organization that aims to positively and proactively impact student academic success, but also the intricacies of the formation and maintenance of such an organization. The larger study was designed to understand *what* was taking place within the parent group, *how* this group was able to enact its mission, and *why* what was happening with this group was important. In this specific paper, I endeavored to answer the following research question: How does a Black parent group, The Council of African American Parents (CAAP), empower parents and students as they navigate academic success in a highly racialized academic environment? This was important to answer because, despite an abundance of literature indicating that key personnel help students navigate academic environments and that Communities of Color (COC) possess forms of capital which are vital to their success, research describing how these two aspects can be activated is limited.

To accomplish this task, I first share my investment in, and the scholarly significance of, this topic to make a case for why new research is needed in this area. I follow this with an overview of the theoretical frameworks that inform the research. I then present critical ethnography as a methodological structure useful for engaging in praxis-based educational research and highlight the selected findings of this study that led to a model of accountability for CAAP. Finally, I describe the implications and conclusions of this work.

A Lamp to Guide my Feet: Theoretical Framework

Three bodies of literature inform the investigation of the collective role that Black parents play in their students' education—parental involvement in education, institutional agency, and community cultural wealth. Content from these sources establishes a foundation that informs how parents in this study were able to create, maintain, and extend their influence in the academic success of their children. The fusion of approaches was important because, despite the extensive use of critical race theory (CRT) and Bourdieusian frameworks in education research to offer innovative analyses of educational inequities, scholarship has yet to consider how, together, these frames might facilitate novel insights into marginalized populations (Tichavakunda, 2019). The overarching framework for these three corpuses of literature is CRT, which offers a counter to the dominant color-blind approaches in educational research (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). CRT has been used by scholars across the field of education to enhance understanding of educational inequities (Howard & Navarro, 2016). It is appropriate for this study because "African American parents often do not control the political discourse on education, nor do those at the forefront of reform actively seek out African American parents" (Martin, 2006, p. 200). It is important to consider the role that parents—Black parents, in particular—play in reform efforts (Martin, 2006). My use of CRT to explore parental involvement in education has precedent in the work of Marchand et al. (2019).

Parental Involvement in Education

Parental involvement has myriad definitions that span attitudinal components (Soto, 1989; Thompson et al., 1992), behavioral components (Stevenson & Baker, 1987), and parenting style (Dornbusch, 1991). The literature substantiates the assertion that family support positively influences student success and is influential in child development and academic achievement (Epstein, 2001, 2008; Epstein et al., 1997; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Jeynes, 2007; Park & Holloway, 2013; Sampson,

2002; Slaughter & Kuehne, 2017; Slaughter-Defoe, 1991)e. Studies often cite the importance of family structure (El Nokali et al., 2010; Heiss, 1996; Jeynes, 2005; Lee, 2018), parental education (Bush & Lawson Bush, 2010; Muller, 2018; Wilson, 2007), parenting style (Hoeve et al., 2011; Mandara, 2003; Pinquart, 2016), physical discipline (Deater-Deckard et al., 1996; Sangawi et al., 2015), socioeconomic status/family income (Barr, 2015; Bush & Lawson Bush, 2010; McLoyd, 1990; Quinn et al., 2016; Vincent et al., 2000), family function (Mandara, 2006), or a condensed, all-encompassing family support variable (Palmer et al., 2010) but either ignore or report mixed results about the differences inherent in Black parental involvement as compared to other ethnicities (Cooper, 2009; Fine, 1993; Reynolds, 2010, 2015; Wilson, 2019). Cooper (2009), for example, found that although Black mothers worked hard to fight and sacrifice to help their children succeed, they described this care in ways that educators did not expect. Additionally, while some research posits that Black parents participate less in their children's schooling than white parents do (Brown & Hunter, 1998; Wong & Hughes, 2006), researchers such as Tillman (2006) suggest that Black parents consider themselves as stakeholders in their children's education. Tillman used qualitative methods to capture a more comprehensive picture of the various social, economic, political, and educational factors that impact the lives of Black people.

While some researchers assert that some parents become involved because "that's what parents do" (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), studies have fallen short of investigating how Black parents may be differently motivated to become involved with schools and how they may engage as a group rather than as individuals. For example, because the academic environment is racialized in schools where Black students are in a minority (O'Connor et al., 2007), Black parents may feel more inclined to participate, observe, support, or contest these school conditions as a collective. Despite negative experiences with the educational system (Pattillo, 2015), many Black parents demonstrate agency and advocacy on behalf of their children (Clark, 1984; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016). For example, Varner et al. (2018) found that students that receive affirming parental involvement experienced better academic outcomes in spite of racial discrimination (Varner et al., 2018), while Brody (2016) found that students of involved/vigilant parents had higher levels of self-regulation and school engagement and developed a positive ethnic identity.

While studies show that Black parental involvement can contribute positively to academic achievement (Arnold et al., 2008; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016), the data does not provide robust information regarding such involvement in education in general (e.g., why Black parents choose to become involved, how their involvement differs from the involvement of parents of other ethnicities, what goals they have for their involvement, etc.). For example, there is a deficit in the academic literature that describes, examines, and suggests strategies to maximize the involvement and community empowerment of Black families within education (Rollock et al., 2015). The data often fails to address the intentionality (actions taken by Black parents without the mandate of the school) and collective action of Black parents to help their children successfully navigate the P-20 pipeline even though research indicates the pivotal role of parents in promoting students' academic success and college matriculation (Banerjee et al., 2011; Carey, 2016). The literature on Black parental influence on their students' education presently lacks acknowledgment of agency and advocacy (Martin, 2006) as well as an understanding of how parents establish connections with school leadership (Auerbach, 2010).

Parental Agency in Education

Despite growing information on the relationship between parents and schools, the use of parental voices that allow caregivers to speak directly to their experiences with schools is just beginning to emerge (McClain, 2010; Koskela, 2021). Parental agency describes the actions and responses parents take in regard to their educational concerns about their children (Vincent, 2001). Agency is particularly important for Black parents because they are not always welcomed in their children's schools

(Marchand et al., 2019). Vincent and Martin (2002) included silence, conversation, storming, by-pass, and exit within a range of parental agency, from inaction to departure, when interacting with schools. Parents' social class influences their sense of entitlement and agency in engaging in the educational space on behalf of their children (Vincent, 2001). Further differences in parental agency shown in my sample were based on race and not merely rooted in parental education, occupations, and lifestyles, as posited by (Vincent, 2001). For the purposes of this paper, I wanted to identify that agency is more than involvement. While both are useful components in supporting students in educational spaces, I view engagement as a subsection of the broader umbrella of involvement. For the purposes of this study, involvement is seen as a more passive interaction while engagement is active, intentional (Koskela, 2021), and meaningful (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020). Involvement is typically at the request of the school or within currently established parameters while engagement is initiated by the parents in this study and may require the creation of networks, conversations, and opportunities to influence outcomes. As used in Morris (2004), agency is "a heuristic to describe the collective actions by Black people to positively influence Black children's schooling" (p. 70).

Institutional Agency and Community Cultural Wealth

Theoretical foundations related to the partnership between home and school remain incomplete and insufficient in many ways (Daniel, 2011). To elucidate the deliberate actions taken by Black parents to influence the academic outcomes of their students, I drew upon two interrelated theoretical frames—institutional agents (IAs) and community cultural wealth—as the frameworks best suited for highlighting the importance and strength of "nontraditional" networks for students of color. Ricardo Stanton-Salazar's work defining the characteristics and roles of institutional agents (e.g., resource agent, advocate, cultural guide, institutional broker, etc.) was used to better understand the efforts made by Black parents to establish valuable resources that would aid in propelling their students to academic success. Stanton-Salazar (2010) describes institutional agents as "non-kin" individuals who utilize their own status and authority, resources, and networks in the service of disenfranchised students. Institutional agents serve as leaders to help students negotiate success in institutional environments by increasing the capital the students can access, in the case considered in this paper by leveraging the attributes named above to support students to navigate the educational system.

Institutional agents go beyond serving as role models or providing psychological support to students; they provide students with access to networks and knowledge bases full of resources through various forms of support (Dowd et al., 2012). Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2001, 2010) classified institutional agent roles into four categories: (1) direct support, (2) integrative support, (3) system developer, and (4) system linkage and networking support. Institutional agents possess extensive levels of social, human, and cultural capital that can impact the social mobility of racial and ethnic groups that are underrepresented in education (Dowd et al., 2012). Those individuals desiring to serve as institutional agents for students of color, specifically Black students, need to be aware of additional forms of capital than those supported by the mainstream. This study showed how Black parent members in CAAP assumed the various roles of institutional agents and how, as a collective entity, they brokered resources to facilitate an environment supporting the success of high-achieving Black students. Without the benefits of CAAP and the Black capital the CAAP community asserted on behalf of its families, Black parents would be unable to advocate for their students' academic success (Taysum & Ayanlaja, 2020).

Bourdieu (1973, 1986) asserted that cultural, economic, and social capital could be acquired from family or through formal schooling but only certain groups keep power and privilege in society; his model assumes that only some communities (those currently advantaged in society) have capital that is deemed valuable. Morris (2004) asserts, however, that "it is important that social capital theory also consider the agency and sustenance that are characteristic of African American people, culture and

institutions—apart from and in response to oppressive forces" (p. 102).

To account for the negative and undesirable description typically ascribed to the resources abounding in COC, Yosso (2005) extends the conversation about capital to include community cultural wealth, which is "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro- and micro-forms of oppression" (p.77). The community cultural wealth literature offers insights on how Black parents might better provide direct support to Black students in academic settings. Similar to the literature on institutional agents, community cultural wealth provides a background to the contributory aspects of the community that empower students to be successful in secondary education and go on to post-secondary education.

Community cultural wealth critiques deficit-mindedness, which tends to disadvantage COC (Araujo, 2011). Yosso and Garcia (2007) posit that forms of community cultural wealth are not static but, rather, inextricably linked and shifting. Community cultural wealth challenges the dominant negative perspectives of COC and identifies how people of color have historically utilized their resources to adjust to, persevere in, and succeed within racist institutional and social structures (Huber, 2009; Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005). Community cultural wealth is comprised of at least six types of capital—aspirational, familial, navigational, resistant, social, and linguistic. Although these six components have gone historically unnoticed and undervalued in academic settings (Liou et al., 2009), possession of community cultural wealth or "non-dominant" capital is essential for socially marginalized groups (Carter, 2003; Wallace, 2016). All but linguistic capital are referenced in relation to the data presented later in this text. Community cultural wealth combats the deficit capital perspective of COC and highlights their strengths (Listman et al., 2011). Together, these frameworks may help scholars to better study and understand the interplay of agency and societal structures while also centering race (Tichavakunda, 2019).

Done Decently and in Order: Design and Methodology

Positionality

Critical ethnography recognizes that those who produce knowledge are neither innocent nor politically neutral (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005); therefore, my positionality informs my work. Further, critical ethnographers ought to facilitate the creation and dissemination of useful knowledge (Jordan & Yeomans, 1995). I am a Black woman and scholar who is profoundly committed to the study of Black education (Morris, 2004; Tillman, 2006). As a student who has benefited from an association with CAAP in the past, when it was in its infancy, I desired to go back with "an ethnographer's eye" (Jacobs-Huey, 2006) and try to elucidate the interworkings and aspects that do or do not influence student academic trajectories and success within this community where CAAP originated. My time away from CAAP after I graduated high school and before I returned as a volunteer, granted me a fresh perspective of the organization; my knowledge of and prior personal involvement with CAAP facilitated access to the group. Ladson-Billings (2000) posits that "scholars of color who have experienced racism and ethnic discrimination (yet survived the rigors of the degree credentialing process) have a perspective advantage…" (p. 271). With this study, therefore, I returned to my own community to conduct fieldwork in the knowledge that researchers are increasingly accountable to both their communities of origin and their communities of interest (hooks, 1984). A qualitative approach allowed me to access perspectives of how parents and students view the organization as a whole and which of its components are most pertinent to students and parents on an individual level.

CRT values experiential knowledge, asserting that people of color, a marginalized population, can offer insight into studying and confronting inequities within educational spaces (Tichavakunda, 2019). Voices from within such a population can offer accurate narratives about its experiences (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano, 1997). Under the guidance of the critical paradigm, I worked to elucidate the cultural phenomenon of collective Black parental involvement and high-achieving students in a meaningful way that did not distort the data (Van Maanen, 2011). Critical research is concerned with social inequities and pushes toward constructive social change (Carspecken, 2013). More specifically, I conducted a critical ethnography because critical ethnographies are concerned with human agency (Barton, 2001) but have yet to be maximized in relation to the role of parents and community in schooling (Anderson, 1989). Critical ethnographies focus on the connectivity between knowledge, culture, society, and action (Thomas, 1993). Critical ethnographers speak from distinct identity locations including, but not limited to, race and class (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). I spent more than 120 hours of observation at various CAAP programs and events over ten months (excluding the two summer months) and over 20 hours interviewing and following up with CAAP affiliates.

Selection of and Access to CAAP

Contextual, social, and personal life factors are important for understanding agency (Koskela, 2021). I looked to CAAP to determine how this organization plays a role in shaping the educational paths of academically successful Black students because "CAAP is…committed to providing ways to enhance the educational opportunities of students through academics, social activities, and cultural awareness" (CAAP, n.d.). CAAP has a track record of positive action to increase the level of postsecondary attainment through partnerships and programs that promote higher education, community and family involvement, cultural affirmation, and volunteerism. According to the founding families, CAAP was created nearly thirty years ago in response to the racist, prejudiced, and biased stakeholders and structures that implicitly and explicitly excluded and disadvantaged Black students in one school district. After a meeting at the district office with the superintendent, five Black families came together to create CAAP. The first president of CAAP shared that "...we were all in the parking lot talking, and we said, we need to have an organization so we can all get together on a regular basis and thus, the Council of African American Parents was born." Since then, the organization has expanded across multiple school districts and has helped to create policy changes within the schools. In the words of one of the CAAP founders:

> …when we started, African American students weren't allowed to take AP and honors classes unless they were recommended by a teacher…We took that whole process out through working with the superintendent …that if your child gets an A or a B, they're able to take the next level of classes, no matter if they have a teacher recommendation. The other successful thing we did was the name-calling…A number of students were calling our students out of their names— niggers, monkeys, and stuff—and we started a rule where if you name call, that's the same as a suspension for hitting someone…And we have developed a network and cadre of students who are very dynamic and robust in that they are becoming change agents.

The genesis of CAAP, rooted in a need to combat racism, is connected to my overarching theoretical frame, CRT, which was birthed from protest; CRT pushes scholars to acknowledge ad elucidate the endemic reality of race and racism in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012)

Agency builds on prior experiences and past interactions (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The CAAP originated in 1992. All of its work is conducted by volunteer members who have developed and maintained a network of thousands of scholars who have attended and graduated from institutions of higher learning throughout the nation. The accomplishments of these students have been facilitated by partnerships with collegiate personnel, businesses, local school districts, parents, and community-based entities to leverage resources and time to cultivate a college-going culture and expand scholarship opportunities. CAAP has developed a college-going legacy through financial aid workshops; college tours; scholarships; summer enrichment; academic advisement; parenting workshops; test preparation; tutoring; college preparation; educational symposia career fair; student

recognition programs; cultural fairs; and holiday celebrations honoring the cultures and traditions of its students.

While agency is rooted in the past, its aims are for the future (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). In CAAP, the past is a prologue to the future. There is an emphasis on returning to the community to "pay forward" the help received from volunteer mentors. CAAP states that the education of Black students and future leaders is at the top of its organizational agenda and further asserts:

It is our goal to empower and equip parents with tools and resources that will help maximize their child's learning potential and increase their academic performance. The single most important thing that we as parents and community members can do for our children is to ensure that they: (1) will be prepared to competitively compete for seats at selective colleges and universities; (2) will become productive and responsible leaders, and (3) will make positive contributions to our families, communities, and society at large (CAAP, n.d.).

CAAP is an open-access organization which families can join by paying $100 in dues for year-round programming, while individuals can opt to only attend select programming open to the public. CAAP services cumulatively reach approximately 1,500 people each year. CAAP student participants enroll in both private and public K-12 schools, but the majority attend public institutions within the service area. CAAP sustains its membership through blind interest expressed via the website or seeing CAAP programming as well as word of mouth from current and past CAAP affiliates. Its various community and collegiate partners across the P-20 continuum also serve as a funnel for additional members.

I elected to study this culture-sharing group for four reasons. First, this group was established and is currently maintained by collective parent initiative and action. This acknowledgment is important because, as noted in my review of the literature, there is minimal information on successful, collective Black parental involvement in the education of their students that was not initiated through the school. Second, because the group has been in existence for nearly three decades, I had an abundance of parents and students to interview, events to observe, and archival data to analyze. Creswell (2007) supports the benefit of a wealth of data sources when he writes that in "Well-defined studies of a single culture-sharing group…numerous artifacts, interviews, and observations are collected until the workings of the cultural-group are clear" (p. 128). Third, because this organization is based in a highly racialized city and school community yet claims that high percentages of affiliated Black students attend a four-year college or university, the findings of this study have the potential to inform best practices for the education of Black students. Numerous scholars have documented the experience of Black students educated in highly racialized environments in which an individual student is the only, or one of few, Black students (Bell Jr, 1970; Delpit, 1988; Gibbs, 1974; Pettigrew & Martin, 1987). Jones, et al. (2006) state that potentially unclear criteria should be defined. Thus, "highly racialized" in this study describes an environment in which African American/Black students comprise less than 5% of the community population and, specifically, where Black students in honors and advanced courses number one, or at most two, and are therefore forced to experience education in a racial context. The demographics of the environment are significant because "…human actions are based upon, or infused by, social or cultural meanings…by intentions, motives, beliefs, rules, discourses, and values" and, ultimately, by context (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003, p. 7). Racialization is "an ongoing process that…involves questions of who belongs where, what categories mean, and what effect they have on people's life chances and opportunities" and can happen to people and in institutions (e.g., schools) by people who act as racializing agents (Lewis, 2003, p. 285).

The success of these scholars even when underrepresented at the schools is notable. As a case in point, according to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2018), only 13.6% of the nation's Black students were enrolled in degree-granting institutions in 2017. However, since its inception, this organization has had a 99.8% success rate in sending students off

to *four-year institutions* (two students went to the military). Lastly, this group of parents allow me to contribute to the literature because of their middle-class backgrounds. The abundance of literature on Black family interaction with schools disproportionately looks at lower-income communities (e.g., Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Smith, 2006).

Selection of Participants

The process of sampling within CAAP was intentional to emphasize information-rich cases that illuminate a comprehensive understanding of the area of interest (Jones et al., 2006). I addressed the sampling dimensions of context, people, and time (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003) through my participant selection. All participants self-identified as African American/Black, confirmed their current or prior membership in CAAP, and lived within the community that CAAP serves, which is a community with a median income 30% over the average income in the state and is less than 4% Black (US Census Bureau). The community is 85% white and Asian. I conducted in-person interviews with five students and seven parents: representing five CAAP families. I targeted families with more than one child in the family and families where all the siblings went to four-year institutions. As not all of the students went to a top-tier school, these parents might convey a diversity of experiences. I was also intentional in selecting families that are still involved with CAAP even though one or more of their children have graduated. Of the five families included here, one had only one child, three had two children, and two had three children. My focus on families with students who have already gone to an institution of higher education was critical to my study because these students have experienced the complete influence of CAAP, which aims to empower parents to equip their students with the tools they need to succeed academically. Those families with students currently enrolled in secondary education are in the midst of CAAP activities and will not have the full spectrum of the experiences within the group.

All families had one or more of their children matriculate to a top-tier four-year university (e.g., Berkeley, USC, Stanford, and Princeton) at the end of their senior year of high school. Parents of academically successful students and academically successful students themselves were selected to better understand what these parents and students deemed important regarding the education and capacity needs required to successfully provide these important components. To understand why Black students whose parents are members of CAAP compete in and complete high school and postsecondary education despite community circumstances, it is necessary to understand this culture-sharing group's past experiences and actions and how it does or does not aid Black students to achieve academically.

Data Collection

Ethnographers collect data through interviews, observations, and documents/artifacts (Creswell, 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003; Spradley, 1979). Though most of the information presented in this paper is from interview transcripts, all three methods were used to establish a holistic interpretation of the role that CAAP plays in the academic success of students (Merriam, 1998). Based on information gleaned from the research literature, a pilot interview with the current CAAP president, and informal conversations with CAAP members, semi-structured interview protocols (separate protocols for parents and students, available from the author upon request) were generated to use for in-depth interviews with parents and students to understand what, if any, aspects of CAAP contribute to better outcomes for Black students. All interviews were conducted individually except two in which both parents of a student were present at once. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each. I served as the interviewer in each interview to maintain consistency. Participants were asked to elucidate how CAAP had or had not shaped the development and mediated the implementation and success of the educational trajectory of high-achieving African American students. Questions focused

on parent/student involvement with CAAP, the support it provided, its benefits/challenges, and its impact on students and parents. Participants were given the time and authority to share in our conversation.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest that "[t]he most accurate rendition of what occurred…is on tape" (p. 123), and so, as proposed by Creswell (2007), all interviews were audio-recorded with high-quality tapes, backed up on computer files, and accompanied by a master list of types of information gathered and transcribed by hand. These actions are necessary but not sufficient to ensure that the voice of the participant is not only heard but also presented in a way that maintains veracity. Utilizing the data collection methods of interviews, observations, and document analysis permitted the triangulation of data so that my findings are better substantiated (Merriam, 1998). Observations were conducted at general member meetings, board meetings, cultural events, and academic workshops and presentations. Documents including past agendas, flyers, student applications, brochures, etc., were collected. The cyclical informing nature of the triad of interviews, site observations, and document analysis allowed me to garner data to better understand factors that contribute to Black student success in a community in which they are an extreme minority.

Data Analysis

Ethnography involves a cyclical process that includes preparing, organizing, and representing research data (Creswell, 2007); therefore, analysis was not isolated to a distinct stage of my research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003). Per the recommendation of Hammersley and Atkinson (2003), my data analysis began with finding concepts that helped me to make sense of occurrences documented by the data. My analysis was iterative. I triangulated the data from documents, interviews, and observations into a progressively focused, funnel structure (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003) starting with themes, then categories, and finally codes.

Coding is an emergent process in which unexpected ideas can come to the forefront at any stage of analysis (Charmaz, 2006). I gave special attention to issues of power, conflict, social structures, and hegemonic assumptions and values that came up instead of universal themes, as suggested by critical theory. All transcription, coding, and analysis was done by hand without the use of qualitative computer software per one of the founding principles of action research, namely that "those who experience a phenomenon are the most qualified to investigate it" (DePoy et al., 1999, p. 561). For this reason, I did not place a machine between me and the data (Creswell, 2007).

For there is Nothing Hidden that will not be Disclosed: Findings

The data show the salience of collective Black parental involvement on the academic outcomes for all students in the study. In this section, I explicate three key areas arising from the data which serve as the dominant influential factors that provide insight on the establishment, sustainability, and accomplishment of the organization— (1) accountability, (2) alliances and networks, and (3) legitimacy. Below, I define these three aspects, provide examples of each from the data, and reveal how they serve as sources of fortitude for this organization. All names used in this text are pseudonyms.

To Whom Much is Given: Accountability

The participants emphasized their commitment and accountability to others within the community regardless of their status as either parent or student. The theme of accountability arose when: (1) I asked questions regarding why participants are still involved or would assist the organization today even though the student already graduated high school and college and so has

received the "maximum" benefit from CAAP; (2) they spoke about prominent aspects of CAAP that influenced success in primary and secondary education; and (3) when they explained how their CAAP involvement impacted their current work or volunteer efforts. While parents chose to intervene or assist based on past, present, and future investment in and obligation to their students, other parents, the organization, or the Black community at large, students foregrounded their academic success on responsibility to other students, their parents, the organization, or the Black community at large. All participants communicated a sense of being part of something greater: one part of a greater body. When asked to identify the major element she took away from CAAP, Sasha, a UC Berkeley graduate who was told by her high school counselor she should only apply to community colleges, answered:

> I think accountability, like you're not only accountable for yourself, you're accountable for others. You're accountable for…what kind of example you want to be and… you are not a representative of yourself, you're a representative of an entire whole…that's something that was one of the main things that I learned.

One father of two sons, Adu, expanded upon this idea by also noting that accountability is not without support from the organization.

> You're not just going to college for yourself. You're doing it for a community…If you want to let yourself down, you're letting the community down…We tried to work our views as a group…to let the student know, hey, we're all depending on you and then to let them know that we are here to help…that he's not alone.

CAAP offers the direct support of institutional agency. That direct support developed a system so that everyone who became a member was part of the network. Ray, who graduated from UC Berkeley and was the son of one of the CAAP co-founders, teased out high expectations within the characteristic of accountability:

> …the students were held to a higher accountability because they realized, yeah, I've got my parents here going to bat for me and they're interacting with the leaders at the school and they're interacting with each other and if I act up, word is going to get back and I'm going to have to deal with more than just my parents…I'm going to hear about it from two or three more sets of parents because that's the expectation…We had no excuse. Let me put it like that. There was no excuse for failure.

The students felt the effect of the familial capital of which they were part, and they leveraged this communal environment to establish high standards of success. Familial capital is a form of cultural wealth that prioritizes a commitment to community and extends the concept of family to include fictive kin (Yosso, 2014). It minimizes isolation and details how families become connected with others around common issues (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). Communal bonds within Black communities (Morris, 1999) are central for the Council of African American Parents—the CAAP family.

While some participants noted that they *learned* accountability through their involvement with CAAP, Michelle, who divorced while her children were in middle school and thus navigated high school as a single parent, expressed that accountability is *taught*:

> I want to touch on that…all along the kids are taught to give back…they instill that in the parents. They instill that in the students and then you have young people who are the products of CAAP, like my daughter who still comes back and…shares her experiences… so that is one of the core components is reaching back and giving back…CAAP teaches that.
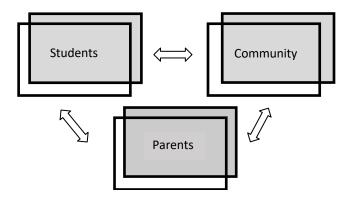
CAAP members are intentional about their network. System development and integrative support are not by chance. An additional caveat of accountability found in this study was a sense of collective responsibility. While some spoke of their individual accountability, others, like Pele, the first Black valedictorian at his high school and current physician, spoke of community accountability:

> What the collective…group does is, it holds the community sort of accountable because when you have individual families trying to deal with individual kids you can somewhat feel isolated

and you're sort of only responsible for your family, but when you have this council, I definitely remember the sense that I had multiple mothers, multiple parents…

As seen in Figure 1, the model of CAAP's accountability is a triadic exchange and has both individual and collective levels. Parents and students felt individual accountability to certain parents or students (e.g., student X felt a need to succeed in academics because he/she was accountable to his/her parents) while also feeling a sense of collective responsibility (e.g., Parent Y expressed a sense of urgency surrounding sharing information with other Black parents about the organization). Within this organization, Black students were not treated as other people's children (Delpit, 1995). Each parent, each student, and the community in which they live as a whole had a vested interest in not only the academic success of the students but also the successful empowerment of parents. Parents and students were empowered through this accountability which strengthened the familial and resistant capital of the group.

Figure 1. CAAP Accountability Model

Gray box is the collective level. White box is the individual level.

Where two or three are gathered-Alliances and Networks

For school success, students need access to habitual and unobstructed opportunities to foster relationships with institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). The institutional agents here were the Black parents in CAAP who mobilized to seek information, resources, and answers to questions that they were not privy to in the past because they were either not informed or misinformed about key academic components. The need to connect with, be a part of, and maximize alliances and networks was imperative to the study's participants. Because of the racialized nature of their milieu (e.g., Black students in this area facing unmerited tracking into special education, lack of entrance to or testing for AP/Honors classes or Gifted and Talented Education programming, etc.), parents and students believed that leveraging their resources had both direct and indirect effects. Issues highlighting alliances and networks surfaced when participants were asked: (1) to talk about how and why the organization is successful in its specific environment; (2) about the benefits of being associated with CAAP; (3) how they learned about or have had opportunities to share about CAAP; and (4) how the organization has grown and can grow further to expand its reach in the community.

Participants shared that though they were tossed into a sea which had been agitated by feelings of isolation created in their racialized environment, association with CAAP provided a calm in the midst of the storm. The network of CAAP created a community within a community for these individuals. Michael, a CAAP alum who now has his daughter in CAAP, shared:

[Y]ou know…it is necessary because of the community that's around here because African Americans are in such limited numbers that it's good to be able to see so many African Americans

together in the same place that can end up helping a lot of students because they see other students in the same situations

George, a father of two CAAP scholars, echoed this point: "What I believe is, as an African American, if you don't belong to some kind of organization, that's a part of your struggle right there because…your kids don't look like the other kids. They don't sound like the other kids." Members of CAAP actively recruit other students and parents into the organization. They serve as bridging agents, institutional brokers, and coordinators to establish a system linkage. When discussing how CAAP can execute such disproportional results with minimal volunteers, Claire, the president and co-founder of CAAP, commented:

We collaborate with a number of other groups because…of the limited resources…We leverage our resources of time, expertise, and money with our collegiate partners…We have community partners and we have the schools that we work with. We are not averse to working with any group that is all about making sure that we're closing that achievement gap. We are truly mentoring and developing excellence in African American students.

Tied to accountability, every student, parent, and community member plays a role in expanding the CAAP network. Not all affiliates contribute in the same way; rather, they contribute in distinct ways that highlight their respective strengths and expertise. Michelle, who, after her divorce, raised her son and daughter (Sasha) on her own, said:

[T]here are dynamic, successful Black professionals, politicians, corporate professionals, business owners, doctors, attorneys, researchers, that are consistently brought in to speak to our students so our students can see, touch, and feel people that have made it through and are successful and are coming back to tell them, 'this is the pathway I took, this is   how you can do it. See me, touch me, I did it, I look like you, you can do this too.'

A relationship with CAAP was advantageous to parents, students, and the organization as a whole. To help students meet the demands of schools, CAAP provided resource-rich relationships which provided social and institutional support (Stanton-Salazar, 2010) and so, as Sasha's mother, Michelle, continued, the benefit to students was that:

"they're connected. CAAP students are connected. A non-CAAP student is not gonna be connected. Because they, it would be impossible for them to tap into the pool of relationships that CAAP has cultivated over the last 20 years. That's impossible."

Pele, Adu's son, continued this sentiment:

…you don't feel so isolated. You can go to so many different people and get the answers to your questions. You can go to your peers. You can go to your peers' parents…On the flip side, there were things that I wouldn't go to my parents about but a different parent in CAAP might know or might have access to something I needed to know about. I asked my dad, do you know anybody in CAAP that might know where I can do this type of internship or where I can get information on this? And he would have his list of parents. He would know. And so, you sort of have this network of this larger community…of families that were now about something bigger…And so it really added more support, for being able to be more comfortable in an environment that really wasn't catered toward being Black at the time.

These members model the aspirational capital fortified via CAAP. Families maintained high educational aspirations despite inequities they faced within the schools and community. Networks were spoken about as integral to the receipt of valuable academic information and resources as well as the key component of expanding current connections. Participants of this study suggested that individuals within the group, as well as the group as a whole, serve as empowerment agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Stanton-Salazar (2010) posits that the "capacity of institutional agents to empower others is largely dependent upon the structure and resourcefulness of their own social networks as

well as their orientation toward effective networking" (p. 1068). Pele, a former CAAP student and board member elucidated parts of the network creation:

> …they also linked me with other groups like Young Black Scholars and Upward Bound so, through CAAP, I was able to get so many resources that I don't think would have been at all offered to me if I were to just have been a regular high school student… So, they do a great job at building networks…

It was not just the students who benefitted from CAAP. Parents also felt like they gained from participation. Adu, Pele's father, explained:

> Being members of CAAP, having all these parents that you could work with…other parents that knew of other organizations…other things happening…We were able to kind of bring all of our stuff together and whatever information we had to support each other. It was a lot easier than one parent trying to do all the research…

The interviews, observations, and document analysis tell the tale of the importance of social networks. The parents and students tapped into the community's social capital to gain the support necessary to navigate the educational pipeline. Document analysis, in particular, provided powerful support for the reliance of this organization on network support and the success it has had in expanding its networks at the local, regional, and national levels, to a point where now it experiences high levels of esteem. A call for participants for a summer program defined the organization as "a cadre of collegiate, corporate, and community partners" while the flyer for the 15th annual Parent and Student Educational Symposium publicized the ability to "*connect* with top academic organizational leaders" and "*network* with top college representatives." With each year and new member, CAAP bolstered its social capital as an organization, and all members were able to access that growing network.

By Their Fruit you will Recognize Them: Legitimization

Since the inception of the organization, CAAP has seen an expansion of the respect it earns and the clout it carries at various levels in society. One salient idea that resonated with the participants is the idea that CAAP has been validated. This legitimization resides at two levels. First, the local, in-house sphere describes when parents and/or students join and stay involved because they have either seen the results of the organization first hand or witnessed the effect of CAAP's influence on someone they know. For example, Adu, the married father of two sons, including Pele, told me "I mean, I saw this pretty early, but I saw there w[as] success from other students who went through the program…I saw it was beneficial to be part of it." Theo, another student alum who ultimately obtained his B.S. and M.S. from the University of Southern California, shared his thoughts on why individuals might consider joining CAAP in this manner:

> I mean, you see most of the kids going to a four-year institution and you're looking at your kid and you want him to go to a four-year institution, it's almost a no brainer. Get in CAAP and go to college is kind of the perception that it gives off… So, if CAAP is sending…African American youth…to four-year institutions and four-year institutions are seeing how many CAAP students are enrolling in their programs, it only makes sense for those schools to support those programs because they are trying to boost their numbers to create a diverse learning environment.

Second, at the more expansive institutional level (including the K-12 school system as well as higher education institutions), CAAP has been legitimized both formally (e.g., inclusion of CAAP as an organization that students can say they participated in on their UC application) and informally (e.g., institutions coming to CAAP events and programs for recruitment purposes). Michelle, a longtime volunteer and parent of two CAAP alums, shared:

> We have, through our alliances with various colleges and universities…college reps coming in… presenting to the kids and basically because the CAAP program…and specifically the Junior/Senior workshop has been identified as a gold mine…where they know they can come

and pitch their university or college to academically qualified and competitive African American students. They know that they can take that to the bank when they come to CAAP so, basically, our kids are sitting there prepared because they've been groomed for so many years to be competitive...They want our students on their campus.

Demonstrating the import of those college connections that Michelle shared, Theo recalled his experience as a college-bound high school student when discussing how CAAP might influence the decision of where to attend college: "They've got various connections with various schools to help out. You know, you've already got institutional buy-in from certain schools and you go to these schools and it is easier to see yourself…going to that school." Because the students had familiarity with the schools as they had been present at CAAP programming, Theo could see himself at one of those institutions.

The legitimacy of CAAP was not just focused on the bridge to higher education. Sasha, Michelle's daughter, spoke of the influence CAAP wielded in her high school:

There's, like, power in numbers and I think because…CAAP has become a powerful unit, like so, when students or like, administrators, or anyone, like in the districts and schools, think or hear of CAAP coming because of something that's happened on their campus…it creates a sense of fear…That's how these injustices and things like that that take place at these high schools are nipped in the bud because CAAP is there. You cannot do that to these students...These are not parents who are…fluff. Parents…are powerful within these communities, and so when you collectively bring them together that creates a powerful movement and so you can't just get away with just any old thing and treating Black students just any old way.

The navigational capital of CAAP empowers parents and families to maneuver within these unsupportive or hostile environments. Taken together these notions of accountability, alliances and networks, and legitimization sustain the cycle of empowerment of Black parents in the community. These pieces are interrelated and demonstrate that the CAAP involvement is mutualistic—all parties involved (even non-CAAP-affiliated Black students and parents in the community) benefit from participation.

The Good News: Discussion and Implications

The combination of community cultural wealth and institutional agency captures the diligence, experiences, perspectives, and challenges that Black students (and their parents) must navigate to persist in school and matriculate to college. Findings suggest that the existing depictions of Black parental involvement do not fully capture the experience and needs of the participants in this study. In using critical ethnography, the findings can be examined for aspects of social reality that are taken for granted (Myers, 1997). Research in and with COC is important, relevant, and necessary to the advancement of education. While the stories shared in this paper might be typical within the organization, the data is counter to the dominant rhetoric describing Blacks in education in the larger society. The evidence provided in this study demonstrates that CAAP simultaneously acted as a bulwark against injustices encountered by Black students and parents in the school and the community and as a springboard for valuable resources (knowledge and networks) for Black parents and students.

This study demonstrated that affiliation with the cultural group CAAP was an integral component of academic attainment, aligning with prior research supporting the idea that the establishment or maintenance of racial/ethnic identity is key to academic success (McGee, 2013a, 2013b; McGee, & Pearman, 2014, 2015). Unlike the middle-class status that solidified entitlement of white parents in Vincent's (2001) work, the participants of this study demonstrated they had to get involved because their financial standing did nothing to protect their scholars from the racist and biased educational

environments in which they lived. Additionally, this piece builds upon research that acknowledges the import of previously established support systems (e.g., sports, churches, etc.) (Nasir & Hand, 2008) to consider that support structures may be intentionally established to specifically support students and their families as they strive for academic success. These parents not only demonstrated the heightened importance of parental involvement, but they also showed that in situations of significant disparity and injustice, parents cannot merely be involved—they must take a commanding role in education. Parents stressed that collective, impactful involvement led to the accountability, networks, and legitimacy that helped them positively influence the education of the Black students in their organization. As one parent shared about his experience in the environment when his son was often the only Black student in his advance classes, "[y]ou need to work in a group to succeed and there's a community there, so if you want to have your student to succeed then you need to have him as part of this community." For him, there was no question that CAAP played a huge role in his son's matriculation to Princeton.

This study highlights three key ways to think about parental involvement in education (with an emphasis on Black parental involvement): (1) our notion of what it means to be an involved parent transcends the walls of the school (as evidenced in the discussion of alliances and networks and legitimization); (2) parental involvement for Black families can sometimes be more likened to community involvement (as supported through notions of accountability and alliances and networks); and (3) the community can and, when necessary, should serve as the author and finisher of Black students' educational fates.

Parents have to become informed about the operations of the school system to actively participate in schools (Carreón et al., 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991) but CAAP parents demonstrated that they needed to become knowledgeable about the interworkings of the school to support their students *inside* and *outside* of the school setting. More directly, this organization equipped parents with the resources they needed outside the walls of the schools so that they could then go and impact and monitor the happenings within the confines of the school. The information they learned and subsequently disseminated to other members was merely the first step in their quest to empower and position themselves as institutional agents for their students. Their impact was magnified as the parents of CAAP embodied their role as institutional agents and did not just act on behalf of their own children, but on behalf of all of the affiliated students. The community played a positive role in facilitating college access (Jayakumar et al., 2013). CAAP became almost a "one-stop shop" for these families. They could be supported academically, socially, and culturally in this space, which made the group more enticing for membership and influential in outcomes because it provided a majority of resources and opportunities that traditionally have been disparate. The necessary proactivity inherent in accountability, alliances, and networks and legitimization allowed CAAP parents to set high expectations for parents so that they, in turn, would have high expectations for students. Black parents established themselves as institutional agents and then served as the model for other Black parents to do the same. Parents can be social capital reservoirs for each other when they share information, offer and give support, and proactively build community (Gillanders et al., 2012; Yull et al., 2014). CAAP parents became the resource agents, advocates, knowledge agents, advisors, networking coaches, political advocates, lobbyists, program developers, and cultural guides (Stanton-Salazar, 2010) for their students that the staff at the schools could not and would not be.

The element of community was integral because the parents recognized that they were all one part of the collective. The Black parents shared their cultural capital to create Black social capital so that they could survive in a segregated environment. The parents leveraged aspirational capital to maintain hopes and dreams for the future for their children, even in the face of real and perceived barriers within the educational system in their community. Further, their kinship through CAAP rooted these students and families in a sense of history and culture to reinforce their commitment to

their created CAAP community—familial capital. Additional research on this intentional collective unity may also explore the ways in which a strong community may support single parents in particular; the literature on single Black parents is overwhelmingly focused on mothers (e.g., Cooper, 2009) so additional research is needed on single Black fathers.

With each new member, and each new year of service to its community, CAAP both explicitly and implicitly armed its affiliates with the valuable navigational capital to maneuver through the K-12 institution, which was not made with Black students in mind. As the students mentioned, they felt that they had to succeed not just for themselves, but for those in the community who were supporting them. The parents echoed this need for familial capital as they recounted the importance of maintaining a connection to the people, information, and resources available to them via CAAP. CAAP made the isolation these Black students and families felt in the community more bearable because they were no longer alone when they joined the organization. Ultimately, CAAP parents and students were equipped with resistant capital: the knowledge and skills to oppose the various micro and macro aggressions that would have kept them out of honors and AP classes or suspended when their white counterparts were learning in the classroom. Challenging inequity (Giroux, 1983) and preserving and bequeathing various dimensions of community cultural wealth to other families are essential aspects of resistant capital (Yosso, 2014). CAAP was intentional about passing on the cultural knowledge of the racist structures of the school district and encouraging other members to transform the oppressive structures, as discussed in scholarship like Villenas and Deyhle (1999). Linquanti (1992) uses the term "resiliency" to describe children who do not succumb to the pitfalls of school failure despite the significant challenges in their lives. I aimed to push these ideas further by looking at the parents of academically successful Black students who attended a school with an extremely low number of Black students to investigate how these students are not only resilient but also academically competitive and successful and the role a parent group played in that success. Their resistance became their success, and that of all the Black students who still benefit from CAAP today.

Several implications arise from this work. First, even without school support, parents should not think they have to be alone in guiding their students through education. There is nothing that precludes individual parents from collaborating and networking with other parents in order to share resources, experiences, and knowledge. CAAP demonstrated how a small group of parents can make a large impact. Second, parents must recognize the power they have within themselves and within their community. They do not need a background in education, but only a commitment to their students and a willingness to unify and influence the educational space. Third, parents should be sure to hold the school system accountable for educating their youth in ways that are culturally affirming. Fourth, the intersection of race and class in the decision-making of parents as they help their students navigate the educational pipeline merits further consideration. The students and families highlighted here were from a well-resourced community, so race, and not socioeconomic status, was a salient factor in their education. Though they were high achievers, these Black students encountered and overcome numerous institutional barriers by leveraging resources (Houston et al., 2020). The CAAP community, either directly or indirectly, identified, secured, and provided the necessary support to help them academically, socially, and culturally. Educators and practitioners interested in improving the college matriculation numbers of traditionally marginalized populations may need to consider that potential for better student outcomes might reside outside the walls of the school and require the centering of parents and community (Rall, 2014). These implications lead to the recommendation of looking beyond the school walls for academic support and, if none is available, starting an organization committed to student support and success.

Limitations

The scope of this analysis is small due to the emphasis on particular types of students and parents within a specific community. Though the findings of this paper may be used as a model for other minority and low-income/low-education communities, not every concept can be generalizable because of the specific population I studied. Despite only having a dozen participants, however, the rich data presented in this text provided here enhances understanding of high-achieving Black students (Houston et al., 2020) and aligns with prior qualitative research that prioritizes gaining rich insights into specific contexts, locations, and topics over generalizability (Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2003). Future research should include a comparison of participants who come from single-parent households as well as dual-parent households (there were only two single parents in this sample), additional interviews with Black families who lived in the same community but did not participate in this organization, and longitudinal research that may be able to better identify specific inflection points where CAAP's influence may be more readily implemented than others.

Now all has been heard: Conclusion

My analysis contributes an additional layer of understanding to the expanding literature on Black student achievement by focusing on Black parents in general, but a self-formed Black parent group in particular. The literature has failed to fully explicate and understand "…the nuances of parents' relationships with schools, why particular parents interact in particular ways with schools, and what resources, what orientations they call on in that interaction" (Vincent & Martin, 2002, p. 109). My study attempted to address these shortfalls with an intentional eye on Black parents and families. This study demonstrated how Black families can support Black students' academic success by proactively and collectively becoming involved in their academic paths. I examined the attitudes, beliefs, actions, thoughts, and practices of academically successful Black students and their parents to provide insight as to how a group like CAAP empowers parents despite racialized school environments. The data supported the accountability model, with bidirectional arrows connecting students, parents, and the community. Spradley (1979) notes that "ethnography offers other dividends to anyone involved in culture change, social planning, or trying to solve a wide range of human problems" (p. 13). Therefore, in this study, I used my "same-race, same culture, indigenous-insider status to conduct praxis-oriented research…to contribute to the broader [Black] community" (Tillman, 2006, p. 282).

What was revealed is simultaneously commonplace and extraordinary—more can be learned about how the collective involvement of Black parents influences the academic preparation, path, and destination of Black students. This is expected, because we will always need additional research to better reveal what is going on with Black education; at the same time, the takeaways may be unanticipated because here I focus on optimistic and sustained accounts of Black student success. That said, the results of this study offer insight that can be utilized to initiate positive change for other African American students and families in similarly racially composed communities. As mentioned early, CAAP parents recognized the need to unify on behalf of their students even before they knew what that work would entail. Over nearly three decades, they figured out a mission, established a voice in the community, and supported myriad families and students to reach educational goals. They did not stagnate in early phases about concerns over whether they could make a difference but knew that they had no other choice, so they deliberately collaborated to bring about change. Other parent groups may want to follow this playbook and come together for the common purpose of changing current conditions (even if all of the needs are unknown at first) and then adapting to the specific community needs along the way. CAAP allowed the disparate treatments of their students and families to guide the organization until other goals took shape or other specific goals pulled them in specific directions.

The takeaway is that in comprehensively supporting the families and students first, the specific targets and accomplishments will follow. The information gathered from this study's participants can serve to strengthen and contribute to knowledge that can be shared with Black families who may benefit from more explicit guidance on how to initiate involvement to ultimately support their children's academic excellence. This work also highlights the triumph, fulfillment, and excellence of Black students. Excellence for these students, these parents, and this community was not individualistic but accomplished through collective impact harnessed by gathering together in the name of education.

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