

Using Queen Sugar as a Lens to Counter Hegemonic Conceptions of Black Fathers' Involvement in P-12 Schools

Journal of Family Diversity in
Education, 2024
Vol 6, No. 2, pp. 149 - 170



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Abstract

The depictions of Black fathers and their relationships with their children on television sitcoms influence societal perceptions of Black fathers' parenting practices, Black families' configurations, and public policies on Black families. This paper sheds light on how excerpts of the show, *Queen Sugar* challenge narratives and images on Black fathers' relationships with their children, particularly their Black sons. Revolutionary parenting and critical race media literacy are used as theoretical concepts to examine the interactions and experiences between Ralph Angel and Blue. Thematic analysis was employed to generate findings that examine the bond between Ralph Angel and Blue, Ralph Angel's support for Blue's toy choice, and his engagement in Blue's education. Implications of this work illustrate how excerpts of *Queen Sugar* can be used in specific teacher education courses to give pre-service teachers multiple opportunities to learn about the dynamics of Black families, Black fathers' parenting practices, and contributions to their families and communities.

Keywords: Black fatherhood, masculinity, teacher education

Introduction

Traditionally, in the United States, the characteristics, lifestyle, and practices of white, cis-gender, affluent, and heterosexual men have been figuratively and literally deemed the standard of masculinity and fatherhood (Wallace, 2023; Wesley, 2015). This standard is known as hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity depicts a narrow perspective of masculinity that values men who are economically wealthy, competitors, emotionally detached, and likely to display physical strength and aggressive behaviors. Racism, patriarchy, and sexism are infused into hegemonic masculinity. Regardless of how oppressive systems negatively impact both individual men and their communities, Black and non-white men and boys are expected to aspire and adopt ideologies and practices associated with hegemonic masculinity to be recognized as masculine. Hegemonic masculinity has been unattainable for many communities and has also justified the subjugation of women, children, Blacks, and people of color (Wallace, 2023; Wesley, 2015). Collins (2022) shows how hegemonic masculinity was perpetuated in the U.S. labor market in the early 1900s. During this time, the U.S.

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workforce was segregated by race and gender, exploiting Black men and women and impacting their pathway to advance economically in society. Collins (2022) emphasizes how Black men who were employed in low-skilled manufacturing positions typically received wages higher than the wives but were vulnerable to being terminated from the workforce due to directly competing with white¹ men in the workforce. Since the early twentieth century, depictions of hegemonic masculinity can be found in western American films and commonly portrayed in white nuclear family configurations in television shows. These depictions of masculinity in the mainstream media discourse exclude Black men, influencing views on their fatherhood, their contributions to the household, and their relationships with other family members. Consequently, in the early twentieth century, deficit perspectives on Black fathers were generated and used to justify Black children's underachievement in schools, impoverished living conditions, and harsh discipline while disregarding the historical and contemporary systemic and structural disparities that impact Black communities (Brown, 2011). Using images, print, and television, mass media have historically contributed to society's conceptions that Black families commonly experience absentee or uninvolved Black fathers (Moody-Ramirez, Clemmons, & Boddie, 2024). However, the depictions of Black fathers, their socioeconomic status, and marital or domestic partnership status on television drastically shifted from the mid-twentieth century onward. To elaborate on how television networks started airing the multi-dimensions of Black fathers' identity and livelihood, we first provide a description and analysis of several shows that were frequently viewed from the mid-twentieth century until the early twenty-first century.

The *Jeffersons* was televised on a primetime network that challenged gender and socioeconomic representations of Black fathers and families in contrast to the shows that historically utilized controlling images to present Black fathers as impoverished, absent in caregiving, hypersexual, suffering from chronic illness, or violent (King, 2017; Kumah-Abiwu, 2020). In the *Jeffersons*, Sherman Hemsley plays the role of a Black father, committed husband, and accomplished entrepreneur who resides in a racially integrated residential community. While this show has largely been credited to Norman Lear, a white man, the initial writer of this sitcom, as well as multiple sitcoms premiering Black families during this time was a Black man, Eric Monte (Harriot, 2023). According to Harriot (2023), Norman Lear follows the pattern of many white artists and executive producers who benefited from a legacy of narrating Black experiences and "telling their stories without employing Black people as storytellers." The scripts and airing of this show occurred when African Americans were mobilizing economically, and white people heightened their resistance to desegregate schools, residential communities, and various labor industries.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the depiction of Black fatherhood continued to evolve on primetime networks such as American Broadcasting Company (ABC) and National Broadcasting Company (NBC). Shows such as *The Cosby Show* and *Family Matters* presented Black families as middle class, with Black fathers involved in heterosexual relationships with wives or a woman partner and residing with their children in the same household. While these shows challenged the stereotypes about Black fathers and families by illustrating how their educational attainment and/or occupation contributed to the advancement of society, they also portrayed Black fathers' care and nurturing practices in their child's educational and extracurricular activities. These practices countered hegemonic masculinity (Brandt & Kvande, 2018). Both *The Cosby Show* and *Family Matters* illustrated the ways Black fathers interacted and participated in their children's extracurricular activities and the ways their children's friends admired them as role models, seeking advice from them. Both shows offered a positive depiction of Black families but were critiqued. For instance, the *Cosby Show* was written and directed by a Black man but functioned with a race-neutral lens, which conveyed a subliminal message to the audience that social progress for Black people was based on an individual's responsibility. This show never addressed the institutional, structural, or systemic race and gender issues that have discriminated against and marginalized Black people from accessing rights, opportunities, resources, and wealth. In

contrast, *Family Matters* began introducing the audience to the ways in which Black parents help their children cope with racial prejudice and discrimination. However, the systemic and structural issues presented in the sitcoms were resolved by the end of each episode—in 30 minutes.

Shows like *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *All of Us*, *Smart Guy*, *One on One*, and *Sister, Sister* elucidated the livelihood of Black fathers who were single, surrogate, or divorced but sustained a healthy co-parenting rapport with their ex-wives to raise their children. As the multi-dimensional representation of sitcoms on Black fatherhood in families continued in the mid and late 1990s, the number of Black men and women who were writers and producers for the narratives of family dynamics shown in these sitcoms increased. For instance, Rikki Hughes contributed to producing episodes for the *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *All of Us* was written and directed by Will and Jada Smith, *One on One* was written and produced by Eunette Boone, and Kim Bass produced the show *Sister, Sister*. The script of these sitcoms focused on Black fathers' relationships with their Black biological and non-biological children and their role in helping the children to recognize and cope with race and gender-based disparities.

As the depictions of multi-representations and stability of Black families strengthened, the accessibility of these sitcoms decreased for the public. By the late 1990s and 2000s, the multi-dimension of Black fatherhood and families was diminishing on primetime television networks and began airing only on cable networks, such as Black Entertainment Television (BET) and United Paramount Network (UPN), which were targeted to predominantly Black audiences, and later on streaming networks, such as Netflix or HULU. Primetime network channels have always been free and accessible to the public, while consumers are required to pay to access the cable and streaming networks that generally showed sitcoms of diverse Black family configurations and Black fathers' relationships with family members and community, as well as their caregiving practices.

Today, the storylines and images of Black fatherhood have reemerged on primetime networks, such as NBC, while remaining accessible for viewers to see on cable and streaming networks. The storylines about Black fatherhood on these networks acknowledge the intersectionality of their social identities and diverse experiences of upbringing, family dynamics, and parenting biological and non-biological children. In addition, several TV sitcoms, such as *This Is Us* and *Unprisoned*, do not depict a quick-fix solution for Black actors and actresses when structural and systemic inequities are addressed in the plot. Rather, the producers and screenwriters of these shows illustrate an accurate depiction of Black people's feelings of disappointment and hardships when they face disparities while simultaneously showing the ways in which they persevere. The evolution of Black fatherhood on television and its mass consumption are influenced by critical theory and radical feminism. The representation of intersectional identities created a platform for viewers to credit screenwriters' perspectives and challenge long-standing stereotypes that have stigmatized Black fathers and their relationships with their family members (Stamps, 2021). These sitcoms have also collectively challenged public policies, such as the Moynihan report, and societal rhetoric framing Black fathers as economically and socially irresponsible or absent during most of their children's lives.

The purpose of this paper is elucidate how a popular culture television sitcom called *Queen Sugar* humanizes and restores the images and perceptions of Black families, particularly the relationship dynamics and support between Black fathers and sons. This paper encourages teacher educators and pre-service teachers to utilize a critical race media literacy approach when selecting and viewing media and texts to analyze Black parents' experiences and recognize the ways in which Black fathers support their children's education in and beyond the school context. The authors suggest that presenting excerpts of *Queen Sugar*, specifically the interactions between Ralph Angel's (father) and his son Blue, are relevant in teacher-education courses and other disciplinary programs that focus on children's well-being. Excerpts of this show can counter the generalized perceptions pre-service and in-service teachers possess regarding Black fathers and boys. Ava Duvernay, an African American woman who is the executive producer of the show *Queen Sugar*, intentionally portrays a multidimensional

representation of the images, roles, and behaviors of manhood among the actors (Jefferson, 2019). Similarly, Bell Hooks (2015) states, “Erasing the realities of Black men who have diverse understandings of masculinity, scholarship on the Black family puts in place of this lived complexity a flat, one-dimensional representation” (p. 89). *Queen Sugar* represents popular culture and highlights the various dimensions of the configuration of a Black family in Louisiana. This show is widely accessible to the public since it is consumed on mainstream cable networks and video-streaming services. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2005) argue that utilizing popular culture as text in teacher education contributes to knowledge in the curriculum that responds to student-centered learning. Considering media as an analysis tool is important for understanding the development of Black people and their livelihood (King, 2017). Popular culture serves as cultural resources accessible to students. The following research questions guide the analysis of excerpts from *Queen Sugar*.

- 1) In what ways does the show *Queen Sugar* counter stereotypes on Black fatherhood and conceptions of hegemonic masculinity as it pertains to Ralph Angel’s parenting practices and his relationship with his son, Blue?
- 2) How can teacher education courses employ popular culture as a resource to inform pre-service teachers’ perceptions about Black fathers’ parenting practices?

This work signals the importance of challenging narratives and imagery regarding Black fathers’ relationships with their children, particularly their Black sons. It disrupts the public imagery that has commonly been presented in policy reports and delivered by former U.S. presidents to determine the root of social, economic, and political problems faced by Black families. This work also aims to improve interactions between teachers and administrators and Black fathers and boys. Finally, this paper contributes to the growing body of scholarship that examines the engagements and experiences Black fathers have with their children (Allen, 2016; Wilson & Thompson, 2022).

Consistent with the focus of fatherhood, we acknowledge how our fathers were physically and emotionally present and served as the protectors and providers in the lives of our families and residential communities. We are teacher educators at postsecondary institutions. The first author identifies as an African American woman who was a committed viewer of the show *Queen Sugar* during the time it aired. She was raised by her mother and father and remembers witnessing her father assuming the responsibility of domestic household and child-rearing duties. She also witnessed her father working alongside her mother for a local community organization to provide support and advocate for residents on social issues in the community. The first author’s father worked multiple temporary jobs to consistently supplement income for his primary job. The flexibility among these jobs granted him the opportunity to participate in child-rearing practices that are traditionally socialized for women in the family (White, 2006). The second author was born and raised in Zambia and moved to the United States in the 1990s. She was also raised by her mother and father, and both parents played a critical role in raising her and her siblings. Additionally, the second author experienced care from other people in the community to ensure she and her siblings experienced a healthy and protected environment. The second author teaches a course that utilizes various genres of films to examine educators’ and administrators’ interactions, dispositions, and instructional practices. Both authors found that the narration of Ralph Angel and Blue was unique and disrupted several stereotypical beliefs and narratives regarding the relationship between Black fathers and sons. The narrations of the show are meaningful and relevant to present to pre-service teachers, as the show will help teachers conceptualize Black fatherhood regarding the intersections of their identities and illuminate their involvement in caring for their children. As authors, we found the depiction of Ralph Angel’s humanity, masculinity, and role as a father in juxtaposition to longstanding, dominant images

and narratives that failed to portray Black men as delivering acts of care with no external motives or demonstrating secure attachment to their family and friends.

First, this paper addresses how Black families and diverse parenting practices that support school involvement are narrowly discussed in the curricula of teacher-education programs. Next, revolutionary parenting and critical race media literacy are considered as theoretical lenses to examine the interactions and relationship dynamics between two characters on the show *Queen Sugar*—Ralph Angel and Blue. The authors argue how intentionally selecting these sources challenges racist and sexist perspectives regarding Black fathers' parenting practices and the ways they provide support for their children's education. Third, a detailed context of the show *Queen Sugar* is provided. Fourth, we argue that examining the relationship dynamics between Blue and Ralph Angel and Ralph Angel's parenting practices serve as a counternarrative of Black fathers' being absent or practicing irresponsibility in their children's lives. A description of themes that were generated based on viewing, transcribing, and analyzing excerpts of episodes from Seasons 1–5 is provided. Finally, the authors provide recommendations on how excerpts of *Queen Sugar* can be infused in specific teacher-education courses to provide pre-service teachers multiple opportunities to learn about the dynamics of Black families and Black fathers' parenting practices and contributions to their families and communities. This type of knowledge eliminates the single narrative about parenting and parental involvement in schools. These recommendations are designed to help educators recognize the ways in which Black fathers are committed to raising their children, are involved in their education, and provide a safe and loving environment for their children to thrive.

Contextualization of Black Families and Black Fathers' Parenting Practices in Teacher Education Courses

Historically, Black parents have played a pivotal role in advocating for and supporting their children's education and that of Black children in the community (McGee & Spencer, 2015). Bolgatz et al.'s (2017) ethnographic study echoes the work of McGee and Spencer (2015) by showing the ways in which Black parents advocated for their children's education when they experience implicit racial biases from educators at predominantly white, independent schools. However, studies have revealed that Black parents' experiences and testimonies are commonly underreported in social science research (Love et al., 2019; McGee & Spencer, 2015; Reynold et al., 2015; Wallace, 2023). Societal interpretations have also isolated Black families from involvement in school-related activities and contributing to the development of the school's curriculum (Marchand et al., 2019; Reynold et al., 2015). In teacher-education courses, the topic of parental involvement focuses on the degree of parent presence in schools (Butler, 2021). This perspective normalizes white middle-class values, heteronormative family structures, and gender roles and behaviors by framing the mother as the primary parent for raising the children and being involved in their educational, social, and extracurricular activities (DePouw & Matias, 2016; Wilson & Thompson, 2022). Because whiteness is rooted in teacher-education programs, it has been used to define the criteria of normative family configurations, parenting practices, and parental involvement.

Pre-service Teachers' Interactions with Black Parents

Pre-service teachers are rarely given opportunities in teacher-education courses to interact with Black parents and families to obtain insights on how their knowledge and experiences contribute to their children's education in and beyond the school context (Marchand et al., 2019; Love et al., 2021). Consequently, pre-service teachers lean on their schooling experiences and the knowledge attained about parental involvement in teacher-education courses. However, the knowledge and experiences that reinforce traditional ideologies of parental involvement are deficit-oriented and accord preference

to the interests, voices, presence, and needs of able-bodied white middle-class or affluent parents. For example, Latunde and Clark-Louque (2016) state that the Epstein Framework for Six Types of Parental Involvement is commonly used as a resource for courses in teacher-education programs to inform pre-service teachers about what constitutes parental involvement in schools. However, Latunde and Clark-Louque (2016) suggest that Epstein's framework operates on a colorblindness perspective by failing to acknowledge what parental involvement entails in school settings or how the intersections of a person's social identities, such as race, class, gender, language, and disability, can operate differently for understanding communication practices, volunteering, and opportunities to engage in school-based activities. Furthermore, teacher-education courses fail to examine how early childhood programs and school-related activities promote parental involvement but continue to exclude parents from specific diverse communities.

Surveillance of Black Parents' Child-Rearing Practices

Specifically, parental configurations and child-rearing practices exerted by Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) are frequently surveilled, critiqued, and viewed as a deficit rather than a strength for the children and their family (DePouw & Matias, 2016). In the episode "Fathers of the Movement" of the podcast *Into America* by Trymaine Lee, Tracy Martin, the father of Trayvon Martin, states, "But what happens when you have a 17-year-old or 18-year-old white kid going into schools shooting his peers—it's never said that it is due to bad parenting" (Lee, 2022). When experiencing the grief of a loved one in the Black community who died at the hands of state-sanctioned violence, Black boys and men are expected to remain emotionless to avoid being labeled as angry and aggressive. In the interview, Mr. Tracy Martin indicates the dichotomy of discipline, scrutiny, consequences, and empathy regarding the judgment of Black and white parents when their children encounter law enforcement. The child-rearing practices of white parents are not generally questioned or scrutinized by society if their young child commits violent crimes.

Black Parents' Voices as the Counter-Narrative

Scholarship utilizing Black parents' voices to serve as a counter-story or narrative to challenge historical and contemporary stereotypes about their parenting practices and active involvement in their children's education remains limited (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Marchand et al, 2019). Possey-Maddox et al. (2021) argue that anti-Black racism has historically influenced teachers' and administrators' perspectives about Black family's configurations and Black parents' parenting practices and decisions regarding their child's education. Love et al. (2021) interviewed four Black parents and utilized counternarratives as a methodology to illustrate the ways in which the Black parents showed proactive involvement in their children's education and resisted disciplinary actions that normalized the behaviors of white students and teachers and school personnel's delayed or limited communication practices. The Black parents in this study identified their experiences of questioning and challenging school personnel's academic and disciplinary decisions for their children, teaching their children to practice agency when confronted with discrimination from peers, and collaborating with school personnel and families beyond the school context. Bolgatz et al.'s (2020) study utilized counternarrative as a methodology to elucidate Black parents' communication experiences with educators, administrators, and school personnel at a private, predominantly white elementary school. Among the multitudes of parents' concerns regarding schools and the education of their children, the most consistent concern involved communication. Black parents expect direct, prompt, and explicit communication about their children's academic progress and how they should support their children academically. Already apprehensive about being counseled out of school, parents feel a sense of urgency about their children's performance. When teachers and administrators do not match that urgency by being straightforward and prompt in communicating academic concerns, they contribute to parents' fears and inhibit parents' ability to support their children. By not providing clear reports of the children's status or direction about how parents could ensure their children's academic success,

“private school speak” not only burdens Black parents with the need to translate, but it represents lowered expectations of Black families (Rollock et al., 2015). This study illustrates how Black parents’ actions debunked conceptions that they lack involvement in their children’s education and have low expectations about the children’s performance. Combating white dominance, therefore, requires that teachers and administrators demonstrate confidence in Black students and communicate their high expectations in ways that are timely and easy for parents to understand. Rather than making assumptions about what Black families want and need, teachers and administrators must seek out and listen to Black parents (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). In addition, supporting Black families involves cultivating additional spaces for networking.

Scholars of family studies and teacher education have argued that exploring the hegemonic conceptions of race, gender, and class are essential theoretical lenses to employ for examining the experiences of parents of color concerning school-based engagements, as well as those experiences contesting institutional and systemic disparities rooted in racial, gender, and sexual binaries (DePouw & Matias, 2016; Waters, 2016; Wilson & Thompson, 2021). Debunking the hegemonic conceptions of parenting involves recognizing that each family member upholds specific knowledge regarding the child, challenging the initial assumptions regarding family members of color and their role, and practicing pedagogical listening approaches to enable families of color to relate what they desire (Wilson, 2021). Whiteness remains centered when it comes to media showcasing diverse families’ configurations, relationships, and household structures (Calvacante, 2015). Shows such as *Modern Family*, *Full House*, and *Gilmore Girls* represent diversity in family configurations; however, the protagonists are mainly white, upper or middle class, and able-bodied, failing to represent most viewers’ experiences as people of color. In addition, these shows illustrate how the protagonists’ features and lifestyles normalize assimilating into white American patriarchal cultural ideas and practices.

Theoretical Framework

Because this body of work utilizes *Queen Sugar*, theories related to post-structuralism were used to counter historical and contemporary generalizations of Black family configuration, Black boys and men, and the involvement and engagement of Black fathers in education and child-rearing practices. Two theoretical lenses inform this body of work: revolutionary parenting and critical race media literacy. The theories are influenced by critical theory, which offers the opportunity for people to recognize, examine, critique, question, and challenge how inequities, domination, and exploitation occurred in sociohistorical and sociopolitical contexts. Both theories depower the hierarchy and superiority of people based on social status and the underlying implications of their socially constructed identities, such as race, age, gender, class, and sexuality.

Revolutionary Parenting

Revolutionary parenting was coined in one of Bell Hooks’s early works, the book entitled *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (2000b). Revolutionary parenting counters sexism and patriarchy, which challenge the domination that occurs in nuclear family relationships, same-sex couples, and child-adult relationships. This type of parenting emphasizes the child’s rights to love and responsive care. It also debunks the notion of matriarchy, particularly as the biological mother’s experience with pregnancy and childbirth does not immediately ensure she is better suited for raising a child. Rather, revolutionary parenting urges people to conceptualize men as equally participating in the role and responsibilities of parenting and child-rearing. Hooks (2000a) indicates that terms such as “tenderness” and “affection” have traditionally not been directly linked to fatherhood (p.137). At a

time when women are being surveilled and potentially criminalized for making decisions regarding their reproductive rights, revolutionary parenting is considered a political act for men and women to equally assume roles in raising a child.

Revolutionary parenting is driven by the belief that “it takes a village to raise a child.” In other words, it is a collective practice that leans on the participation of a community of people, albeit immediate or extended family members, neighbors, community-based child care staff and educators, or educators at local schools to raise a child. Hooks (2000a) notes that regardless of a person’s gender and marital status, the child-rearing process is not exclusive to adults or the women who have children. This practice informs the child that they are loved by people in the community. It also creates an opportunity for the child to develop relationships with more than one person as their caregiver, learning that more than one individual can be contacted and depended on to obtain love, safety, and security.

Revolutionary parenting is a feminist concept and liberating parenting practice that is pro-family, humanizing and empowering the parents and child as it encourages every family member to be their authentic selves by valuing and acknowledging their rights, voices, feelings, and well-being. The opposite of revolutionary parenting is authoritarian parenting, which represents patriarchy or matriarchy. Hierarchical parenting upholds a strict environment and primarily positions the child to be the recipient of information, expecting them to comply with the parents’ assertions and directions. In numerous cases, children and women are deemed as property or possessions. Authoritarian parenting provides limited or nonexistent opportunities for the child to thoroughly communicate their thoughts and feelings to their parents.

Critical Race Media Literacy

Critical race media literacy (CRML) is informed by critical race theory (CRT) to examine how race and other socially constructed identities are portrayed in media and how these portrayals impact people’s livelihoods (Yosso, 2002; 2020). Degand (2020) suggests the following tenets of CRT as relevant for critical examination and discussions on media:

- (1) Racism is a dominant force that influences other forms of oppression and occurs covertly and overtly in media and throughout society.
- (2) The messaging from mainstream media fits the interests of elites, conservatives, and white people, which warrants identifying and examining the gatekeepers of media (Kumah-Abiwu, 2020).
- (3) Media has historically been a platform for constructing social identities, such as race, class, gender, age, ability, nationality, and language.
- (4) Media produces and reinforces tropes and stereotypes about Black people and people of color.
- (5) Counternarratives and counter-stories are opportunities to challenge ahistorical and inaccurate depictions of Black people and people of color.

CRML recognizes that the media are politicized and play a major role in serving the interests of able-bodied, affluent White people. Yosso (2020) notes that media are a “societal curriculum” (p. 8). Yosso (2020) further suggests that Hollywood producers and screenwriters are cognizant of how their work influences public perceptions. Because the media are one of the primary sources for society to access Eurocentric ideologies, norms, and practices, these factors have been the archetypes of success for society (Degand, 2020; Dixon, 2019). Media (photographs, songs, news, films, commercials, magazines, interpretations of court-released transcripts, social media, and television) have traditionally

influenced federal and state policies, statistical data on government and social science research reports, stock explanations, textbooks, and people's beliefs.

Because media has traditionally operated from a dominant ideology lens, the voices, knowledge, and experiences of Black people and people of color have been decentered, misconstrued, and silenced. Instead, the dominant narrative contributes to prejudice, discrimination, and inequities on an individual, institutional, and societal level. Media that depict the experiences of Black people and people of color but omit their testimonies, histories, and experiences in the development process intentionally produce inaccurate representations and a generalization of their collective experiences. In response to this, CRML creates a platform for Black people and people of color to shift the narratives and images portrayed in mainstream media by utilizing critical literacy strategies to examine subliminal and explicit messages conveyed in media outlets, question and critique the intention of the messages portrayed in the media, recognize the demographic interests the media serves, and discuss how the messages impact their community. Further, CRML encourages people to develop an awareness of how Black people and people of color are generally represented in various media outlets—questioning and critiquing the intention of the representation to privilege a specific narrative; utilizing a critical, conscious approach for consuming certain media outlets; and imagining and creating alternative images, texts, and scripts in media that humanize and present an accurate representation of their experiences (Degand, 2020; King, 2017; Yosso, 2002, 2020). For this paper, CRML is used to examine how the interaction between a Black father and son in *Queen Sugar* counters depictions of anti-Blackness and hegemonic masculinity.

Infusing CRML in teacher-education courses is designed to challenge longstanding generalizations and narratives regarding the experiences of Black people and people of color globally and in the U.S. To provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to be culturally competent and authentically collaborate with Black parents and parents of color, teacher educators must find cultural artifacts that serve as supplemental resources to challenge and transform stereotypes about Black families and families of color (Soloranzo, 1997; Yosso, 2020).

The Context of *Queen Sugar*

Queen Sugar is an award-winning television series directed by Ava Duvernay, an African American woman. The show is an adaptation of the novel *Queen Sugar*, which was written by an African American woman, Natalie Braszile. In adapting the show, Ava Duvernay uses a feminist, sociohistorical, and political lens to connect the history of plantations during enslavement, disparities of land ownership and farming, and contemporary racial, gender, and regional politics. By making these connections, she elucidates how these factors impact the livelihood of Black people and people of color in Louisiana (McInnis, 2019). *Queen Sugar* ran for seven seasons, from 2016 to 2022 on a televised network owned by Oprah Winfrey, who was the executive producer of the show and identifies as an African American woman. Ava Duvernay featured Black women and women of color as leading roles in the show, and behind the scenes when it came to co-producing (Jefferson, 2017).

Queen Sugar contrasts the historical and monolithic images of Black families in mainstream media. Instead, it illuminates issues like race, colorism, class, sexuality, and gender and brings nuance to the dynamics of Black families. It also shows how intimacy and relationships are the core elements of the dynamics for the Bordelon family. This TV show features an intergenerational African American family whose origins trace to New Orleans, Louisiana. In several seasons, Ralph Angel's parenting practices for Blue are informed by various people: Darlai, Aunt Violet, Hollywood (initially Aunt Violet's partner and then husband), his sisters Charley and Nova, and his nephew, Micah. Darla is Blue's biological mother. In the first season, she is estranged from Ralph Angel and the Bordelon

family due to her history of drug addiction. Her drug abuse led Blue to experience child neglect. When Darla's drug addiction and negligent parenting practices for Blue were brought to Aunt Violet's attention, the aunt legally took custody of Blue and assumed guardianship of him during Ralph Angel's imprisonment and Darla's ongoing recovery from drug addiction. Upon his release from prison, Ralph Angel lived with Aunt Violet to be restored to humanity and experience emotional and financial support to concentrate on developing a bond with Blue and fulfilling his identity in fatherhood.

As authors, we acknowledge the essential role Aunt Violet and Darla play in Ralph Angel's and Blue's lives. Several episodes illustrate how Ralph Angel and Blue lean on both Darla's and Aunt Violet's presence, contributions, and advice for support, fellowship, and affirmation, and vice versa. The bodies of knowledge shared and exchanged among the entire Bordelon family and their close acquaintances serve as an empowering practice to survive in a white capitalist, patriarchal society (Collins, 2022). We do not neglect to recognize here the value and role that Black women and mothers play in community-based child caregiving (Collins, 2022; Hooks, 2000b). As evidenced from both authors' lived experiences, we know that Black mothers play a pivotal role in shaping the cultural values and beliefs of their children and their moral compass. However, our focus in this analysis is to highlight the parental role of fathers, specifically pertaining to Ralph Angel and Blue. Through these collaborative experiences, Ralph Angel learns about the importance of creating possibilities for Blue that exceed Ralph's childhood experiences and imaginations. The collective child-rearing practice the Bordelon family provides for Blue directly reflects Hooks's work (2000b) on revolutionary parenting.

Ralph Angel is a formerly incarcerated Black man who is the youngest sibling among Nova and Charley. In the first season, Ralph Angel works continuously to restore his trust and relationship with Blue. Upon Ralph Angel's release from prison in Season 1, Aunt Violet allows Ralph Angel to be Blue's primary caregiver. However, she provides him with support by allowing Ralph Angel and Blue to stay in her house while seeking employment. Ralph Angel's presence and active involvement benefit Blue intellectually, socially, physically, and emotionally. Ralph Angel understands that the opportunity to re-enter society post-incarceration and reunite with Blue allows him to redefine his understanding of manhood and fatherhood. At the end of his parole, Ralph Angel is given the opportunity to provide mentorship to prisoners on progressing in life and living with purpose and aspiration during the parole period. In the latter part of Season 2, Ralph Angel discovers that Blue is not his biological son. However, Ralph Angel and his family continue to take care of Blue as if he were their biological family member.

Methodology

In this paper, we employ counternarratives to analyze and challenge racist and sexist narratives about Black families, specifically parenting and relationship experiences between Black fathers and Black sons. Here, counternarratives are derived from the works of critical race theory (CRT; Yosso, 2002; 2020). Because the production and writing of *Queen Sugar* were developed by Black women and women of color, the knowledge, experiences, and voices of Black people are recognized rather than assimilated to fit into the interests and rhetoric conveyed by white people (Dixon, 2017). Counternarratives are strategic paradigms that aim to disrupt whiteness and ahistorical narratives (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). This methodology promotes critical thought and engagement on the role of race, racism, and other forms of oppression that are interconnected and pervasive in society (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002).

For qualitative research, counternarratives are situated in four categories: personal narratives, biographical narratives, composite narratives or stories, and chronicles to empower the epistemologies people hold and to validate their experiences (Salcedo & Bohonos, 2022). Personal narratives or

testimonies are generally firsthand accounts and experiences shared by Black, Indigenous, and people of color on navigating historical and contemporary structural and systemic inequities, barriers, discrimination, harassment, and experience. Biographical narratives or stories are the accurate retelling of an individual or group of people's experience. This approach involves the narrator or researcher's establishing and sustaining genuine interest and trust with people in the community. Composite stories are a collection of narratives and stories of similar real-life experiences (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002). Finally, Milner (2020) refers to Ladson-Billings's and Tate's (1998) work to state that counternarratives are also framed as parables, chronicles, poetry, fiction, and revisionist histories to counter ahistorical and dominant narratives.

Queen Sugar is a fictional story. The images and scripts of the show illustrate multi-dimensions of Blackness and intersectionality, which serve as an analysis tool to counter the historical stereotypes generated by Eurocentric ideologies about Black people's livelihood, Black family configurations and childrearing practices, femininity, masculinity, sexuality, class, and wealth.

For this paper, we utilized data collected from excerpts of *Queen Sugar* as counternarratives. Counternarratives explicitly challenge dominant narratives and highlight the stories of those whose experiences are generally overlooked and often remain untold, providing an alternative story to these dominant narratives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The least-told story in this paper's context is that of the Black father's role. The counternarrative, therefore, aims at disrupting the deficit perspectives of Black fathers in mainstream media.

Data Source and Analysis

To analyze the data, we employed the thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a data analysis method widely used in psychology and a range of other disciplines. The term "thematic analysis" has also been used to refer to data analysis techniques in the social sciences. This method entails identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis provides procedures and processes that enable the generation of codes and themes from qualitative data. The smallest unit of analysis is known as the code. Codes are the building blocks of themes, which are larger patterns emerging from the data. Thematic analysis can be used for various forms of data, both large and small. Within this study, this approach was used to analyze seven transcripts.

Through analysis, we examined how the cultural and contextual representation of Ralph Angel's and Blue's existence and masculinity are presented, interpreted, and contested by different people belonging to various racial, gender, and socio-economic identities in *Queen Sugar*. The depictions of the scenes are designed to counter the dominant ideologies of race and masculinity. The data in this study were collected by reviewing and transcribing 18 excerpts from various episodes of *Queen Sugar* from Season 1 to Season 5. For this article, only seven transcriptions are presented. These specific seasons were considered, as they depicted Ralph Angel's development and sensemaking of fatherhood, his relationship with Blue, and changes in his relationship with Darla. English subtitles were used to confirm the accuracy of words and statements conveyed in each episode for transcription purposes. The first author initially watched all the seasons from 2016 to 2020. She began to make connections between Ralph Angel's character to Bell Hooks's books on *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity* (2004) and *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (2015). She invested in Hulu, revisited several of the episodes from Season 1, and continued watching the show until Season 7, Episode 13.

The initial coding process was conducted by reviewing selected scenes of *Queen Sugar* that directly reflected each transcript. We also engaged in close reading of each transcript and added brief comments next to excerpts on the transcripts, such as "Blue raises a question," "Ralph Angel hugs Blue," or "Responds to Blue's inquiries." As we reviewed different scenes that correlated with the transcript, we marked actions that occurred in the scene, such as Ralph Angel's picking up Blue to

give him a hug. Documenting this information contributed to the description of the category and themes and provided more context for readers who have not seen *Queen Sugar*. Axial coding was practiced by merging similar codes and generating preliminary categories, such as “advocating for Blue,” “recommended toys,” “expressing feelings,” and “intimate conversations or dialogues.” The preliminary categories were organized into themes that corresponded to the research questions and provided context regarding Ralph Angel’s parenting practices and relationship with Blue. To avoid subjectivity and ensure the data responded to the research questions, the first author allowed an external reviewer to provide feedback on the manuscript draft, which at the time included the introduction, theoretical framework, literature review, data, and description of the themes. The external reviewer, who is a professor for a teacher-education program at a university, was recruited based on their expertise and extensive scholarship on Black male teachers’ development and pedagogical practices and critical race theory in teacher education and PreK–12 education. Based on the feedback provided, changes were made to the theoretical framework, detailed descriptions of Ralph Angel and Blue, methodology, recommendations for analysis, and steps to ensure that the data are supported by the tenets of the theoretical framework.

Debunking the Emotionless Stereotype: Authentic Bond between Father and Son

This theme elucidates the physical and emotional connection Ralph Angel and his son developed and maintained throughout the series. Patriarchy commonly governs family systems in global society (Hooks, 2004); in particular, it constructs the identity of spouse and father. Therefore, it is important to understand how Ralph Angel’s parenting practices extended beyond economic contributions and provided comfort and protection for Blue. Ralph Angel initially assumes full responsibility for parenting Blue until Darla recovers from substance abuse and shows interest in assuming equal responsibility. The distribution of Ralph Angel’s and Darla’s childrearing practices supports Hooks (2000b) argument that revolutionary parenting involves equal participation in parenting. Throughout the show, Ralph Angel’s relationship with Blue shows multiple one-on-one bonding experiences grounded in love, care, trust, communicating feelings, and the ability to display a range of emotions. According to Hooks (2004), men’s expressing their lack of knowledge and emotional vulnerabilities, such as sadness and depression, in response to experiences of disappointment does not conform to the “rigid script of maleness” (p. 12) and is in direct opposition to domination and patriarchy (Hooks, 2004).

Season 2 Episode 8 highlights Ralph Angel’s and Blue’s response to the shift in parenting practices between Darla and Ralph Angel. Ralph Angel and Blue are in the kitchen, eating breakfast. Ralph Angel notices that Blue appears sad and investigates what is bothering him. He states, “Now, you know we don’t waste food, Blue. What’s going on?” Blue responds by questioning why his biological mother, Darla, is not present during dinner time. He points out the difference in the context when Darla is at the house during dinner time by stating, “That was just me and Mommy, not you, me, and Mommy.” He further asks, “Did I do something bad?” Ralph Angel immediately follows up, “No, you didn’t do anything wrong. I don’t want you to think that’s okay.” In this scene, Ralph Angel affirms Blue’s feelings and voice by allowing Blue to express what is bothering him. This scene disrupts the image of stoicism that is often thrust upon Black boys and men, negating their emotions and experiences of disappointment (Hooks, 2004). Ralph Angel acknowledges the changes in Blue’s behavior indicated by his not eating. Blue’s disappointment is a response to the separation between Ralph Angel and Darla during that period. This dialogue shows that Blue felt comfortable raising questions to Ralph Angel about his separation with Darla, curiosities regarding whether he caused a

shift in the routine of dinner with his parents, and his desires for his parents to be together and residing in the same household. Blue's behavior also represents how the changes in parental configuration can impact children's emotional well-being (Cooper et al., 2020).

In Season 3 Episode 10, Ralph Angel and Blue are in Blue's room preparing for bedtime. Blue questions Ralph Angel about the police coming to the house. In this episode, the police officer and two representatives from the local Child Protective Services came to the house. The dialogue below shows Blue posing a series of questions to make sense of what occurred:

Blue: Pop, why did the police come?

Ralph Angel: (sighs as he looks at Blue) Just a misunderstanding. Them ladies wanted to make sure the house is good. That's all. I'm sorry if they scared you. I was a little scared myself.

Blue: Is that why you yelled?

Ralph Angel: Yeah. And I shouldn't have. (looks at Blue)

Blue: What's a record?

Ralph Angel: When I tell you not to do something (sits on Blue's bed) and you do it anyway. Then, I got to put you on time out. When you was a baby, I did something I shouldn't have. Had to go away for a little while. I think about what I have done. I was in prison, Blue. You know what prison is?

Blue: It's where bad people go. Are you a bad person, Pop?

Ralph Angel: No, I'm not a bad person. But I did some bad things. I took things that weren't mine. I need you to know something. I regret the things I have done. And I ain't never going to do them again. You understand?

(Blue shakes his head)

Ralph Angel: I ain't going to let nothing . . . ain't going to let nothing take me away from you. Never again. Come here. (Ralph Angel and Blue hug each other). Oh man, I love you so much, man.

This dialogue represents an emotionally vulnerable moment between Ralph Angel and Blue. It also supports Bell Hooks's work on reclaiming male integrity (Hooks, 2004). Although Blue is young during this season, he feels comfortable asking his father additional questions about his past life experiences. Ralph Angel does not choose righteousness or annoyance to diminish Blue's questions regarding his past but rather ensures he fully understood what occurred. Instead of lying or compartmentalizing this information and preserving it to be disclosed later in Blue's life, Ralph Angel tells Blue about his past when Blue raises the question regarding whether he was a "bad person" for going to jail. Ralph Angel acknowledges how he has changed and commits to never leave Blue again.

In Season 5 Episode 8, Ralph Angel and Darla return home early from their honeymoon to check on Blue in response to the police brutality and killing of George Floyd. In response to their concern, Ralph Angel and Darla believe it is imperative to have a conversation with Blue.

Darla: Um, George Floyd was a man who . . . (pauses and looks at Ralph Angel)

Ralph Angel: He got killed by some police officers. You know what Black Lives Matter means, right?

Blue: Yes, but don't all lives matter ?

Ralph Angel: Yeah, but everybody doesn't act like it. So we can't say that all lives matter until they act like Black lives matter. You understand?

Darla: (touches Ralph Angel) Ralph Angel

Ralph Angel: (turns to Darla) It's time. Blue, this world is filled with good people. Good things. And I want you to experience all of that. Everything the world has to

offer you; I want that for you. You understand. The thing is, this world ain't all good. There's a lot of bad things out there. A lot of bad stuff.

Darla: And bad people.

Blue: My teacher says there's no such thing as bad people.

Ralph Angel: Well, there is. I wished we lived in a world where everybody was nice and everybody was good. But bad people don't see you. They won't see you. (starts to cry) I wish I could be there to make sure everyone you meet in life will treat you right. But I can't. So I need you to know what to do when someone doesn't love you the way me and mommy do.

Darla: You have to be extra careful if you are ever stopped by the police.

Blue: But I'm not going to break the law.

Ralph Angel: That doesn't matter. You will be stopped by the police, Blue.

Blue: Why?

Ralph Angel: Because you're Black. And that's just what happens to Black boys and men in America.

This scene represents the racial armoring Black parents commonly deliver when informing their young children regarding societal racial bias and the impact of state-sanctioned violence on Black people (Dilworth-Bart et al., 2021). Although these dialogues are informative for Black children at a young age, they also serve as a form of protection and highlight how Black children are racially socialized in society. Ralph Angel's urge to have this dialogue with Darla and Blue represents his fear that his son will experience systemic, institutional, and structural racial violence. He initiates the conversation by expressing his desire for Blue to experience living in a world of unlimited possibilities where his self-worth, dignity, and racial pride are intact despite people's biases. Ralph Angel shows his emotions of pain to Blue by crying when he states that will not be there to protect Blue when his son encounters experiences of prejudice and discrimination. Darla's recommendation to Blue to be "extra careful" if stopped by the police represents the longstanding impact of mass incarceration and deaths of Black boys when confronted by the police or neighborhood vigilantes. Ralph Angel and Darla affirm Blue by acknowledging that his authentic self is deserving of love and people seeing the good in him. This part of the dialogue represents revolutionary parenting, as it ensures Blue will continue to be himself. However, Ralph Angel and Darla also acknowledge that with his traits, people will perceive him negatively due to racism. Although Blue assures his parents that he will not break the law, Ralph Angel warns him about being stopped by the police because of his race.

Diverse Perspectives on Masculinity and Play

For multiple seasons, one of Blue's play choices, a doll named Kenya, offers Ralph Angel the opportunity to define his conception of masculinity and happiness for his son. He allows Blue to be expressive of his feelings and publicly play with his doll. From the first season, Ralph Angel supports and advocates Blue's choice of playing with Kenya.

In Season 1 Episode 11, Blue's teacher, Miss Valez, contacts Ralph Angel and Darla to schedule an after-school meeting in Blue's classroom to discuss a physical altercation that occurred between Blue and Jamal during recess. Jamal and Blue are Black boys who are peers in Miss Valez's class. Jamal's parents are also contacted by Miss Valez, and they attend the meeting. The earlier episodes of this season showed that Blue has been experiencing bullying from Jamal. Blue's experience with bullying counters the dominant narrative that frames Black boys as bullies in educational spaces instead of victims (Bryan, 2019). The dialogue shows how Ralph Angel's parenting practices are questioned by Jamal's father:

Counter Hegemonic Conceptions of Black Fathers

Jamal's father (states to Jamal's mother): Isn't this the boy who plays with Barbie dolls?

Ralph Angel: (voice gets louder) It ain't a Barbie doll.

Jamal's father: Maybe if you bought your boy some appropriate toys, he'd fit in better with the other boys.

Ralph Angel: (looks directly at Jamal's father) It ain't none of your [expletive] business what toys my son plays with.

In this scene, Jamal's parents are Black. The presence of both Black fathers in this scene counters the narrative that depicts Black fathers as uninvolved in their children's education and lacking concern about their children's well-being in school spaces (Allen, 2016). Further, this scene illustrates the ways in which Black men participate in policing the gender expression of other Black men and boys. Jamal's father utilized a hegemonic masculinity and cis-gender lens to judge Ralph Angel's role as a father and his adequacy in raising his son (Bryan, 2019; Hooks, 2000b; Wallace, 2023). Jamal's father classifies Blue's behavior as feminine to imply that Blue's choice of playing with the doll deems him unfit to play with other boys at school (Hooks, 2000b; Hooks, 2004). However, Ralph Angel immediately challenges Jamal's father's rationale regarding Blue's playing with Kenya (the doll) and his inability to make friends with other boys. This scene highlights how Jamal's parents' beliefs, regardless of their racial background, uphold anti-Blackness, specifically racist and sexist conceptions of play for Black children in and beyond the classroom spaces of schools (Bryan, 2019). The expectations for boys' behaviors and play are racialized and connected to hegemonic masculinity. Black boys' play is judged differently than that of their white counterparts and boys of other races (Bryan, 2019).

In season two, episode two, Ralph Angel, Darla, and Blue are at a diner. A waiter, who is a Latino man, approaches them to take their orders for dessert. In the dialogue, Ralph Angel allows Blue to use Kenya to verbally express his preferences.

Waiter: Would you like anything else?

Ralph Angel: Oh, we good.

Waiter: Dessert menu?

Blue: (holds up Kenya) Me and Kenya want desserts!

Waiter: That's your doll?

Blue: Uh huh.

Waiter: You know, you should get a Transformer. Those are really cool.

Blue looks sad. He holds Kenya close to his chest and looks at Kenya. Darla looks directly at Ralph Angel. Ralph Angel immediately coughs to clear his throat. He looks directly at the waiter.

Ralph Angel: We're going to get two ice cream sundaes, all the toppings y'all got. One for my son (tilts his head to Blue) and one for his doll. You got me?

Waiter: Not a problem.

This dialogue also illustrates how Black boys' play and Black fathers' parenting approach are revealed and scrutinized through a gendered lens (Bryan, 2019; Wallace, 2023). The waiter suggests Blue play with Transformers, a toy that has historically been marketed to boys (Reich, Black, & Foliaki, 2018). As the waiter is Latino, this interaction illustrates the ways men of color impose their expectations on boys of color to perform hegemonic masculine behaviors that are centered in male-to-male competitiveness, video games, sports, or engagement of "boy toys" for play (Bryan, 2019; Hooks, 2004). In this scene, Blue is aware that Kenya disrupts the societal expectations of toys for boys. His immediate silence and holding Kenya close to his chest signal a self-soothing technique that he has developed in response to interactions in which Kenya's presence is not accepted by others. Ralph

Angel challenges the waiter's actions of gender policing by not acknowledging his statement, looking at the waiter, and reinstating the order Blue made for himself and his doll. Ralph Angel's rebuttal challenges the dominant narrative on historic figments of manhood forced upon Black men to conform and appease their white counterparts (Wallace, 2023). The waiter's response, "Not a problem," indicates that his recommendation for Blue to play with a Transformer instead of a doll was not accepted by Blue, Ralph Angel, or Darla.

Ralph Angel's Active Engagement in Blue's Education

There were several episodes that showed Ralph Angel's visibility and involvement in Blue's education in and beyond the school context. The episodes presented in this theme connects to Marchand et al.'s (2019) definition of parental engagement, specifically considering the ways parents motivate and nurture their children's educational growth in multiple settings (p. 12). In addition, the data presented in this theme illustrate how Ralph Angel's involvement led teachers to inform him directly about Blue's activities and incidents that occurred at school and supported Blue's educational endeavors. Excerpts from various episodes of *Queen Sugar* presented in this theme counter patriarchal culture and further examine the meaning of a father's involvement in a child's education, which is often unknown or not considered when educators make meaning of their students' parental configurations. In addition, it elucidates the multiple ways in which Ralph Angel demonstrated home-based engagement practices with Blue, thereby contributing to Blue's academic success as well as his physical and social-emotional wellness in school. This theme also counters the narrative of Black fathers' not being directly involved in their children's education (Cooper et al., 2021).

In Season 1 Episode 10, Ralph Angel meets Blue to pick him up from his classroom at school after dismissal. When Blue sees Ralph Angel enter the classroom, he greets him by giving him a hug and sharing his excitement about going to the zoo.

Ralph Angel: Whaaa! Going to the zoo! That's exciting. (Ralph Angel puts Blue down so he can pick up his backpack. He approaches his teacher.)

Miss Valez: Hey.

Ralph Angel: How's it going?

Miss Valez: Good. So we're going to the zoo.

Blue: (runs to Ralph Angel) You got to sign my permission slip, Pop.

Ralph Angel: Oh man, no problem. Where do you want me to sign?

Blue: Right there.

Ralph Angel: Okay. I'll sign right . . . just like that.

(Teacher looks at the paper and Blue. Blue claps his hands and passes the permission slip to the teacher).

This scene illustrates that Ralph Angel is physically and emotionally connected with Blue. The routine Ralph Angel establishes by taking Blue to school and picking him up serves as a space for Blue to immediately communicate his excitement about his current and upcoming experiences at school. This scene also allows the teacher, Miss Valez, to see the interaction and relationship between Ralph Angel and Blue. As Blue shares his excitement of going to the zoo, he informs Ralph Angel that he needs his father's signature on the permission slip, showing him where to sign his name. The dialogue between Blue and Ralph Angel is indicative of Blue's comfort in expressing his feelings to his father about school occurrences without being concerned about being condemned or questioned about his level of excitement. Blue's behavior debunks traditional hierarchical practices of parenting in which the parent and child have hierarchical relationships (Hooks, 2000a). Collectively, Ralph Angel's

initiative of having Blue reside with him and establishing and sustaining child-rearing routines signal that Ralph Angel is the primary parent at the time.

Another factor that reflects parental engagement outside the school context is school choices or placement decisions, which Black parents have historically made for their children since schools desegregated (Possey-Maddox et al., 2021). These decisions are typically informed by the parents' schooling experiences, context of the neighborhood, and opportunity in terms of resources, quality teachers, and affirming their children's experiences. In Season 5 Episode 9, Ralph Angel, Darla, and Blue acknowledge Blue's acceptance letter to an elite school in Washington, D.C.: Sidwell Friends. Although Ralph Angel and Darla are initially reluctant to let Blue relocate and attend this school, they consult their family members and give Blue a few days to think about his choice of attending Sidwell Friends. Black parents' consulting with family members and friends is a common practice used as capital to foster a support system for the child and tailor that child's educational experiences (Possey-Maddox et al., 2019). Ralph Angel piques Blue's interest in Sidwell Friends by stating, "You know, I've been thinking about that Sidwell School sometimes." Blue responds, "Me too. Sometimes." He further elaborates his interest and rationale for wanting to attend the school to meet new people from all over the world and train to be a leader. Being allowed to explain his decision to attend a school that suits his interests represents Blue's agency and affirms how he chooses to participate and contribute to society (hooks, 2015). The primary factor that inspires his decision is being intellectually stimulated to aspire to leadership and make a change.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper aims to apply elements of revolutionary parenting and critical race media literacy in research focusing on race, gender, class, and media in teacher education. The themes presented in this paper illustrate how Ralph Angel's child-rearing practices counter anti-Blackness, sexism, and the patriarchal culture. Throughout the show, Ralph Angel's love and care for Blue is presented through several factors: being physically present in all aspects of Blue's livelihood, having his direct attention, and being emotionally connected to his son. Throughout the show, Ralph Angel consistently prioritizes Blue's needs and plays a role in influencing his son's decision-making. This type of parenting is radical in the sense that it counters the ideology of child-rearing responsibilities and the identity of fatherhood for men. Simultaneously, we argue that this type of parenting among Black men is not unique. Stereotypes about Black men as fathers have been generated and perpetuated in the media, informing policies that have impacted Black families (Love et al., 2021; Stephens, 2022). Black people encounter racialized experiences that are unique compared to those experienced by people of color.

Our findings also indicate how various experiences shaped Ralph Angel's understanding of masculinity and parenting practices. The representation of Black fatherhood in *Queen Sugar* responds to the paucity of research on how Black fathers' parenting styles influence their child's cognitive, social, and emotional development, and achievement in educational experiences (Harmon et al., 2022). The findings of this study also support a National Health Statistics report that stated that Black fathers' level of involvement and child-rearing practices with their children are higher than their white and Hispanic counterparts (Jones & Mosher, 2013).

In several cases, Ralph Angel's decision-making for Blue was indicative of revolutionary parenting, a social-political conscious approach—that is, an investment of love and care is prioritized for raising Blue. Because this type of parenting is anti-hierarchical, Blue's response to the parenting allows him to be expressive about his frustrations and happiness, choices regarding Kenya in public spaces and school, questions regarding institutional and systemic racism, and resolving family and societal problems. Although popular culture is the data source, it indicates the importance of

examining how African American parents' children respond to feminist parenting practices (White, 2006). Because white capitalist patriarchy is ingrained in our society, there are several episodes in which Ralph Angel still upholds the ideals of patriarchy, particularly when he interacts with Darla and she recovers from substance abuse, gains her independence, and begins advancing professionally and economically.

Schools uphold whiteness and hierarchy in accordance with people's socially constructed identities (Shah & Grimaldos, 2022). Eurocentric perspectives on parental involvement and engagement for schooling, parent-child interactions, and child-rearing practices are extensively covered in teacher-education programs. These programs utilize a deficit stance by "othering" non-white parenting practices and the support they offer to their children's education in home and school settings (DePouw & Matias, 2016; Morris et al., 2022). Offering opportunities for pre-service and in-service teachers to examine the ways K–12 schools have historically and continuously excluded Black parents from access to their children's education can create opportunities for pre-service teachers to understand Black parents' mistrust of the K–12 school system. This type of activity would also create space for pre-service teachers to examine how schools have traditionally centered the needs and interests of certain racial and gender demographic of parents to influence organizations such as the school parent teacher association (PTA) (Shah & Grimaldos, 2022).

As the student and family demographics in P–12 schools continue to become more diverse, exposure and engagement activities that understand the perspective of Black fathers', parents', and families' experiences with school, particularly their constraints and support, are critical to establishing and maintaining an equitable and trusting partnership that will benefit the child. To assist in this process, we recommend the following practices for pre-service teachers to engage in tenets associated with critical race media literacy and counternarratives about Black parents and families. *Queen Sugar* can be used as an analytical tool for several teacher-education courses.

The curricula in teacher education programs typically comprise a course that involves collaboration among teachers, families, and communities. An activity that might be implemented in the course is the use of a Venn diagram. In this assignment, the pre-service teachers would be engaged in conducting a comprehensive review and analysis of the following sources: a report by a policymaker and a documentary. Specifically, preservice teachers would indicate the name, race, and gender identity of the policy decision-maker or producer(s) and conduct a comparison analysis. With this practice activity, the pre-service teachers would be encouraged to initially view a policy report, such as the Moynihan Report, or the documentary *The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America*, and identify excerpts that pathologize and reinforce stereotypes of Black families today. Utilizing this information, pre-service teachers would then be encouraged to view and analyze excerpts of *Queen Sugar*, indicating the ways the sitcom reflects or counters the social pathologies and stereotypes of Black families presented in the Moynihan report or *The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America*. Comparing the excerpts of both sources will support critical race media literacy by using counternarrative as a practice for marking the differences from the storyteller's or narrator's perspective and explaining how specific sources challenge racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes about Black families, their child-rearing practices, and involvement in education. Pre-service teachers can also work on an asset-based mapping activity that focuses on acknowledging how Black families' and parents' traditions and cultural practices can influence content curricula at schools (Morris et al., 2022; Yosso, 2005). These course activities collectively reflect critical race media literacy, as pre-service teachers are encouraged to describe how rhetoric or narratives construct conceptions or images of race, specifically on Black families and Black parenting.

Another course that is common in teacher-education programs is child psychology and human growth and development. Because these courses cover several prominent developmental theories, such as Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory, excerpts of *Queen Sugar* that show the

impact of community-based child caregiving and Bell Hooks's work on revolutionary parenting could be utilized. Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory provides an opportunity to analyze how consistency in routines, interactions, and experiences the child has with parents, extended family, educators, friends, neighbors, or community stakeholders impacts their development and lived experiences on the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and/or macrosystem level. The pre-service teachers can refer to the bioecological systems framework when viewing excerpts of *Queen Sugar* to acknowledge spaces Blue felt safe or unsafe and the difference in his emotional state when Darla and Ralph Angel were separated versus when they were living together in the same household. Throughout the episodes in each season, Darla's and Ralph Angel's relationship strengthens, which eventually leads them to reunite and get married. As Darla's presence in Ralph Angel's and Blue's lives increases, Ralph Angel and Darla equally share the role of taking care of Blue. As their relationship evolves, however, their parenting practice reflects hegemonic masculinity (Brandth & Kvade, 2018). In addition, these courses address the levels of attachments: secure attachment, anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, and disorganized attachment. Covering the different levels of attachment helps pre-service teachers to understand the importance of caregiver and child bonding and the ways it supports the child in progressing in their emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development. The findings presented in *Debunking the Emotionless Stereotype: Authentic Bond Between Father and Son* and Blue's interactions with Darla, Miss Valez, his immediate family members, and people in the community could be used for pre-service teachers to determine traits that reflect secure, anxious, avoidant, or disorganized attachment. From watching multiple episodes of *Queen Sugar*, pre-service teachers could also mark the number of times Ralph Angel parenting practices reflect secure attachment for Blue. This information can be used to counter hegemonic masculinity narratives that frame Black fathers as being emotionally detached from their loved ones.

Teacher-education programs include courses that encourage pre-service teachers to build an understanding of how the learning climate and environment in schools influence children's cognitive, social, and emotional well-being. In these courses, it is important to discuss how restricting classroom jobs, activities, toys, or class resources to students' gender reinforces hegemonic masculinity and femininity. The findings presented in *Diverse Perspectives on Masculinity and Play* illuminate how pre-service teachers can design and practice incorporating anti-racist and gender-neutral learning spaces. Schools are places that perpetuate racial hierarchy and value gendered and heteronormative behaviors. Therefore, course activities could also include pre-service teachers' constructing newsletters to inform parents about the importance of inclusivity and opportunities for children to play with gender-neutral toys. For pre-service teachers enrolled in early childhood or elementary teacher education programs, the National Association of Education for Young Children's Code of Ethical Conduct could be used to provide a rationale for establishing and sustaining an inclusive and gender-neutral learning environment.

Because the internet, mainstream television, and print have traditionally dominated and influenced society's perspectives about Black family configurations and caregiving practices (Moddy-Ramirez et al., 2024), Black mothers and fathers are aware on how they are perceived in school spaces as it relates to parenting their child. Regardless of society's image, the studies and excerpts of the show *Queen Sugar* illustrate how Black fathers and mothers are committed to their children's education and using their expertise to contribute to the school's infrastructure, curriculum, and logistics.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the feedback from Dr. Julius Davis and the peer reviewers from the Journal of Family Diversity in Education.

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ⁱ The letter, "W" in white and whiteness is lowercase throughout the article. This approach supports the work of Critical Race Theory as it recognizes the language in text and how it can reinforce racial hierarchy (Matias, 2020).

ⁱⁱ Darla is Blue's biological mother. She was initially estranged from Ralph Angel and the Bordelon family due to her experience of drug abuse. Throughout the show, she actively works to recover her abuse with drugs, reform her livelihood, and restore her relationship with Ralph Angel, Blue, and the Bordelon family.