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2014

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
Los Angeles

Dollars and Sense(making): An Examination of African American Parents'
Pecuniary and Non-pecuniary Educational Investment Decisions

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Education

by

Rhoda Yvette Robinson Freelon

2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Dollars and Sense(making): An Examination of African American Parents' Educational Investment Decisions

by

Rhoda Yvette Robinson Freelon

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor John Rogers, Chair

National attention regarding the heterogeneity of student outcomes across has race been an enduring concern among education researchers and policy makers. Often, the reasons for the well-documented differences are rooted in negative perceptions of families of color and what they fail to do for their children's education. In attempt to understand parent contributions, this study examines the educational investment strategies of African American parents using multiple methods and data sets. The study uses data from two national data sets (The Consumer Expenditure Survey and The Panel Study of Income Dynamics) as well as interview data with Los Angeles area parents. The study examines existing social and economic theory about parents' actions and behaviors regarding education and explicitly incorporates a race and class-based perspective that considers parents' social and economic position in society. The work focuses on educational investments (i.e., monetary, experiential, and parent-school based investments) as a broader conceptualization of parent involvement. By examining parents' educational investment patterns using quantitative and qualitative data, this study critically

examines the prevailing deficit thinking about African American parents' involvement in their children's educational trajectory.

Central to the quantitative analysis of this work is a deeper understanding of intergroup disparities. Findings reveal that household income and wealth are positively related to educational expenditures across groups and may serve as a mechanism for perpetuating educational advantages. Interview data reveal the numerous ways that African American parents in this study invest in their children to advance their educational and social development despite contending with varying degrees of racial and economic inequality. Findings also suggest African American parents with limited economic capital increase their reliance on other forms of capital such as social capital found through their personal networks and community based organizations. Given the body of evidence that connects parental engagement and student achievement, this study has clear implications for better understanding the various ways that African American parents with children in a variety of school contexts can help to bolster student achievement.

The dissertation of Rhoda Yvette Robinson Freelon is approved.

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M. Belinda Tucker

John Rogers, Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to my Dad (Eddie) and Mom (Mildred) who continue to make parental investments in me.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been more than fortunate throughout the course of my life to have so many wonderful people encourage me along the way, but first I thank God for the inspiration and motivation to apply, enroll, and complete this degree.

I would like to thank Eddie Robinson and Mildred Charles Robinson for their enduring love and support. You have always been there for me and have always believed in my abilities and encouraged me in every way. Whenever I experience periods of self-doubt and anxiety, I can always call my father and receive the kind of supportive and loving talk that inspires me with the confidence to continue.

My Mother, Mildred has exhibited mother-wit in my educational journey and has been the strongest most remarkable parent advocate I know. She loves to tell the story of how I started Kindergarten very prepared thanks to her, my father, and my pre-school program. According to my mother, the first day of kindergarten, I was so eager to attend and I came home excited each day because I was drawing lots of pictures in school. My mother collected all the drawings for one week. At the start of week two she went to my elementary school to meet with my kindergarten teacher. She declared that I could read and write and she demanded that I be given more rigorous school work. For her love, bravery, and tenacity around education and parenting, I am eternally grateful.

To my husband, Byron – whom I love most dearly, I am so delighted to have you as my life partner. You are an exceedingly patient person who supported me throughout this entire process of completing my degree. I am grateful to have met you many years ago and to still know and love you today. I look forward to the many years ahead as we continue to commit

ourselves to love for one another and the broader Black community. We have much more work to do on this earth together, and I am happy to do it all with you.

My brother, Rodney Robinson and sister Karin “Sister” Robinson, I am so appreciative that we’re siblings and friends. I love you both and appreciate the love and support you have provided throughout the years.

To my mentors who were responsible for the evolution of my scholarly interests: Drs. Barbara A.P. Jones, Jewel Prestige, Lisa Aubrey, James Peoples, Samuel L. Myers, Samuel Agronow, Nan Maxwell, Mitch Watnik, John Rogers, Robert Cooper, Tyrone Howard, and Walter Allen. Listed in order of when I encountered you over the years, each of you helped shape my identity as a scholar at the many junctures of my educational journey.

To Professor John Rogers you are an excellent mentor and adviser who knew when to press and challenge me for more. I am so appreciative of your willingness to take me on as an advisee during my first year in the program. You supported me throughout and provided me with a wealth of research opportunities during my time in graduate school. I look forward to the work we will produce together as academic colleagues.

To my dissertation committee, thank you for your expert knowledge and support as I pushed through and produced my final draft. I hope that I will continue to learn from you all and work with you in the future as academic colleagues. Each of you inspires me to be a better scholar. Dr. Mike Seltzer who taught nearly all of my quantitative methods courses during my time at UCLA, not only are you a gifted and patient instructor, but your scholarship is excellent. You are a gentle and thoughtful spirit and I count it an honor that you were willing to serve on my committee. To Belinda Tucker, who saved me in a pinch, while you didn’t know me as a student, you believed in my research and chose to serve on my committee. Your careful and

insightful comments on the final draft served to improve the document and hone my thinking about future research possibilities. To Dr. Allen, you serve as a mentor and inspiration who adopted me as one of his your own students as if I were enrolled in HEOC. I appreciate your guidance and all of the opportunities you have created for me to grow as a scholar. If I am able to be half as prolific and productive as you are, I will make significant contributions to the field.

To my Urban Schooling buddies—I love you all and I am most grateful to Arlene Ford and Melanie Bertrand who I count among my closest friends and colleagues for life. I would also like to thank the broader community of scholars who helped me during my journey – Lanette Jimerson, Tanya Chirapuntu, Wendy Perez, Sera Hernandez, Femi Vance, Rema Reynolds, David Medina, Brian Ventura, Danny Martinez, Nicole Mirra, Antero Garcia, Cliff Lee, Maribel Santiago, Queenie Zhu, Monique Lane, Karissa Peer, and Karla Perez.

I would also like to thank my Chicago friends for their support near the tail end of this process – Torica Webb, my BGR running partner and sister in the struggle for completing various races and milestones. To the GED students at Fellowship in Fuller Park you are all an inspiration to me. To my comrades who make up the Woodlawn Peace Center Collective – Dawanda, Gabriel, Holly and Ken, thank you for providing me with important outlets for meaningful community engagement. I really feel we are on the verge of building something really special in our community.

I would like to thank the amazing program staff in the Office of Student Services – Harmeet Singh and Amy Gershon who made UCLA policies, procedures, and paperwork a breeze!

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CHAPTER 1:

Introduction and Problem Statement

Introduction

In the era of the No Child Left Behind Act, there has been increased policy and public attention on the gap between the educational achievement of African American students and White students. Data on educational inequality shows that Black students are more likely than White students, regardless of socio-economic status, to be enrolled in schools with inadequate resources. African American students are most likely to encounter poor conditions in highly segregated schools (Kozol, 1992; Orfield & Eaton, 1997; Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005). Even when African American students attend less racially and economically segregated schools they often experience within-school segregation where they are tracked into lower academic tiers (Oakes, 2005; Lucas, 1999) or face low expectations and negative stereotypes from school staff (Ferguson, 1998; Gosa & Alexander, 2006). Despite these well documented inequities in educational opportunity, public policy discourse often seeks alternative explanations for gaps in achievement, and, in such accounts, African American parents rarely escape blame.

Against the backdrop of a persistent negative discourse about parents of color (Darity, 2002; Valencia, 1997), studies have documented the positive effects of involvement by African American parents in the school and the home (Clark, 1984; Winters, 1993; Yan, 1999; Diamond, 2000; Diamond & Gomez, 2004). Moreover, when examining national data on educational aspirations, all subgroups of parents report relatively high aspirations for their children. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics shows that 64% of Black and Latino parents and 66% of White parents of 6th through 11th graders have expectations that their children will

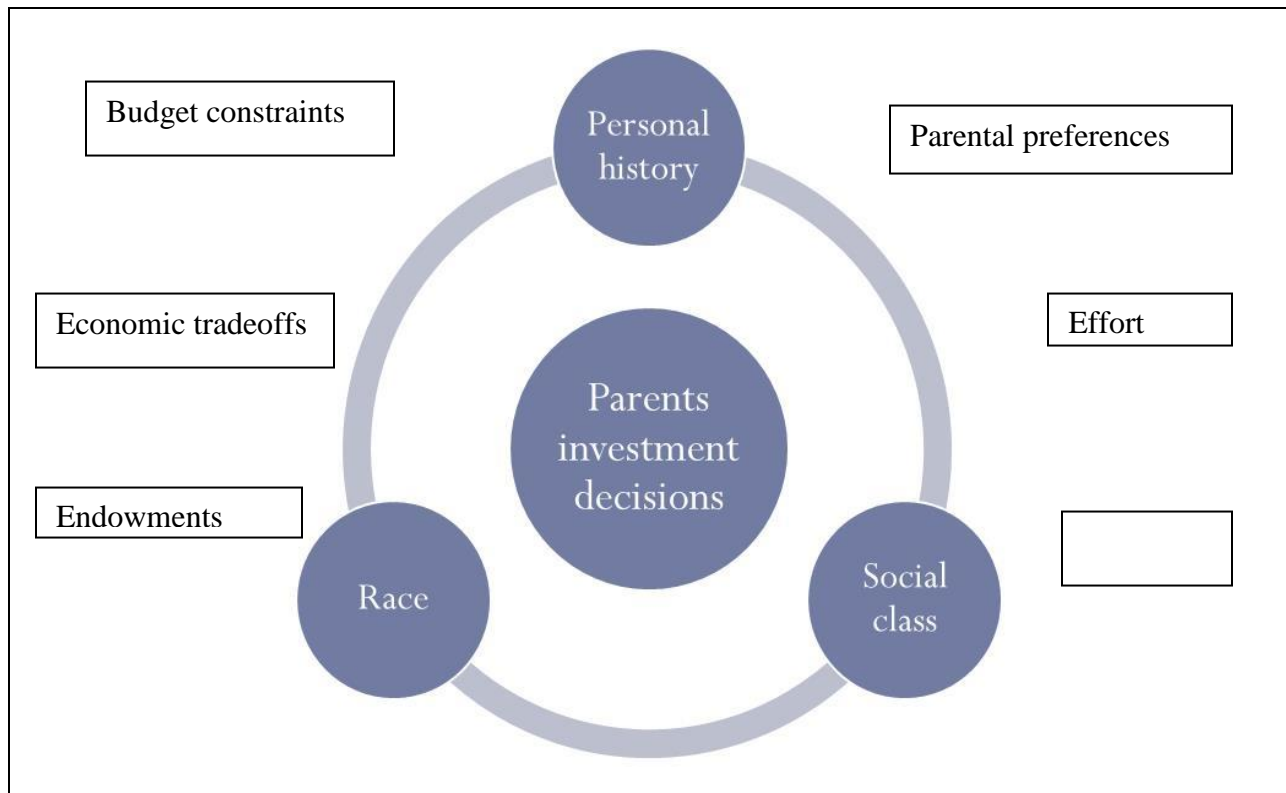
earn a four-year degree or more. These studies and statistics belie prevailing conceptions about African American parents as uncaring individuals that devalue education.

Human Capital Theory and Parental Education Investments

Human capital theory holds that investments are made in people for the expressed purpose of increasing the productive capacity of the individual. Gary Becker (1991) extended this labor market model to parents' decision-making behavior regarding educational investments on behalf of their children. The parent investment model suggests that parents base their decisions on the expected net benefits of their investments in their child's education (Becker, 1991; Becker & Tomes, 1986). In other words, parents will invest time and money in education if their child's expected future earnings are greater than the cost of the investments made. This rational-behavior model and utility-maximizing framework sheds little light on the array of decision-making influences facing most African American families' decisions about their children's future. For example, Granovetter (1985) suggests that economic behavior is embedded within a larger social context and structure that is typically not accounted for in neoclassical economic frameworks. Parents' life experiences, shaped by race and class identity, often influence the decision-making process (see Figure 1.1). Also, by only viewing time and money as aspects of parents' educational investment decisions, this paradigm dishonors the decision-making power of low-income, working-class parents who, due to lower occupational flexibility, possess less time and income than more affluent parents. Figure 1.1 shows the way economic and sociological understandings can be merged to influence and shape our understanding of how African American parents make educational investments decisions for their children's well-being.

Educational investment decisions are influenced by factors beyond what rational choice models suggest. For example, parental decisions may be shaped by structural constraints or parents' individual agency, strength, and resilience. Such additional considerations do not fit well into the framework that characterizes much of neoclassical economic theory and thus are not fully considered when examining parents' decision-making patterns as it relates to their children.

Figure 1.1: Context for Parents' Educational Investment Decisions



Parent Involvement across Race and Social Class

Parent involvement is an important component of parent educational investment activities that reflects the time that parents devote to their children and, in the case of school-based involvement, to their children's school. In this sense, school-based parent involvement has the potential to benefit not only the parent's own child, but the children of other parents as well.

Previous qualitative studies have found that middle-class families are more likely to engage in school-based involvement than working-class parents (Lareau, 2011; Lareau, 2000). Further, Lareau (2011) argues that Black middle-class families are similar to White middle-class families in their parenting orientation. Accordingly, both Black and White middle-class families instill a sense of entitlement in their children and deploy more resources to aid their children in school. Diamond & Gomez (2004) find that African American parents' educational orientation is greatly influenced by the school and community context that they must navigate. While these studies have made contributions to the literature on social class, race, and parental involvement, they are limited in their ability to make generalizable claims about the structural constraints hindering parents' involvement because they solely use ethnographic methods. Further, they typically focus on parent involvement in elementary schools, leaving open the question of the most effective involvement strategies for parents during their child's adolescent years.

The Need for More Expansive Models of Parent Educational Investment

Studies of parental engagement address a number of topics covering home and school involvement and its various iterations (i.e. homework assistance, volunteering, school decision-making, etc.). This study consciously focuses on educational investments as a broader conceptualization of parent involvement. I define educational investments as decisions, actions, expended financial resources, time, parent-child interactions, parent-school interactions, and

youth development activities that positively enhance an adolescent's educational achievement. I am interested in how both race and socioeconomic status might influence parents' educational investment decisions. In this sense, I seek to extend the parent investment model by considering the way parents' personal experiences shape their investment decisions.

Theoretical Frameworks

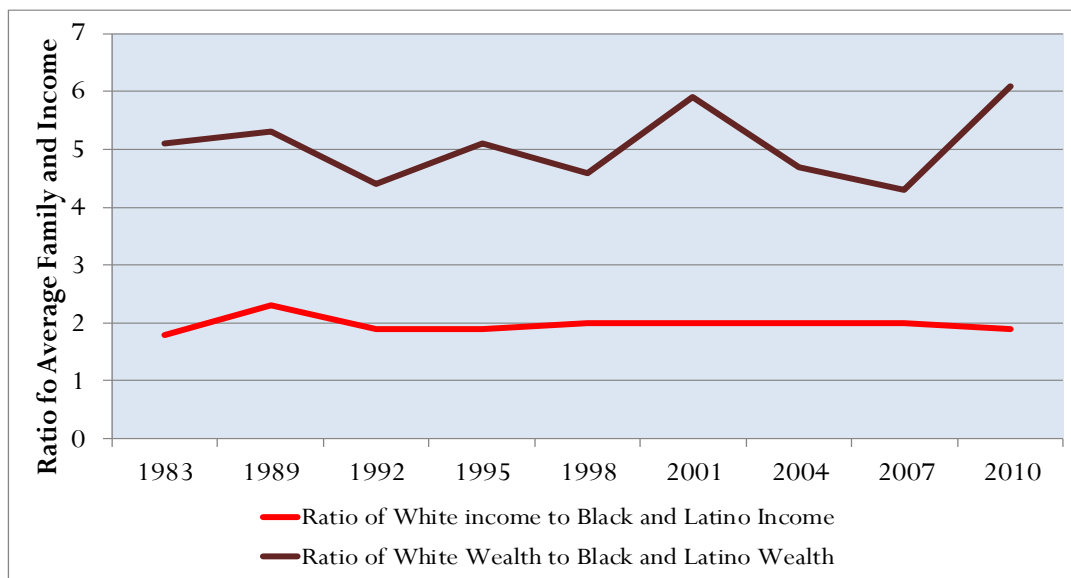
The study seeks to provide detailed analyses of parent data across and within racial groups to break away from the usual unrefined, monolithic race and class portrayals of Black parents (Allen, 1995; Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009). The analytical frames of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Moore, 2008), racial socialization (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Lesane-Brown, 2006a), and the forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) guide this work. I explore whether the intersectionality of social class and race play an important role in shaping African American parents' investment patterns in their children's schooling.

I also am interested in how family wealth shapes parent educational investments and involvement practices. A focus on the role of wealth in addition to income may provide insight for how we think about parents' economic investments. While studies highlight the role of income in most studies exploring the impact of material well-being on educational outcomes, more studies are beginning to stress the contributions of wealth, independent of income (Conley, 2001; Orr, 2003; Shanks, 2007; Yeung et al, 2002). Moreover, historical data from the Urban Institute (McKernan et al, 2013) show wealth differentials continue to exceed income differentials by race. Figure 1.2 shows the ratio of White to Black/Latino income hovers around 2, while the ratio of White to Black/Latino net worth exceed 4 for most years and was slightly above 6 for 2010 – nearly three times greater than race-based income. Wealth has a transformative power that income alone may not fully be able to tap into. Shapiro (2004)

identifies transformative assets as wealth passed down through generations that “lifts a family beyond their achievements” and allows parents to more easily shape the lives of their children (p. 10). Due to the historical legacy of legalized discrimination in the U.S. that has produced wealth differentials; a wealth-based perspective provides a more explicit race and class framework for analyzing family variation in educational investments. Additionally, a focus on wealth may be particularly important when researching African American parents as disparities in Black-White wealth are greater than racial disparities in income (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006; Keister, 2004; Shapiro, 2004). As Figure 1.3 shows the racial wealth gap has historically been a problem; however, after about 1995, the gap between White families and African American and Latino families has widened considerably.

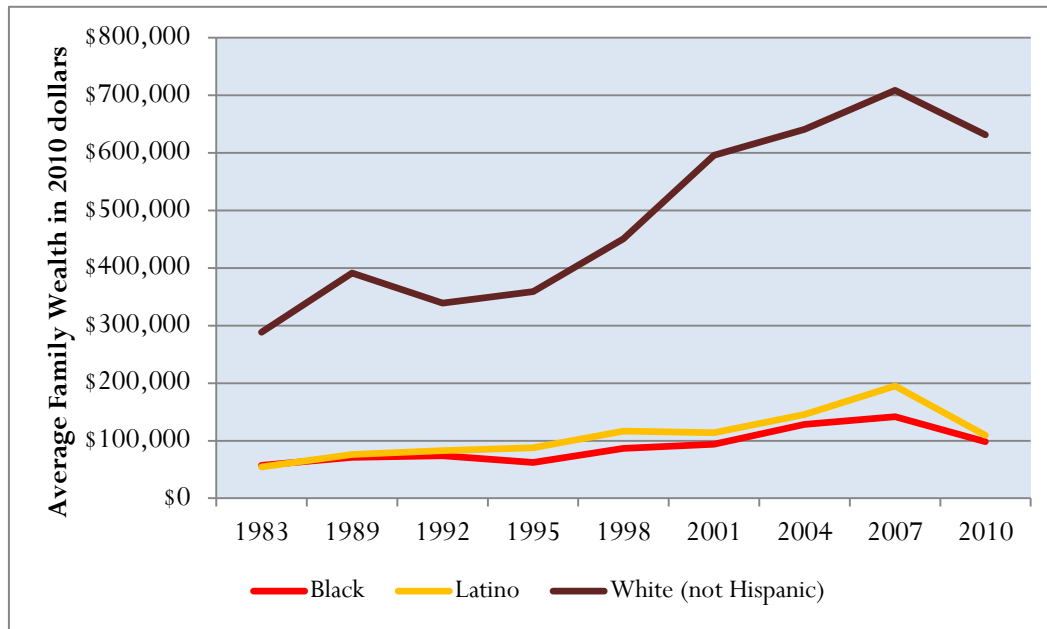
I also merge theories of race and class intersectionality, racial socialization, and forms of capital. This provides an analytical frame to understand the way in which Black parents organize their children’s activities to promote a healthy academic identity.

Figure 1.2. Ratios of Average Family Wealth and Income, 1983-2010



Source: Urban Institute (2013)

Figure 1.3: Wealth Inequality by Race, 1983-2010



Source: Urban Institute (2013)

This study seeks to challenge prevailing deficit understandings of African American parents by exploring parents' educational investment patterns. Many parents aspire to give their children the greatest opportunities in life, and they do so in a number of important ways through behaviors, decisions, and actions that can be broadly characterized as investments. Parental investments are traditionally thought of as money, time, activities and programming that parents use to enhance their child's educational development or human capital (Becker, 1991). According to this definition, parents may invest in their children by purchasing books, computers, tutoring services, or merely by interacting with their children to advance their emotional and social development. Parents may also make educational investments by participating in educational activities at school, home or in the broader community. Research documents the virtue of parent involvement and its many benefits to students' academic

development (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Epstein, 1995; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000). Further, research shows that these benefits accrue to students across racial and class lines (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The inclusion of an array of parent involvement activities in a broader conceptualization of parents' educational investments is an important extension to existing economic theory because it begins to honor some of the ways that parents, in varying social contexts, contribute to their children's education. Further, it places more of an explicit focus on non-pecuniary forms of investments. At the same time, students that are benefitting from more pay-for-fee investments such as tutoring, test preparation, etc. are at a distinct advantage. Indeed, students that are exposed to the most challenging and rigorous education are most likely to gain access to high-quality supplemental educational opportunities provided by their parents (Jones & Schneider, 2009). In this way, economic inequality continues to exacerbate educational inequality.

This study aims to better understand African American parents' educational involvement by providing a nuanced account of the ways that African American parents invest in their children's education and social-emotional well-being. Instead of examining this population as a monolith, the study will disaggregate analyses and findings in order to document within-group differences and similarities among African American parents. The study seeks to illuminate how decisions and actions traditionally characterized as educational investment activities may be mediated by parental assets, dispositions, and educational orientations. It examines more traditional forms of educational investments as well as parental choices and actions not traditionally thought of as investments. This study makes contributions to our understanding of family and school connections by constructing a meaningful counter story to the uninvolved, disengaged Black parent. Further, this study examines these educational investments in the

context of the adolescent years through the use of qualitative inquiry. The adolescent years represent a key time for youth's transition to adulthood. Educational investments made during this time period could prove consequential for college access. With a growing number of families turning to private counseling services in order to maintain a competitive edge in the college admissions process (McDonough, Korn, & Yamasaki, 1997; Avery, 2010), the different types of investments made by parents across race and social class during adolescence, may have important implications for understanding persistent stratification in access to higher education.

Data and Methods

This study uses a multiple methodological approach. The first phase of the analysis documents findings from two national data sets to answer research questions about parent investment. The first data set is the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Expenditure Survey. The survey provides a comprehensive set of data on the buying habits of American consumers. These data are typically used to construct the nation's Consumer Price Index. This specific data set will allow me to analyze the household educational expenditure patterns for adolescents by race and income.

The second data set is the Panel Study of Income Dynamics' Child Development Supplement wave II (CDS-II). CDS-II contains information on 2,908 children from 2,017 families, with an oversample of African American families. This dataset is suitable because it not only has collected national data on children and their parents since 1997 and it provides data on families' asset holdings, a key area of interest. It also collects data about parents' interaction with their children (inside and outside the home), involvement with their children's school, financial resources for tutoring, academic enrichment, cultural activities, as well as standard data on school characteristics.

For the second phase of the study, I draw from a sample of African American parents I interviewed previously as a part of a study of parent engagement in Los Angeles County. These parents represent a subset of 68 African American parents randomly selected to participate in the Los Angeles Parent Engagement Study. Eleven in-depth semi-structured interviews with parents were conducted. The sample represents a heterogeneous group of African American parents of varying levels of socioeconomic status.

Using the tools and data sources outlined above, I seek to address the following research questions:

- 1) In what ways do African American parents invest in the educational development of their children? What are the educational investment patterns for African American parents (e.g., money/resources, time/activities, parent-child expectations; school involvement; etc.)?
 - a) How does the investment of African American parents compare to parents of other racial/ethnic groups?
 - b) How do these educational investment patterns vary within the African American community (i.e., across social class)?
 - c) Does wealth have an independent effect on parents' investment patterns above income and other factors?
- 2) What are other factors and characteristics (outside of wealth and income) that foster higher levels of parental educational investment among African American parents and in comparison to White parents?
- 3) In what ways do African Americans make sense of their educational investment choices for the academic well-being of their children?
 - a) How do parents define and describe the educational investments that they make?

b) How do they understand the impact of these investments on their children's academic and social development?

c) In what ways do they articulate the motivation for their actions and decisions?

Significance

Any patterns of differential educational investments that will emerge across race and class lines will be reflective of the larger patterns of inequality observed in existing social structures. Findings from this study could potentially speak to the ways that parents' educational investments can be maximized when coupled with adequate public support. From an education policy standpoint, should we rely solely on parent educational investments or make increased collective societal investments to ensure all students have the greatest life chances?

Policymakers also will benefit from understanding how income and wealth mediate the educational investment patterns of families. The relative importance of family wealth is not well understood within education as analyses often only consider family income. Finally, the study makes a conceptual contribution to the economic literature by reframing a diverse set of parent activity as investments. This reframing is important because it stretches narrow understandings of investment that tend to place greater emphasis on the monetary forms of investments that parents contribute. Additionally, there is a significant and valuable exercise in identifying African American parent investments across social class. These differences are important in helping the educational research community move beyond monolithic portrayals of African American parents (O'Connor, Lewis, & Mueller, 2007; Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009) and reveal new possibilities for parents and public policy.

CHAPTER 2:

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

There is a large body of research on parent involvement going back several decades. Scholarly attention to increasing parent involvement as a strategy for equalizing educational outcomes has grown since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. A significant amount of articles have been written that explore the benefits to students' academic outcomes as well as the process of parent involvement itself. In this review, I focus on four broad streams of the literature on the role of families in children's academic well-being by synthesizing literature on 1) parent educational investments and child well-being, 2) studies on monetary educational investments, 3) parent involvement and socioeconomic status with a particular look at college-going parent aspirations, 4) studies on African American parent involvement, and 5) parent involvement in the life of adolescent youth. Given my interest in exploring within group differences among African American parents, research in this area will be interrogated for gaps in the literature. Further, because I am interested in formulating a broader conceptualization of parents' educational investment activities, I will also scrutinize the scholarly contributions on this topic as well. This chapter ends with a look toward three theoretical perspectives that help frame the current study, touching on the importance of examining intragroup differences.

Parent Investments and Child Well-Being

Economists and child developmental psychologists have taken the lead in advancing theories and empirical work of family investment models. Among Gary Becker's numerous contributions to the field of economics, his work on the family has served as a central starting place for how scholars in the neoclassical economic tradition think about parents' educational

investments. Economic formulations of the family suggest that parents are utility-maximizing, self-interested actors that will invest money (and time) in their children subject to scarce economic resources or budget constraints (Becker & Tomes, 1986; Becker, 1991). Based on this description of an economists' family decision-making model, the academic well-being of a child is governed by a fairly narrow set of influences that on the face of it seem logical. For example, it seems largely self-evident that parents make decisions about which educational toys or books to purchase based on the money they have available and that this is balanced with their desire to see their children do well academically. To be sure, the work of developmental psychologists has advanced a series of studies exploring the relationship between economic resources and child well-being. From their work we have a better understanding of the way in which income influences child outcomes. Using data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), Yeung, Linver, and Brooks-Gunn (2002) found that income effects on child outcomes are in fact mediated by family processes (e.g. parenting strategies, emotional stress, etc.) as well as parental investments. In other words, having less income not only makes parents less able to financially invest in resources needed for child development, but it also contributes to parental stress and thus poorer outcomes for low-income youth. In the past, these two explanations (the family investment model vs. the family process model) have been juxtaposed in the child development literature; however more research is arguing for a more integrated approach to explaining income effects (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Rand D. Conger, K. J. Conger, & Martin, 2010)

The debate about the usefulness of this economic framework for the family hinges on whether or not actors' (in this case parents') decisions are based only on factors such as money and time that are thought of as contained inside the family unit. Neoclassical economic frameworks are often criticized for overlooking or minimizing the role of social structure and

social relations in shaping human behavior and decision-making patterns (Granovetter, 1985; Ream & Palardy, 2008). There may be reason to suspect that parents situated differently within America's social hierarchy are making parental investment decisions that are influenced by constraints on their money, time, and a host of other factors linked to parents' race, social class, and past educational and life experiences.

Monetary Investments in Children's Educational Resources

Few studies exist that explore factors that contribute educational expenses made by families in the United States. This may be due to the fact that families in the United States have open access to public education during K-12. However, it is important to understand how parents' private educational investments may contribute to widening inequality of educational opportunity across socioeconomic levels (Reardon, 2011). Further, as entrance into higher education systems is often highly competitive, it is important to review these international studies and the few domestic studies of monetary educational expenditures made by families.

Family expenditures for tutoring services can provide students with crucial supplemental academic support or provide a way for families to bolster the educational profile of their children and create a competitive edge for entrance into private schools or prestigious institutions of higher education. Using data from a national household survey of expenditures, Tansel and Bircan (2006) explore the demand for private tutoring in Turkey and find that parents' income and education level are positively related to expenditures on tutoring for children. Further, they also find that households headed by single mothers expend more on tutoring than two-parent households. In particular, this study contributes to the literature that documents the income elasticity of demand for tutoring and found that it represents neither a luxury good nor a necessity in Turkish households.

Similarly, Dang (2007) explores the key household characteristics contributing private tutoring in Vietnam. In contrast to findings from other scholars, Dang calculates the elasticity of demand for private tutoring expenses and finds that expenditures on tutoring are a necessity for primary and lower secondary students. However, ethnic minority and rural students spend less on private tutoring at the lower secondary level compared to others and this may contribute to the sorting seen in higher education as families struggle with increasing costs of tutoring at higher levels.

Using data from the Consumer Expenditure Survey, Mauldin, Mimura, & Lino (2001) argue that research on parental investments in primary and secondary education in the United States has received little attention from scholars. As a result, the authors examine patterns of direct expenditures made on children's education. They explored determinants of educational expenditures for children in households where allocations were made for educational expenses and also explore the factors that impacted parents' decision of whether or not to allocate household resources towards education. Essentially after-tax income was positively related to probability of families' spending money on children's education or the amount allocated to education expenses. Not surprisingly, parents with higher levels of education were more likely to spend money on children's education and when parents with lower educational attainment did spend money on household education they spent significantly less. With respect to race, there were no differences in likelihood of making educational expenditures and no statistically significant differences in the amount allocated toward educational expenditures between Black and White households.

Most studies exploring households in the United States make use of the the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Expenditure Survey. Using data from 1980-1998, Ziol-Guest, Kalil,

and DeLeire (2004) examine expenditure decisions across family composition. They find expenditure patterns differ between married and single households with school-aged children. Single parents spend less of their total expenditures on education related expenses than do married families even after controlling for lower levels of material well-being.

In all of these studies, family income plays a critical role in parents' expenditures on children's educational expenses. The study by Kaushal, Magnuson, & Waldfogel (2011) was no different as they found that as a family's permanent income rises, spending enrichment items for children also rises. This relationship was witnessed in the presence of cross-sectional data as well as longitudinal data. The authors argue that the finding supports the claim that financial and social supports for low-income families could potentially increase the amount of money these households spend on educational enrichment. Inequality of educational spending has also been documented using historical data from consumer expenditure surveys. Kornrich and Furstenberg (2013) used 30 years of data from the Consumer Expenditure Survey and discovered American families' educational spending on children has risen over time and so has inequality in educational expenditures.

While these studies explore the relationship between key family characteristics and their role in structuring inequality of monetary investments among families, most ignore the role of wealth as well as race.

Parent Involvement and Social Class

Since parent involvement and engagement means that parents expend time, it should be factored into a broader conception of parents' educational investments. The research continues to associate various forms of parent involvement with positive student academic outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Perna & Titus, 2005; Yan, 1999). As a result of these positive

results, parent involvement has been researched from many different angles with some body of work documenting lower levels of participation by low-income parents compared to their middle-class counterparts (Lareau, 2000; Lareau, 1987). Yet recent research suggests that there is little difference in participation rates across income groups in traditional school-based involvement such as volunteering, general meeting attendance, and parent-teacher conferences (Rogers, Freelon, & Terriquez, 2011). Instead, the more pronounced differences between low-income and more affluent parents can be found in representation on school decision-making bodies.

Horvat (2003) examined the parental networks of working class, poor, and middle class African American and White parents to determine if there are significant differences that exist in the structure of their networks across class lines. Using the theoretical framework of social capital accumulation, the authors use ethnographic data on families of elementary school children to explore class-based differences. The authors observed students in classrooms, made observations at informal school-based activities, and conducted in-depth interviews of parents to gather information about the differences in their social ties and social capital networks. One of their central research questions is whether or not social capital can be used to contest the decisions made by school personnel or intervene when a problem arises at school. The findings suggest that middle-class parents were better able than their poor and working-class counterparts to rely on their extensive social networks to influence school-based decisions made about their child.

Louie (2001) examines the educational goals and investment strategies of parents who immigrated to America from China. Her analysis is unique in that it includes a view of social class distinctions within the Chinese immigrant population. In her analysis of interviews with

over 60 undergraduates in New York City and nine parents/guardians, she found distinct differences between middle class parents and their working class counterparts. Working class immigrant parents in her study were concerned with providing their children with the best educational opportunities, yet they were faced with many structural challenges that made it more difficult for them to translate the high aspirations for their children into reality. These working class parents spent less time formally involved in their children's schooling experience due to work constraints and language barriers. In spite of this, working class parents were able to use their extensive social network to ensure their children had access to the appropriate educational resources as educational achievement was extremely important to their parents. In contrast, parent involvement in and outside of the school was more prominent among middle class parents who sent their children to elite private schools or high performing public schools, made additional investments in private lessons or tutoring, and were actively involved in the life of their children's school. This study is important as it seeks to unpack the dynamics of social class and immigrant status to provide a more detailed account of the educational investment strategies of Chinese immigrant parents. The author argues that researchers must strive to disentangle the roles of race, ethnicity, and social class when studying the educational outcomes of various groups.

However, when there are social class differences found in parent involvement in schools, there are several reasons generally advanced to explain them. First, working class families may have workplace restrictions that do not allow them the time and flexibility to participate at the same rate as middle-class parents (Williams & Sanchez, 2011; Lareau, 2003). Middle-class families are more likely to work at jobs with higher occupational prestige that allows them flexibility in their schedule to accommodate school-based involvement and, to some extent,

home-based involvement as well. Secondly, it is also argued that low-income families are less likely to possess the social and cultural capital that is valued by school personnel and therefore feel less welcomed interacting with schools (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lott, 2001; Lightfoot, 1978). Lareau's (1987, 2003) ethnographic accounts have been particularly useful in taking Bourdieu's (1986) conception of cultural capital and applying it to class-based disparities in parent-school relations. Her ethnographic studies have played a significant role in shaping the way education researchers think about the micro processes of family-school relations as well as the mechanisms for social reproduction in schools. In one of her initial studies, Lareau found that White working class parents were more intimidated by school personnel and were less likely to initiate school contact than White middle-class parents. The cultural capital of middle-class families is thought to be the same as that possessed by the school personnel and influences their family and community relationships. When low-income families possess different forms of cultural and other capital this can often cause them to be viewed from a deficit-based perspective by school personnel (Cooper, 2009). This uneven power differential is thought to squelch low-income parent participation. These ethnographic accounts have been useful in providing insight about the mechanisms that would perpetuate inequality in school participation between low- and middle-income families and have generally corroborated some quantitative accounts. However, there is a body of research that suggests that race may mediate the relationship between social class and parent involvement (Diamond 1999; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Diamond, 2000).

Parent Involvement and College Goals/Aspirations for Children

Much of the parental involvement literature suggests that when traditional measures of involvement are used, minority and low-income parents participate less than white and/or middle class parents (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Shumar, 1996). Some have

come to the conclusion that these parents care less about their children's educational trajectory (Smith, 2009). However, national surveys suggest that the educational aspirations that minority parents have for their children are equally as high as those of White parents (NCES, 2007). This result remains consistent when examining data over time. Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, (2008) explored how parental involvement is influenced by school context and the specific barriers that serve to limit parental involvement in general as it relates to their child's college-going pathway. The study utilized a descriptive case study approach by examining 15 high schools in five different states. There was variety in the type of schools studied with some sites characterized as highly-resourced schools, while others were lower resourced. Upon analysis of their findings, the authors found that the parents in the study exhibited strong college-going orientations for their children with all of them expressing they encouraged and supported their child's quest for higher education. However, actual parent involvement in this effort was limited by the families' access to financial resources, time, and information which varied based on the socioeconomic status of the parents. When parents lacked one of the three specific resources, this tended to increase their reliance on the school site to support and guide their child toward college. As might be expected, this situation is especially poised to produce differential access to college resources since it is likely that students from lower socioeconomic households are attending poorly resourced schools that lack the types of institutional support to help students navigate the path to college. The authors' research showed that parents at more affluent schools tend to "shape" the school context for college opportunity through their demands on school staff to provide specific college related support and guidance to their children. While their study documents the experiences that low-income families face, it did not explore how the intersection

of race and class may be examined to paint a more holistic picture of barriers faced by different groups of families.

Smith (2009) studied the lives of African American single mothers with the goal of obtaining a better understanding of their parental involvement orientations. He also explored the possibility of developing strategies that would increase their role in their children's post-secondary educational journey. His findings suggest that the messages and support that low-income African American parents provided around college-going was limited by their own experiences. While many of these parents conveyed a message of "striving to have a better life than they had", they were limited in scope of the tangible guidance they could provide. For most of the mothers in this study, this meant stressing that their child acquire a high school diploma and get the best job possible. And while the mothers understood the value that a college education could potentially bring, the pathway to college was considered foreign to them, to the point of being unrealistic to some. Smith's study showed that, while these parents did not fit the traditional definition of involved parents that attended school functions or participated in specific home and community based forms of involvement, they sent consistent messages of encouragement to their children. Smith makes the point that this finding not only provides an important counter story to the traditional view that low-income minority parents are not involved, it also represents a potential opportunity to empower parents with the appropriate resources and understandings about the college opportunities that are within their child's grasp. However, this study tended to present a monolithic view of single working-class parents without the specific nuances that are found among these parents

Auerbach (2007) studied the college-going orientation of working-class Latino families and found that these parents' may fall along a continuum of support. On one end are the less

proactive parents who exercise “moral support” for their children’s college pathway, and at the opposite end of the continuum, are the more active parents who are characterized as the “struggling advocates”. The struggling advocates were sometimes rebuffed by school personnel when attempting to make demands on the school’s existing structure for their child’s general school success. The typology Auerbach presents suggests that the struggling advocates are more likely to see their children reach their college goals. Somewhere in between the less active and the more proactive, you may have what she calls “ambivalent companions” who are parents that offer “strong emotional support and occasional direct help but conveyed deeply ambivalent messages about schools and higher education” (pg. 258). These parents were sometimes diverted from the college goal to other goals. What this study suggests is that college goals can be realized if parents are proactive and empowered to advocate on behalf of their children. Auerbach (2007) describes the struggling advocates as providing home and school-based support, harboring a distrust of the school and educational system, providing support for their child by monitoring, and negotiating for access. The distrust is usually from the parent’s experience with being rebuffed by school administrators and teachers when attempting to advocate for their children. What Auerbach’s work reveals is that low-income parents of color can also make demands on the school system just as Rowan-Kenyon et al found among more affluent parents. Moreover, Auerbach’s findings extend Smith’s (2009) arguments about the important role that low-income minority parents can play in supporting and guiding their students’ college-going orientation in spite of widely held narratives that suggest otherwise.

While these studies show that low-income parents have an interest in seeing their children gain access to higher education, the studies also reveal that parents are often limited in how they are involved. These limits can take the form of constraints on available resources

(money, time, and information), a parent's own personal background and experiences with schools, as well as pushback from school officials. These studies provide insight into the complexities that low-income minority parents face in their concerns and pursuit of better educational outcomes for their children. However, the question still remains if these insights hold for African American regardless of socioeconomic status.

African American Parent Involvement

While it is understood that social class does impact parental educational investment strategies, it is very likely that race plays a significant role as well. The majority of the literature on African American parent involvement has focused on low-income parents. Clark's (1983) study of low-income high- and low-achieving students was instructive in revealing the home-based practices of academically successful African American children. He found that low-income families with students that excelled academically were more likely to engage in home-based interactions that facilitated and were characterized by high parent aspirations, high levels of parent initiated school contact, and overall higher levels of resilience. Clark's study is important as it focused on home-based practices of involvement that are sometimes overlooked in the literature. Further, it provides policy prescriptions that underscore the need for social and economic support for low-income families and African American parents in particular.

In a quantitative study exploring the role of African American parent involvement among academically successful students using National Educational Longitudinal Survey data on high school students, Yan (1999) found that, in many instances, African American parents exhibited higher or equivalent levels of involvement than their White counterparts once family income and education level were controlled. He examined four dimensions of parent involvement as social capital: 1) parent-child interaction; 2) parent-school interactions; 3) interactions with other

parents, and 4) family norms). Yan states that African American parents, “tended to discuss subjects of importance to teens with their children at home more so than did White parents and contacted the schools regarding their teens’ school experiences and future plans more frequently” (pg. 18). A noted limitation of Yan’s study is the general comparison of White and Black families, and he questions whether his findings would be robust across social class.

Diamond (2000) found that the effect of social class may be mediated by race in his qualitative study of low-income African American parents’ involvement practices. Particularly, his findings revealed that low-income African American parents’ educational beliefs and involvement strategies were markedly different from those found in previous studies of low-income White families. Low-income African American parents’ involvement was characterized by extensive use of family based networks, church involvement, and orientations toward more communal child rearing practices in an effort to fully support their children’s academic development.

Though there have been several studies exploring African American parent involvement patterns, practices, and school-family processes much of what we know stems from studies of low-income families. While this is important for understanding ways to help families that may suffer from economic stressors that impede their parenting and engagement practices, less understood is the way race still shapes and permeates the parenting orientations, involvement, and practices of middle-class African Americans.

Diamond and Gomez (2004) have conducted one of the few studies that examined within group differences in the African American community by examining the differences between working and middle-class African American parents. In general, they found that parents’ involvement was shaped by their educational orientations. Middle-class African American

parents adopted more positive orientations toward interactions and involvement with the school and tended to assess them positively whereas working class parents took a more critical stance towards school and were more likely displeased with their neighborhood schools. Not surprisingly, middle-class African American parents were able to leverage their economic, social, and cultural capital to select the best schools for their children and even had more choices given their residential proximity to better quality schools. Working class parents were confined to poorer performing neighborhood schools that they deemed as ineffective in educating their children. The authors suggest that the specific school contexts helped shape their educational orientations with middle-class parents adopted more supportive stances while working class parents adopting more critical and reform-oriented stances toward their children's respective schools. Their involvement in schools were largely driven by parents' perceptions of school quality.

Diamond and Gomez (2004) also argue that "analyses of social class need to attend to the ways in which race and class intertwine to shape parents' educational involvement" (p. 420). When comparing their findings to prior analyses, they notice some differences. In a previous study, Lareau and Horvat (1999) found that middle-class White parents were more likely to challenge schools than White working class families. Diamond & Gomez found that Black working class parents were more likely to challenge the schools their children attended than Black middle-class parents. Juxtaposing their findings with Lareau, Diamond and Gomez imply that families either aim to ensure social reproduction (in the case of White middle-class families) or disrupt social reproduction (in the case of Black working class families).

Howard and Reynolds' (2008) study of African American middle-class parents examined how these parents experience schools in comparison to the narratives portrayed in prior literature

on less affluent African Americans. They found that, while some parents in their sample confronted racism when advocating for their children, others chose not to interfere with school affairs and believed that the superior quality meant that their involvement was not as critical. This study reveals the power of providing nuanced and particular accounts of within- group narratives about African American parents.

Parent Involvement and Adolescents

A focus on parent involvement and adolescents raises questions about the developmentally appropriate role for parents at a time in the life of youth when they desire higher levels of autonomy. For example, teens spend less time with their parents and more time with peers resulting sometimes in increased conflict and frustration on the part of both teens and parents (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Simon, 2004). This developmental phase is important as it allows for more discussion-based and less authoritative forms of parenting (Hill & Chao, 2009). Despite these challenges, a body of work suggests that parents can still play a strategic and necessary role in assisting their children navigate and transition to the next phase of life, notably post-secondary educational opportunities.

In addition to these developmental challenges, there are some inherent logistical difficulties associated with parents remaining engaged with middle and high schools even if they have been actively engaged in school-based activities when their child was in elementary school. Middle and high schools are larger making it a challenge for parents to figure out how to be involved in the school site (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Further, middle and high school teachers instruct more students than elementary school teachers and this makes it more difficult for them to get to know the parents of each student. Also, the fact that students have multiple instructors

across subject matters makes it more challenging for parents to make connections as there is no single person that is in charge of their child's academic well-being.

Given the importance of a successful transition to post-secondary opportunities, it is important to reconceptualize the role and characteristics of parent involvement in the adolescent years. Research suggests that positive parent-adolescent relationships are associated with improved school outcomes (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Ream & Palardy, 2008). Further, Perna & Titus (2005), using a nationally representative sample of high school students, found that the volume of resources accessed by parents through social networks at schools was positively associated with high school students eventually enrolling in college. Further, they found that parents' discussion of education related topics and parents that initiated contact with schools increased the probability that their student would enroll in college. This study highlights the critical role that parents can play in spite of the growing independence of teens.

Gaps in the Literature

The research synthesis of these broad topics suggests that there are specific contributions that can be made to the body of literature just by linking a variety of broad themes found in various studies. First, while there are some obvious omissions to the economic framework for understanding parental educational investments, I argue that there are some useful aspects to the theory, and once it includes a more expansive notion of parents' educational investments it would be even more useful.

Next, taken together, the studies that examine racial and socio-economic differences give us some interesting clues into the differential patterns of involvement and investment that might emerge if a study of within group differences among African American parents is pursued. A

significant portion of the current literature in the field fails to address such differences and when it does, middle-class African Americans are often equated with middle-class Whites, despite some significant differences between the two groups. Differences such as continued residential segregation, racialized experiences, and lower levels of wealth accumulation, make the experience of the Black middle-class markedly different from their White counterparts (Pattillo-McCoy, 2000; Conley, 1999; Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Shapiro, 2005; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Lacy, 2007). These differential experiences may have a bearing on their decision-making regarding parental investments. Finally, this brief review of the literature suggests that additional insight on how a variety of African American parents make meaning of their investments and involvement patterns, particularly at the critical juncture of middle and high school transitions, is important for advancing our understanding of how best to support parents and their children during this phase.

Theoretical Framework

Three theoretical perspectives guide this study of African American parents' educational investment patterns and each are discussed in turn below.

The Forms of Capital

This study draws on Bourdieu's (1986) articulation of the forms of capital by focusing explicitly on two of the four outlined in previous work -- economic and social capital. In addition, I examine the role of community cultural wealth as advanced by Yosso (2003) to include additional formulations of capital such as aspirational capital.

Bourdieu thought of capital as resources or tools that could be used to enhance one's status in a specific context (Swartz, 1997). Economic capital can be thought of as income and wealth that can be used to enhance life chances. Understanding the usefulness and the

limitations of African American's economic capital may be important to the research design and subsequent analysis. The focus on the relationship between income or wealth and household expenditures for education provides a straightforward application of this concept in the context of the current study. The framework should allow me to answer critical questions about the ways in which economic capital – operationalized as income and wealth – provides advantages to some African American families. It will also allow for an understanding of how some families lacking sufficient economic capital may have to rely on other forms of capital.

Social capital theory is perhaps one of the most utilized theoretical constructs in social science research and as such, the theory has been readily exported to the study of education problems by a host of researchers (Dika & Singh, 2002). In his discussion of social capital, Portes (1998) defines it as “the capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures”, (p. 12). I seek to investigate whether social capital influences the educational investments that African American parents make. For example, in what ways do parents draw on their social capital when making key decisions about their educational investments in their children?

Yosso (2005) argues communities of color possess community cultural wealth which is an accumulation of a set of knowledge, experiences, and skills that allow them to successfully navigate systems and institutions not designed with them in mind. She outlines six forms of capital that make up the community cultural wealth framework – aspirational, linguistic, navigational, familial, resistant, and social capital. Aspirational capital is when families are able to maintain a strong sense of hope and possibility for success in spite of contending with real or perceived barriers to the success. I examine how African American parents draw on aspirational

capital as they discuss what they would like to see their children accomplish in the future. This also may inform their parental investment decisions.

Racial Socialization

Racial socialization may be defined as explicit or implicit messages about race that typically parents pass on to their children (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, & West-Bey, 2009; Lesane-Brown, 2006). The socialization may take the form of messages about racial discrimination and race-based stratification or a sense of racial or ethnic group-based pride. Racial socialization is meant to buffer children of color from the harsh stings of societal racism by allowing them to develop a healthy racial identity. It also may help by exposing them in developmentally appropriate ways to the potential harmful effects of race-based discrimination. The use of this framework may aid me in understanding how African American parents make the choices regarding their children's educational investments. Parents that are aware of their social position and the historical significance of being Black in America may approach their educational investment strategies differently. Moreover, as Diamond & Gomez (2004) found, African American parents' educational orientations are shaped by the current social context as well as their own historical experiences with the United States educational system. Because African American parents may identify developmental needs particular to African American adolescents, they may invest in their children's education in distinctive ways.

Intersectionality of Race and Social Class

The notion of intersectionality is often thought of as the coexistence of multiple identities and interlocking oppressions (Crenshaw, 1991). I use the conceptual frame of intersectionality of multiple identities to understand how race and social class mediates African

American parents' educational investment strategies. Hardaway & McLoyd (2009) note, "...intersectionality enables a better appreciation of how racism and economic disadvantage affect African Americans across classes and, hence, affords improved understanding of within group variation" (p.244). This addresses the heart of the current study's research questions and should provide a frame for contextualizing themes that could emerge from the qualitative inquiry. As discussed above, prior literature suggests that poor and working-class African Americans must contend with structural and institutional racism in addition to economic deprivation, while African American middle-class families on average hold a precarious and tenuous place within the middle-class strata (Patillo-McCoy, 2000; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Shapiro, 2005; Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009). The tenets of intersectionality will provide a framework for understanding these challenges across the socioeconomic spectrum of African American families, and the use of this framework should help avoid the underconceptualization of the intersectionalities of race and social class (O'Connor, Lewis & Mueller, 2007). Underconceptualization can occur if either social class or race is privileged in data analysis. As such, it will be important to always keep in mind the way race and social class interface to shape the lived experiences and educational decision-making of African American parents.

CHAPTER 3:

Methodology and Data Sources

In line with an increasing number of educational studies that build on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative inquiry, this study employs multiple methodologies. The study reports findings from two national data sets of families with qualitative findings from in-depth semi-structured interviews with African American parents residing in Los Angeles County. The strength of the quantitative analysis will be the ability to provide generalizable trends while the more localized qualitative inquiry has the potential to corroborate, challenge, or extend national findings as well as reveal new theoretical insights through rich descriptions of parent experiences. Below I review the research questions and how they relate to each phase of the research design. Next I provide a brief discussion on measuring social class, followed by a description of the quantitative data sources and important constructs and variables. Finally, I discuss my positionality as a researcher ending with the limitations of the study.

Research Questions and Data

As mentioned in the introduction and problem statement, three general questions guide this study of African American parent investments. Questions one and two will be answered through a quantitative investigation of the two national data sets. These questions will be answered using descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis. In general, specific questions about money spent on specific categories of educational expenses will be answered with the Consumer Expenditure Survey from the Bureau of Labor Statistics while questions about parental time will be answered with the Panel Study of Income Dynamics. Question three and its related sub-questions will be answered through qualitative inquiry based on a sample of parents from the Los Angeles Parent Engagement Study.

- 1) In what ways do African American parents invest in the educational development of their children? What are the educational investment patterns for African American parents (e.g., money/resources, time/activities, parent-child expectations; school involvement; etc.)?
 - a) How does the investment of African American parents compare to parents of other racial/ethnic groups?
 - b) How do these educational investment patterns vary within the African American community (i.e., across social class)?
 - c) Does wealth have an independent effect on parents' investment patterns above income and other factors?
- 2) What are other factors and characteristics (outside of wealth and income) that foster higher levels of parental educational investment among African American parents and in comparison to White parents?
- 3) In what ways do African Americans make sense of their educational investment choices for the academic well-being of their children?
 - a) How do parents define and describe the educational investments that they make?
 - b) How do they understand the impact of these investments on their children's academic and social development?
 - c) In what ways do they articulate the motivation for their actions and decisions?

Defining Social Class

An important aspect of this study is the examination of social class differences. In each of the data sets discussed below, there are measures of income, parent education level and occupation, although the income categories are different across the three data sets. Often economists rely on income alone and do not consider occupational prestige. However, within the

sociological literature there are three standard methods used to designate a group as middle-class for example – (1) the income-to-needs ratio, (2) white-collar occupational categories, and (3) parent education levels (Patillo-McCoy, 2000). The strength of the income-to-needs ratio is that family size is taken into account in this calculation. The income-to-needs ratio is calculated by dividing household income by the U.S. Government poverty threshold for a particular household's size (Duncan, Smeeding, & Rodgers, 1993). The second measure would involve categorizing occupations and coding professional white-collar jobs as middle class and blue-collar jobs as working class. Finally, highest level of education could be used to determine middle class status. This argument implies that because bachelor's and graduate degrees command higher salaries in the labor market they should be placed in a middle class category. Many studies use parent education only or income only due to data limitations, but the use of parent education or occupation alone is problematic as it does not exclude the possibility that individuals may be poor at different education levels (Heflin & Pattillo, 2006). This is especially true when you do not have a data set that has income data over time. For this study, I employed the approach by Heflin & Pattillo (2006) to produce working- and middle-class categories.

Phase I – Quantitative Data Analysis

The Consumer Expenditure Survey (CEX), collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), is a cross-sectional dataset that provides detailed data on consumption patterns of U.S. consumers annually. BLS has been collecting survey data from approximately 7,000 households each quarter since 1999. At the time of the interview, respondents are asked to report spending during the previous three months. In 2009, respondents began reporting more detail on the educational expenditures for a household, but for the sake of increasing the sample size I pool data over a five year period so much of this detail on expenditures is lost as a result of this

decision. Using race and income data from the CEX data files, I provide a breakdown of education related expenses selecting households with children age 5-17. To the extent that the data allows, I make group comparisons in educational expenditures across race and income level. One of the advantages of using this data set is that it provides fairly recent detailed information about the educational expenditures of a household. However, one drawback is the inability to look at family characteristics over time. Table 3.1 shows general household characteristics for 2009 from the CEX data file.

Table 3.1 Household Characteristics for Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2009

Item	African-American households	White households
Sample size*	809	5,702
Consumer unit characteristics:		
Income before taxes	\$44,211	\$67,784
Income after taxes	\$43,449	\$65,259
Age of reference person	47.1	50.7
Percent distribution:		
Sex of respondent		
Male	36%	48%
Female	64%	52%
Housing:		
Homeowner	46%	72%
Renter	54%	28%
Average annual expenditures		
Reading	\$35,198	\$52,320
Education	\$47	\$131
	\$599	\$1,197
Other financial information:		
Estimated market value of owned home	\$75,429	\$178,925
Estimated monthly rental value of owned home	\$504	\$945
Gifts of goods and services		
Education	\$577	\$1,193
	\$53	\$270

***Note:** It is possible to calculate population estimates across groups with weights from the survey. Source: Consumer Expenditure Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, October, 2010

Table 3.1 compares African American and White respondents on select characteristics and expenditure data from the Consumer Expenditure Survey. On average, African Americans report lower levels of income than White families and they are decidedly less likely to own their home with 54% classified as renters compared to 28% for the White sample. Not surprisingly, residential segregation and a confluence of other structural factors (Massey & Denton, 1993) place the average estimated market value of the homes owned by African Americans at \$75,429. This was well below the market value of their White counterparts which was \$178,925. Also, annual education expenditures are higher in White households reaching nearly \$1,200 annually compared to \$599 for the African American sample.

As stated before, because the African American sample for one year is smaller than I would like, I chose to pool the data over multiple years. The appropriate sample weights were used to ensure representativeness of the results. Due to the level of detail on expenditures in this file compared to other national surveys, these data have the potential to reveal inequalities in educational expenditures by race and social class in key areas such as test preparation services, tutoring, and other supplemental educational opportunities.

The second step in the quantitative phase draws on data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics' Child Development Supplement Wave II (CDS-II). CDS-II contains information on 2,908 children from 2,017 families. This dataset is suitable because it not only has collected national data on children and their parents since 1997, it provides data on families' asset holdings and household consumption. While there are other national data sets such as the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and ADD Health with larger sample sizes, CDS-II provides higher quality wealth and income data (Yeung & Conley, 2008) and more measures on parent-child

interactions. It also collects data about parents' involvement with their children's school, financial resources for tutoring, academic enrichment, cultural activities, as well as data on school characteristics. The CDS-II sample provides data on children age 5-18, and I will focus on families with middle and high school students. While both the CDS-II and the Consumer Expenditure Survey both have expenditure data, they differ in important ways. The Consumer Expenditure Survey provides a more complete data set on consumption with up to 95% of household expenditures recorded by the sample. The Consumer Expenditure Survey is designed to track consumption patterns of the sample, whereas the CDS-II provides more limited measures of parent educational expenditures. The CDS-II's strength is its longitudinal design and extensive list of parent-child measures. The first model is based on *monetary investments* operationalized as parental educational spending or saving for future education. Using variables from CDS-II, I constructed a composite measure of investments to model or run separate analyses for the different components of educational expenditures. The second model is based on *parent-school investments*, traditionally thought of as school-based parent involvement. The outcome variable for this model will represent a composite variable based on a series of survey items.

Analytical Strategy

The quantitative phase of the study relies on analysis of descriptive statistics as well as multivariate analysis to answer research questions about differences across racial groups and within the African American sample. For the Consumer Expenditure Survey data, I utilize descriptive statistics to understand differences in educational spending across racial groups. Further, the African American sample was divided into subgroups based on income. These

income distinctions provide an opportunity to highlight differences within the African American population.

For the PSID data, I use descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the sample with respect to key family characteristics used in the models for multivariate analysis. The study employs Tobit regression models for the monetary investment model which represents a continuous measure of educational expenditures for families. To investigate the factors that contribute to parent-school investments, the study uses ordinal logistic regression to model the relationship between key family characteristics and a scale measure of parent-school involvement. In both descriptive and multivariate analyses, I weigh the data with the last observed family weight variable from the Child Development Supplement as instructed by the PSID manual (Hill, 1992).

Phase II – Qualitative Inquiry

The 2010 Los Angeles Parent Engagement Study (LAPES), a telephone survey and semi-structured interview data, form the basis for the interview pool. Telephone survey data was collected in English and Spanish from 750 public school parents residing in Los Angeles County. This telephone survey sample includes 510 randomly selected White, African-American, Latino, and Asian-Pacific Islander parents and 240 parents selected at random from the lists of a community based organization and five low-wage labor unions. Telephone survey data contain information about parents' involvement in a range of school activities, school resources that facilitate their involvement, demographic characteristics, and other relevant information. In order to account for the impact of school characteristics in shaping patterns of parental school participation, survey data are merged with California Department of Education school-level data.

The LAPES data also includes follow-up in-person interviews with over 95 socio-economically and racially diverse survey participants. In general, the interview pool consisted of a purposive sample of parents that exhibited high levels of involvement based on telephone survey responses. These qualitative data contain in-depth information that further illuminates the social mechanisms underlying broader patterns of parents' school engagement. For example, parents were asked about their own educational experiences while they were in school, their motivation for being actively involved in their children's education, their interactions with public school personnel at their children's school, as well as the aspirations that they have for their children and why they desire to see their children meet these stated academic and life goals.

African American parents comprised 9.2% (n=69) of the sample of survey respondents which closely mirrors their representation of 8.8% of residents throughout Los Angeles county. Parent follow-up interviews were completed with 26 of the 69 African American parents surveyed. The 26 parents also provide socioeconomic diversity that is important for the study. It is from this sample of 26 parents that I randomly selected 11 parents for follow-up interviews. According to the American Community Survey's five-year population estimates, the median household income for Los Angeles County was \$54,828 (2009 inflation adjusted dollars) and at least five parents interviewed reported household incomes greater than \$100,000. Also, examining the zip codes represented by the 26 parents from the African American interview pool revealed there was neighborhood diversity as well, with parents residing across a number of neighborhoods, including Watts, North Hills, Lancaster, and South Los Angeles to name a few.

Scope of the Interviews

As the largest county in the United States and home to a socio-economically and racially diverse population, Los Angeles County serves as an important context for understanding the

experiences of parents from different backgrounds. Within this context, I explored how African American parents make key decisions regarding their children's education. Through this qualitative inquiry, I examined African American parents' investment decisions to discover how these decisions are shaped by parents' own lived experiences and the broader social context. Primarily, I was interested in knowing more detailed information about how they make decisions to support their high aspirations for their children and what challenges they encounter when making these investments. An important aspect of this qualitative inquiry centered on how parents make meaning of parental investments in the hopes that I can advance a more nuanced account of African American investment decisions. Parents were asked to participate in 45-60 minute in-depth semi-structured interviews and were compensated with gift cards for their participation.

Coding and Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and coded with themes that would speak to the qualitative research questions and broad goals of the study. Overall, the parent interviews explored the following core issues: the parents' educational aspirations for their children, their school and home based involvement strategies, views on racial stratification, ways parents allocate household resources for their children's expenditures, and why they do what they do on behalf of their children. Moreover, the theoretical insights of economic and social capital; intersections of race and social class; and racial socialization of children were also important topics that were used as broad themes as it relates to parents' investment decisions. From these themes, an initial coding scheme was developed. Each interview was coded manually and relevant themes and supporting evidence were grouped together to form the basis of the narrative.

The qualitative analysis represents an essential component of the research study as it is where conventional economic and sociological theories that explain parent investment behaviors have the greatest potential to be augmented. I argue that the lived experiences of African American parents may shape the decisions and investment strategies they employ on behalf of their children, so codes were applied to address these concerns. However, I attempted to remain open to new insights and update the coding scheme accordingly.

Limitations

Few studies are without shortcomings and there are a few limitations to this project that are worth noting. First, the sample sizes of the national data sets are not ideal and the creation of more detailed subgroups across class within racial groups diminishes the counts even further. While the producers of the data have created weights to aid claims of representativeness and generalizability, a low sample size threatens the study's potential findings and renders them less reliable. Secondly, this study seeks to employ multiple methodological approaches that go from a national level to a very localized and specific area. The qualitative component could be critiqued or perceived as distinct and detached from the quantitative analysis and thus two separate studies altogether. Finally, when using multiple methodologies there is always a concern about one method dominating the other in analysis; therefore what I might gain in comprehensiveness I might lose in depth, an inherent trade off in this type of research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

Positionality of the Researcher

While it is more customary for researchers in the anthropological tradition to address the issue of positionality I feel compelled to share how this work is important to me and to situate myself in this research inquiry. I am the daughter of two working class African Americans who

believe wholeheartedly in education as a way of improving your life's chances. Though neither of my parents attended college, education was stressed at home. They held high expectations for my educational performance and actively encouraged me to attend college. Also, when I attended my elementary neighborhood school, my mother was not only very involved in my education at home; she was involved at the school site as well. While my mother's connectedness to my school began to wane when I was bused to a school in a more affluent community, she was still very much involved in my education at home.

My interest in this topic stems from my parents' interest in my educational journey as well as my questioning some findings in the literature on parent involvement. For example, Lareau's (2000) work argues that "working-class parents are characterized by separation because they believe that teachers are responsible for education, they seek little information about either the curriculum or the educational process, and that criticism of the school center almost entirely on non-academic matters" (pg. 8). In contrast she argues that upper-middle-class parents' relationship with the schools is best described as "interconnected". Interconnected parents believe that educational responsibility is shared between parents and schools. When thinking about my own parents, I wonder if there is not a more nuanced explanation for the differences in parental involvement along class lines that Lareau and others have found. I also wonder how the intersection of race and class may play out and potentially yield alternative explanations. Hopefully, my research in this area will provide rich detail to the question of how different African American parents make educational investments that help shape their children's educational trajectory.

CHAPTER 4 -- Money Matters: Monetary Educational Expenditures across Race and Socioeconomic Status

This study represents a quest to better understand the various ways that African American parents make educational investments. As the literature review in Chapter two highlights, there are many studies examining the educational investment patterns of parents, but little attention is paid to the way in which social class and race interact to shape the various types of educational investments. This chapter examines how parents of different racial and ethnic groups and income categories make monetary investments in their children's education. Though descriptive in nature, the analysis provides a foundation for exploring more complex relationships in parents' educational investment decisions in subsequent chapters. A better understanding of the differences in patterns of educational expenditures for school age children across racial groups and socioeconomic levels -- in light of parents' budget constraints -- is important. Household income may be one of the primary mechanisms that allow educational advantages and disadvantages to be transmitted on the basis of private family spending. On average, African American families earn less income than their racial and ethnic counterparts. This research has a bearing on the policy prescriptions necessary to mitigate educational disadvantages.

The first section begins with an overview that explores the general characteristics of the full sample by race. The second section examines the characteristics and expenditures of total expenditures across the pooled sample of families from 2005- 2009, showing differences across racial and ethnic categories. The third section examines the differences by socio-economic levels, while the fourth section examines the differences for African American households across income and education level compared to the reference category of white families. Throughout this chapter, when exploring differences across household income, lower, middle, and upper

income quintiles are used. These quintiles were based on the full population of cases in the dataset and applied to the specific sample of households with school-aged children. The lower income quintile consists of families earning less than \$24,000 annually, followed by the middle most income quintile inclusive of households earning \$43,637 - \$67,892. Finally, the upper income families earn more than \$104,698. The chapter ends with a discussion about the differences found, raising questions about what this means for public versus private education spending and the transmission of advantages linked to various family characteristics.

This chapter looks solely at pecuniary investments and provides detailed disaggregation of how parents allocate household spending towards education expenditures for children in their household between the ages of 5 -17 years of age. Using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey, this chapter relies on the use of descriptive statistics to illuminate the differences across race and socio-economic background. The cross sectional data pools samples of households with school-aged children from 2005-2009 for a total number of 32,697 cases. When weighted, these cases represent nearly 1,000,000 households during the five year period. All of the income and expenditure figures are adjusted to 2010 dollars to address issues related to data comparisons across the five year period where pre-recessionary data are included. Sample weights were adjusted to account for the five year span in data. Pooled data were used instead of single-year data to increase sample size for group comparisons and address fluctuations in expenditures across time. This analysis reveals whether or not African American parents' spending patterns on education related costs are statistically different from other families. Also of interest is whether or not expenditures across socioeconomic levels within the African American community are statistically different from one another.

Sample Characteristics

The sample of households with children aged 5 to 17 from 2005-2009 is 32,697, with 64% of white households, nearly 18% of Latino households, 12.4% of African American households, 4.5% of households that are Asian, and the remaining percentage of 1% identifying as Native American. Table 4.1 summarizes the sample characteristics across racial groups. Asian American households earn the most compared to other families with a median after-tax income of \$73,790. African American and Latinos earn less on average with median income levels around \$32,000 and \$33,000 respectively. As a result, African American and Latino families have a higher percentage of families earning incomes in the lowest quintile (less than \$23,697 annually). Nearly 39% of African American families found in the sample are in the lowest income quintile, while white families have only 13% of families in this category.

Asian and white households in the sample have a higher proportion of at least one parent with a Bachelor's degree or more compared to Latino and African American families. Only 22.5% of African American households have at least one parent with a Bachelor's degree or more, while this level of educational attainment for Asian and white households is greater than 45%. Latinos are more likely than other racial groups to report that a high school degree is their highest level of educational attainment in the majority of Latino households (56percent), the highest level of education is a high school diploma.

Across all racial and ethnic categories, the average family size is approximately 4, with an average of 2 school-age children per household. African Americans are far more likely than other groups to live in households headed by single parents (46%). This is compared to 15% for Latino and white families and 6% for Asian households. Finally, the sample shows that nearly

72% of all households own their home, while only 44.5% of African American families own their own homes.

Table 4.1: Characteristics of Sample with 5 – 17 year olds living in household (Five year estimates: 2005-2009)

Characteristics	African American	Asian	Latino	White	Total
Sample size	4,050	1,485	5,864	20,875	32,697
% of households	12.4%	4.5%	17.9%	63.8%	100%
Mean income after taxes	\$44,331	\$87,247	\$44,838	\$79,618	\$69,043
Median income after taxes	\$32,359	\$73,790	\$33,451	\$65,127	\$53,848
% Lowest quintile (\$0 - \$23,697)	38.6%	17.9%	33.7%	12.9%	20.1%
% Middle most quintile (\$43,637 - \$67,892)	18.2%	15.5%	18.2%	21.1%	20.0%
% Upper quintile (\$104,698 or more)	7.1%	27.5%	7.2%	25.7%	20.0%
Highest Level of Parent Education					
Less than HS diploma	12.9%	5.7%	30.3%	4.1%	9.9%
H.S. graduate	25.2%	11.7%	25.8%	17.5%	19.7%
Some college	27.6%	10.8%	18.6%	19.0%	19.9%
Associates degree	11.7%	7.8%	8.2%	13.9%	12.5%
Bachelor's degree	13.8%	26.7%	11.3%	27.1%	22.5%
Graduate/professional degree	8.7%	37.4%	5.9%	18.5%	15.6%
Average age of reference person	38.8	42.5	38.9	41.4	40.7
Average family size	3.7	3.6	4.1	3.9	3.9
Average number of school age children (5-17 years old)	2.1	1.9	2.1	2.0	2.0
Gender of respondent					
% Male	26.4%	55.7%	41.2%	44.6%	41.9%
% Female	73.6%	44.3%	58.8%	55.4%	58.1%
% Single parent	45.7%	6.0%	15.2%	15.5%	18.6%
% Homeowner	44.5%	71.3%	56.6%	82.1%	72.1%

*weighted averages; dollar values are adjusted to 2010 values

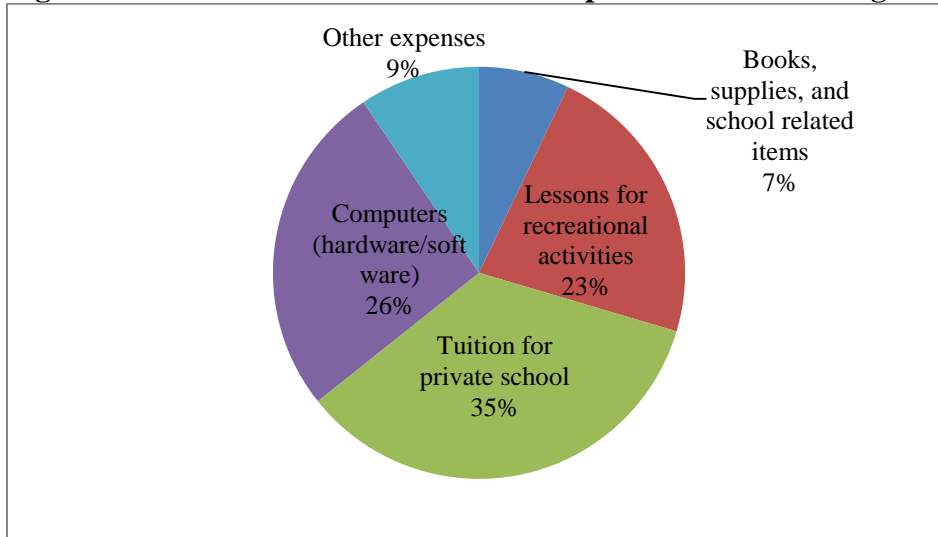
The Middle Income American household: Their characteristics and expenditures

Before delving into the expenditure patterns and characteristics of households by race and social class, it is instructive to better understand how the “typical” family spends money for educational expenditures. While there is no single typical family, it is useful for comparative purposes, to consider the experiences of families in the middle of the economic spectrum. The median after-tax income for the typical American family found in the sample is \$53,848. This income level falls into the middle most income quintile where 20% of families have after tax incomes between \$43,637 and \$67,892 annually. Families in the middle quintile average 4 persons in size, with an average of 1.9 school-age children in the households. Data on educational attainment reveals that 70% of households in the sample have at least one parent with some college experience or more. In terms of four-year degree attainment or higher, the data show 38% of households in the sample have at least one parent possessing a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Further, an overwhelming majority of households are homeowners, with 78% owning their own home.

With a median after-tax income of \$53,848, the typical American household spends approximately 25% of their after –tax income on housing costs and about 10% of their family budget on food. Estimates of annual education expenditures show that families falling into the middle portion of the income distribution spend \$991 annually on education, with the largest share of the expenditures going toward tuition for private schools. Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of expenditures with 35% of expenditures for private school tuition, followed by computer hardware and software at 26%, lessons for extracurricular activities such as music or sports for school –aged children at 23%. About 7% of educational expenditures are spent on other school related expenses such as rental fees for books and school related expenses. Finally,

only 5% of the total annual amount of educational expenditures is reserved for purchasing books and school supplies.

Figure 4.1: Distribution of Educational Expenditures for Average Household in Sample



Expenditures by Race and Ethnicity

In the last section, we examined the typical American family and noted that they spend more than \$990 annually on education. Table 4.2 shows the educational expenditures of households with school age children by race, while table 4.3 examines the data by low, middle, and upper income categories. These data reveal there are some distinct differences that emerge across race and income categories.

On average, African American and Latino families spend far less than White and Asian families on educational expenses annually. Asian households spend 5 times more than African American families on total educational expenses, while White families spend four times the amount of African American households. All households in the sample outspend African Americans in all select educational expense categories. It is important to note that the sample of African American households has the lowest median income of all households in the sample at

\$32,359 and only 45% of African American families own their home. This may suggest that income and material inequality play a significant role in the educational expenditure patterns of households (Duncan, Huston, and Weisner, 2007). However, when you examine the average annual expenditures by race as a share of families' after-tax income, you notice smaller differences for educational expenses. Table 4.3 reveals that African American's spend 1.3% of their after-tax income on educational expenses compared to 3%, and 2.5% for Asian and white families. Moreover, when you consider how families spend their money on two of the most basic needs – food and housing—it provides greater context for understanding the sacrifices African American families make toward educational expenses for their children. The sample data reveal African American families spend nearly 50% of their income on food and housing expenses while white and Asian households, who on average earn more, spend less than 40% of their income on food and housing and Latino households spend slightly more 50% on these necessities.

Table 4.2: Average annual education expenditures by Racial/Ethnic group for sample with 5 – 17 year olds living in household (Five year estimates: 2005-2009)

Expenses	African American	Asian	Latino	White	Total
Education expenses	\$585	\$2,635	\$846	\$1,964	\$1,601
Books, supplies, and equipment	\$47	\$72	\$56	\$73	\$65
Lessons for recreational activities	\$77	\$879	\$146	\$481	\$381
Tuition for private school	\$272	\$1,189	\$386	\$937	\$755
Computer (hardware or software)	\$191	\$471	\$250	\$407	\$354

Table 4.3: Average annual expenditures by race as a share of after-tax income (Five year estimates: 2005-2009)

Expenses	African American	Asian	Latino	White	Total
Education expenses	1.3%	3.0%	1.9%	2.5%	2.3%
Food expenses	12.3%	8.9%	13.6%	10.2%	10.7%
Housing expenses	35.9%	26.1%	37.1%	22.5%	25.4%

Expenditures by Income

Table 4.4 provides average annual expenditures by income category for families in the sample. The data show a clear linear relationship between amount of household income and the amount of money spent on educational expenditures. Middle income households, defined as those earning between \$43,637 - \$67,892 annually, spend nearly twice as much as lower income households on education, while upper income households (those earning more than \$104,698) spend nearly 9 times as much as lower income families (earning less than \$23,697). As expected, the overall level of spending declines when reviewing the data for families not paying for private schools. However, the magnitude of the differences is still present with upper income households with public school students spending nearly 7 times that of lower income households.

Families with household after-tax incomes greater than \$104,698 allocate about 52% of their annual education spending to private schools, compared to lower and middle income households where only about 34% of education spending goes toward private school tuition. When looking at households with only public school students, upper income households allot 52% of their annual educational expenses towards private lessons for music and sports, while low and middle income households spend about 34% of their income on these extracurricular activities. It is clear from these tables that household income provides an advantage to upper income households by allowing them the ability to devote larger proportions of their educational

budgets toward private schools or private extracurricular activities when compared with lower and middle income households.

Table 4.4: Average annual education expenditures by Income category for sample with 5 – 17 year olds living in household (Five year estimates: 2005-2009)

Expenses	Lower Income Quintile	Middle Income Quintile	Upper Income Quintile	Total
Education expenses	\$505	\$991	\$4,432	\$1,601
Books, supplies, and equipment	\$53	\$70	\$109	\$65
Lessons for recreational activities	\$113	\$223	\$1,032	\$381
Tuition for private school	\$175	\$344	\$2,307	\$755
Computer (hardware or software)	\$123	\$260	\$585	\$354

Table 4.5: Average annual education expenditures by income category for families with no private school expenses (Five year estimates: 2005-2009)

Expenses	Lower Income Quintile	Middle Income Quintile	Upper Income Quintile	Total
Education expenses	\$314	\$645	\$2,046	\$861
Books, supplies, and equipment	\$51	\$66	\$83	\$61
Lessons for recreational activities	\$105	\$218	\$1,066	\$385
Computer (hardware or software)	\$123	\$266	\$592	\$293

Tables 4.6 and 4.7 show that lower income households spend less in absolute dollar amounts on education, food, and housing expenses, yet the share of their after-tax income that is allocated for educational expenses, is not much lower than upper income households and slightly higher than middle income households. Further, low income households in the sample spend 59% of their income on basic household needs such as food and shelter. Middle and upper income households spend far less of their budget, with nearly 28% of middle income families' earnings going toward food and housing, compared to only 18% for families in the upper income

quintile. With far less of their spending going towards basic needs, upper income households are able to accumulate higher savings rates and spend their extra money on many categories of household spending that lower income households cannot afford (Blank & Barr, 2009). One factor contributing to this finding is the fact that low income families that fall into poverty are more likely to receive government assistance in the form of food stamps and housing subsidies. In addition to this point, table 4.7 shows that middle income households' share of spending on education as a proportion of after-tax income is actually less than lower income households. This could be related to middle income households spending more on housing in better quality school districts and as a result their private spending on education could be crowded out by parents' confidence in the quality of the public schools in their neighborhood (Holme, 2002; Johnson, 2006).

Table 4.6: Average annual expenditures by income (Five year estimates: 2005-2009)

Expenses	Lower Income Quintile	Middle Income Quintile	Upper Income Quintile
Education expenses	\$505	\$991	\$4,432
Food expenses	\$3,360	\$5,073	\$8,688
Housing expenses	\$10,698	\$13,509	\$21,910

Table 4.7: Average annual expenditures by income as a share of after-tax income (Five year estimates: 2005-2009)

Expenses	Lower Income Quintile*	Middle Income Quintile	Upper Income Quintile
Education expenses	4.0%	1.8%	2.7%
Food expenses	26.8%	9.2%	5.2%
Housing expenses	85.5%	24.5%	13.1%

*Values for the lower income quintile reflect subsidies for food and housing expenditures.

Educational Expenses by Parent Education

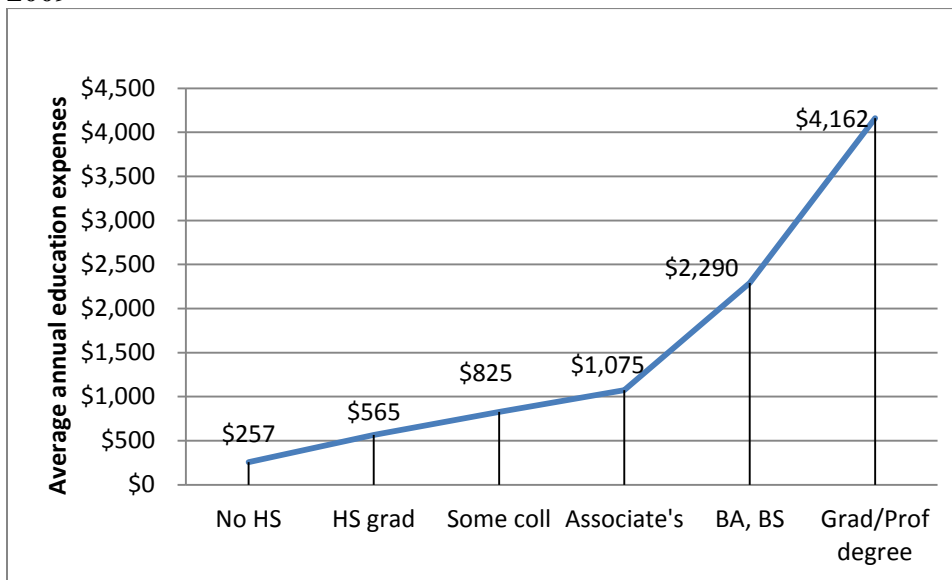
Parent education level is often used as a secondary measure of socioeconomic status because of the positive relationship between income and additional years of schooling. Moreover, it may be considered a more reliable method for determining social class when using survey data, since people tend to decline to report their income for survey instruments (Turrell, 2000). In the context of this study, it is also used as a proxy and verification of the findings by income. Further, subsequent chapters of this study analyze interviews with parents about their investments and educational expectations for their children, their own experiences with education may shape their educational investment strategies. Therefore, in this section, I examine the relationship between educational spending by highest level of parent education.

Similar to the pattern that emerges for educational expenses by income you notice as years of schooling increase, total educational spending on school aged children increases as well. This mirrors the trend found for income largely because of the wage premium associated with additional years of schooling. There is a direct relationship between parent's highest level of education and educational spending. Households where at least one parent has a graduate or professional degree spend an average of \$4,162 on education for school-aged children – nearly 8 times more than households where the highest parent education level is a high school graduate (\$565). Further, Figure 4.2 shows there is a sharp increase in spending from households with Associate degrees versus Bachelor's degrees.

Table 4.8: Average annual education expenditures by Parent Education Level for sample with 5 – 17 year olds living in household (Five year estimates: 2005-2009)

Expenses	No HS diploma	HS grad	Some college	Assoc. degree	Bachelor's Degree	Grad/Profess. Degree
Education expenses	\$257	\$565	\$825	\$1,075	\$2,290	\$4,162
Books, supplies, and equipment	\$37	\$44	\$49	\$67	\$85	\$101
Lessons for recreational activities	\$23	\$77	\$182	\$259	\$585	\$1,044
Tuition for private school	\$68	\$219	\$274	\$380	\$1,082	\$1,864
Computer expenses	\$130	\$216	\$295	\$351	\$468	\$579

Figure 4.2: Relationship between educational spending and parent education level, 2005-2009



Educational Expenditures for African American Households

Central to the goals of this chapter is a better understanding of the educational expenditure patterns of African American families. Table 4.9 examines the educational expenditures for African American households by income category and parent education level.

When examining the data by income groupings, we see that upper income African Americans – those with household incomes greater than \$104,698 spend significantly more than low and middle income households. They spend approximately \$3,242 annually on education expenses for the school age children in their household. This is nearly 8 times more than middle income African American households spend on average (\$474) and nearly 19 times more than lower income black families (\$172). This gap is much larger for African American families than found among the entire sample. It is also much larger than what is found among white families where upper income households spend 6 times more than lower income households on total educational expenditures. This suggests that there are additional factors at play that make it exceedingly difficult for poor African American families to provide sufficient financial resources towards education in their households.

Figures 4.3 and 4.4 provides additional context for better understanding the household spending patterns of households for African American and compared to the reference group of white households. The data show that while low income households spend less on education, housing, and food than their more affluent counterparts; families in the lower income quintile allocate a larger amount of their household budget to housing and food. Paying for these basic necessities of living, leaves little income for households to spend on education, but low income families manage to do so in spite of their budget constraints. For low income African American families; this is even more of a challenge. This may suggest that low income black families contend with many factors that make it increasingly difficult to afford basic needs and extra spending on education as it relates to their children. This brief analysis raises numerous questions that cannot be fully answered with the existing dataset, but it does provide clues for further investigation that can be explored in chapter 5 where multivariate analysis is used to

better understand differences in investment patterns across race and socioeconomic status of families.

Table 4.9: Average annual education expenditures by Income category for African American families with 5 – 17 year olds living in household (Five year estimates: 2005-2009)

Expenses	Low Income	Middle Income	Upper Income	Total
Education expenses	\$172	\$451	\$3,242	\$585
Books, supplies, and equipment	\$39	\$45	\$121	\$47
Lessons for recreational activities	\$22	\$77	\$440	\$77
Tuition for private school	\$26	\$114	\$1,976	\$272
Computers (hardware/software)	\$62	\$177	\$468	\$191

Figure 4.3: Education Expenses for African American and White Households by Income Quintiles

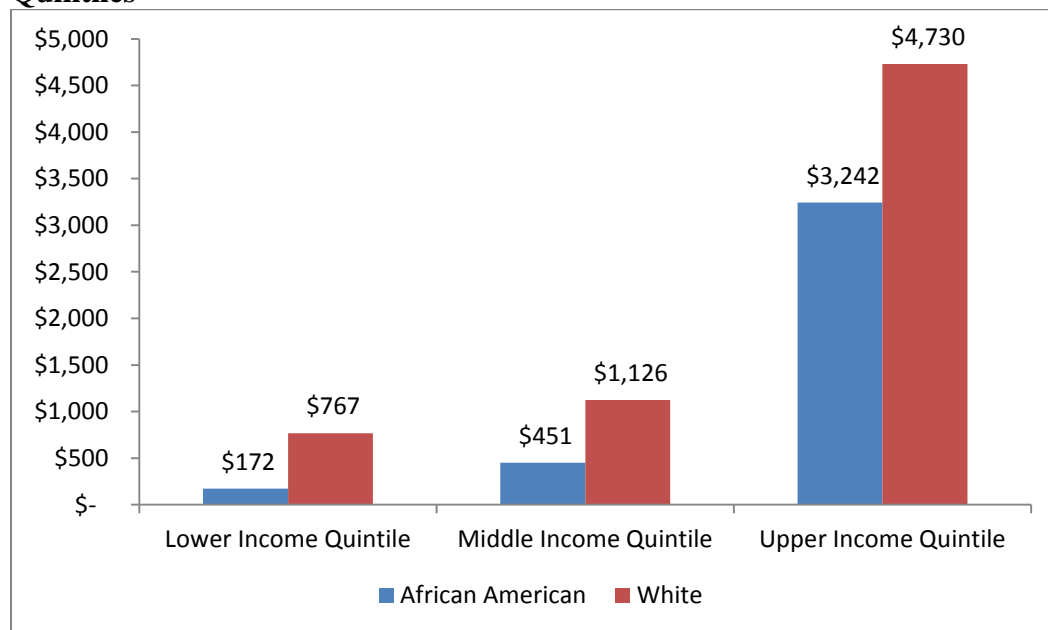
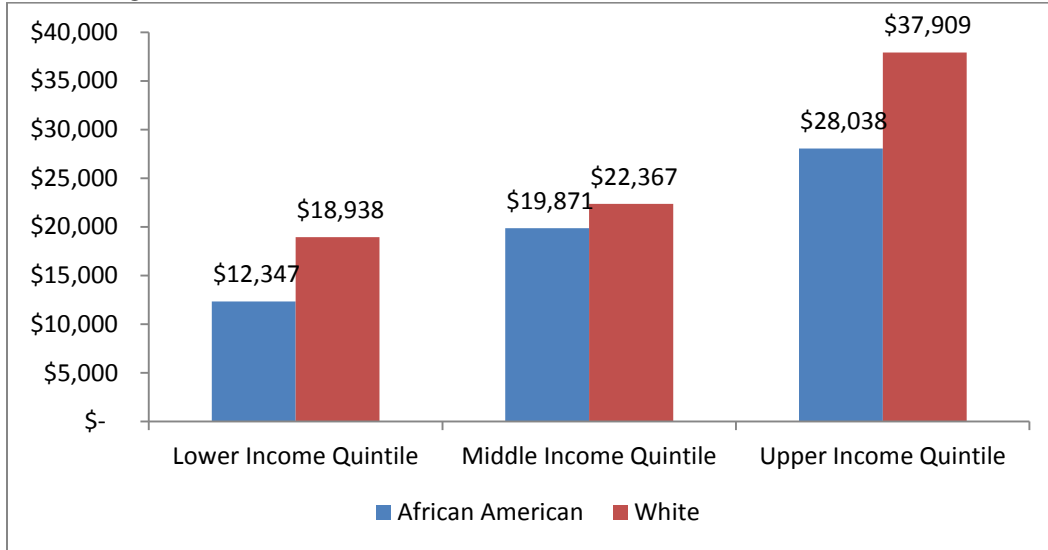


Figure 4.4 Food and Housing Expenses for African American and White Households by Income Quintiles



Summary and Discussion

The objectives of this chapter were to determine the differences in educational spending across race and income with a special focus on differences by income within the sample of African American households. The findings reveal some important differences regarding income and race as it relates to spending on education for school aged children. The results show low income parents, African American parents, and Latino parents spend less in absolute dollars on education than their upper income, white and Asian counterparts. However, when reviewing data on the share of after-tax income that is devoted to education spending, the differences across income level are remarkably similar, suggesting that parents' desire to pay for educational supports for their children is similar across income and racial categories. This finding echoes previous research by Kaushal, et al (2012) and Mauldin et al (2001) which found that size of total budget matters more as parents tend to increase educational spending when their total spending rises. The question of whether or not additional support would be beneficial to low income parents is difficult to answer given the data limitations found in this chapter, but it raises

an important question about policy prescriptions that could potentially target low income families for academic enrichment. This exploratory chapter lends tentative support to human capital perspectives on parents' educational spending as higher income and higher educated parents may rely heavily on their own experiences when making decisions about investments and future returns for their children. However, there is evidence outlined in chapter 6 from qualitative interviews that may shed additional light on the thinking behind the investment decisions of lower income families.

Not surprisingly, the differences in expenditure on education are very large between upper and lower income households when looking at all families and to a lesser degree when examining families with only public school students. Clear and predictable patterns emerged as upper income families spend more than 9 times on total education expenses compared to low income families. And the share of their educational spending is large for private schools and lessons for extracurricular activities which arguably provides some quantitative support for Lareau's (2003) claims of concerted cultivation among upper-income households. However, because the share of lower and middle income spending on education is on par with upper income households, there is reason to believe that these parents would expose their children to increased private educational activities if there were free or low-cost quality options readily available.

The intersection of race and economic status proved important for better understanding differences across African American families. Analyses that lump households into one racial category generally miss the nuance that is found in within group analysis. The findings show that low income African American households have the lowest total educational expenditures. Moreover, the gap between low and upper income black households is quite large at 18:1.

Comparatively, the gap between white upper income households on educational spending is 6 times as high as white lower income households. Further investigation of the lower income categories across race might reveal additional differences in the households, but the fact that many lower income African American families struggle to pay for additional educational expenses is likely due to a host of challenges such as higher proportions of their budgets devoted to housing and food expenses with little left over each month for enrichment expenditures. Chapter 5 which models differences in types of expenditures, controlling for race and socioeconomic status provide greater insight into this finding.

CHAPTER 5 –

Determinants of parental educational investments: The role of income, wealth and race

Chapter four explored the pecuniary investments that parents make across race and income using the national cross-sectional database Consumer Expenditure Survey. The data pointed to a relationship between the economic resources of a household and their subsequent patterns of spending on school expenditures. This chapter examines similar relationships and seeks to illuminate the key determinants of parents' monetary and school-based investments. Extending the investment model to a non-pecuniary form of investment such as parent-school involvement is important as it may broaden our understanding of the myriad forms of parent investment. Another important theme of this chapter is the inclusion of family assets as a key explanatory variable in the models of the two types of parent investment. This inclusion of a wealth variable in addition to understanding the relative contribution of income helps us understand inequality of parent investment across two important dimensions of economic well-being.

Data and Measures

This chapter uses individual data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) – Child Development Supplement. Due to its historical longitudinal data dating back to 1968, the PSID is often used in studies documenting intergenerational effects of educational opportunity and outcomes. Further, it is also considered a useful dataset because of the presence of high quality data on the economic situation of a representative sample of households in America.

The sample in this study consists of households with children who were enrolled in K-12 schools in 2002. Unlike chapter four, only African American and White households were used in this analysis. The sample was simplified to explore differences within the African American sample and to provide a comparison with White households given research that documents the

disparities in income, wealth and educational outcomes between Black and White families (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Keister, 2004; Shapiro, 2005; Gosa & Alexander, 2006). Cases with missing values for either dependent or independent variables were excluded from regression analysis. Because I use sampling weights in the analysis, results are representative of African American and White households in the United States.

Outcome variables

Two sets of outcome variables are explored using multiple regression techniques in this chapter. The first outcome variable is total educational expenditures for the household. The PSID data asks parents to document how much money they spent on the following school-related items: books, school supplies, equipment including computers, software, uniforms, tutoring, tuition, and room and board for children attending K-12 school away from home. Since the sample is restricted to households with school aged children, data for children enrolled in college are excluded.

The second outcome measure, parent-school investments, represents a composite variable comprised of the following measures: how often parents volunteer in the classroom, how often do parents attend Parent-Teacher Association sponsored events, and how many times do parents attend a general school event. All these measures ask parents to report on their participation in the previous school year. Each item is coded 0-2 based on frequency of participation and then summed to create a 0-6 point scale measuring level of parent involvement. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the items in the scale and the standardized alpha equals .6015, suggesting a tenuous relationship among the items. The scale was used in spite of this shortcoming as a way to explore the relationship between levels of parent involvement and key explanatory variables across race and social class. Table 5.1 provides

frequency distributions on the parent-school investments dependent variable and gives insight into how this variable was ultimately constructed for analysis.

Table 5.1 Dependent Variable for Parent-School Investments

Construct	%
Volunteer in Classroom (number of times during school year)	
0	52.5%
1-2	14.2%
3 or more	33.3%
Attended PTA Event (number of times during school year)	
0	53.5%
1-2	23.1%
3 or more	23.5%
Attended general school event (number of times during school year)	
0-2	55.0%
3-5	23.9%
5 or more	21.1%
Parent-school investments (Ordinal composite variable)	
0	28.9%
1	16.3%
2	20.9%
3	12.9%
4	11.1%
5	5.3%
6	4.7%
Total N (unweighted)	2,392

Independent variables

The key economic variables of interest are household income and household wealth. Permanent income is averaged over a four year period from 1998-2002 to account for fluctuations in household income over time. Income data prior to 2002 are inflated to 2002 dollars using the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index. The study examined two types of household assets: liquid assets and net worth. Liquid assets represent total financial

assets less unsecured debt. To calculate this, PSID provides the researcher with the sum of the amount of savings, checking, value of stocks, mutual funds, and investment trusts minus the sum of credit card debt, student loans, medical or legal bills, and personal loans. The measure of unsecured debt excludes car loans or home mortgages which are considered measures of secured debt. The second wealth measure, net worth, is the sum of liquid assets, home equity, value of other real estate, vehicle equity, business or farm assets as well as other assets. I chose to create permanent wealth fields by averaging data over time. Unlike income, wealth data are collected every two years in the PSID file, therefore, for net worth and liquid assets, I averaged data for 1999 and 2001 making sure to inflate the 1999 values to 2001 dollars.

While the descriptive statistics report mean and median values for wealth and income data, when including these fields in multivariate analysis, I first divide income and wealth measures by 1,000 to normalize the scale of these variables and then take the natural logarithm of the continuous measures of permanent income and wealth. This natural log transformation is often done to address skewed data distributions found in economic variables (Kennedy, 2003; Yeung & Conley, 2008). Before converting the income and wealth measures into logarithmic form, I assigned a value of 1 to zero and negative values. While this truncates data and forces zero and negative values of wealth into one field, it allows the analysis to account for the skewed distribution of wealth and income data without dropping cases of zero and negative values from the sample.

This chapter also uses other household characteristics and demographic data about parents. Demographic data on parents include highest level of parent education and age of household head. Parent education is reported on a scale from 0 – 17 where 0 is no schooling completed to 17 – where at least some postgraduate work was attained by one parent. Household

characteristics include the number of K-12 students in the household. One of the unfortunate omissions in the models of parental investments is related to data on school characteristics of the focal child. Data on school characteristics could not be included in the analysis of the model due to the limited access of these fields in the public use data files. Measures of school quality and opportunity may have a bearing on how much parents choose to invest monetarily and may even influence school based involvement patterns. As a way to address environmental factors that may influence parents' investment decisions, I included a measure of parents' neighborhood ratings, where they were asked if their community was a good place to raise children. This variable was on a scale where 1 means excellent and 5 means poor.

While much of the data on parents' educational aspirations for their children demonstrates a high degree of homogeneity across subgroups (Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009), I chose to include a measure of parent's educational expectations for their children. Parents were asked how much education they feel their focal child will actually complete. I treated this variable as continuous in the model with values ranging from 1 representing 11th grade or less and 8 which equals JD, MD, PhD, or other doctoral degrees.

Finally, economists often discuss the role of child endowments in the allocation of parents' educational resources in the household (Becker & Tomes, 1976). Much of the literature supports the claims that parents use investments to reinforce initial observable endowments of their child. Endowments may be defined as subjective and objective measures such as health, beauty, intelligence, temperament, etc. In other words, parents invest more in children with observable endowments versus children perceive as less-endowed. To test this relationship and account for variation in the quality of the educational experience for children, I include an indicator variable for whether or not a child was ever enrolled in gifted/talented programs in

school, where '1' designates enrollment in gifted programs and '0' is not enrolled in gifted programs.

An important contribution to this study is the examination of differences within the African American community along socioeconomic lines. Following the guidance of prior researchers (Duncan, Smeeding & Rogers, 1993; Heflin & Patillo, 2006), I created categories for low income, middle income, and upper income based on the needs-to-income ratio for each household. Average income-to-needs ratios less than 1.85 were designated as low income, while those with income-to-needs ratios greater than 1.85 were considered middle and upper income households. I used these newly created fields to explore within group differences for African Americans.

Table 5.2 Sample Characteristics (Standard deviation in parenthesis)

	White (N=1251)	African American (N=1272)	Low Income African Americans (N=732)	Middle and Upper Income African Americans (N=540)
Outcome Variables				
Educational Expenditures	\$2,162 (24,043)	\$519 (3,794)	\$216 (1,565)	\$879 (5,399)
Average school involvement	2.11 (7.69)	1.37 (3.31)	1.27 (3.39)	1.54 (3.21)
Permanent household income				
Mean	\$88,519 (364,294)	\$39,480 (62,235)	\$21,416 (21,813)	\$65,432 (57,118)
Median	\$69,894	\$31,444	\$21,017	\$59,889
Liquid assets				
Mean	\$188,679 (5,393,104)	\$25,443 (224,366)	\$6,088 (52712)	\$54,276 (334,773)
Median	\$34,817	\$3,851	\$1,529	\$17,540
Net worth				
Mean	\$277,460 (5,638,412)	\$42,803 (248,880)	\$15,588 (77770)	\$83,354 (359,655)
Median	\$98,156	\$13,695	\$3,161	\$39,440
Homeowner	81.5%	42.1%	28.7%	70.5%
Number of school aged children in household	1.8	1.9	2.1	1.5
Age of household head	37 (34.3)	38 (23.0)	37 (23.2)	38 (17.7)
Neighborhood rating				
1- Excellent	42.1%	20.5%	17.7%	24.7%
2- Very good	35.7%	25.0%	21.7%	31.5%
3- Good	15.3%	25.6%	28.3%	22.2%
4- Fair	5.1%	22.5%	24.5%	16.9%
5- Poor	1.8%	6.4%	7.8%	4.7%
Educational Expectations				
Less than HS	0.5%	1.3%	2.3%	0.03%
HS graduate	15.0%	33.7%	44.7%	18.3%
Vocational/some college	4.9%	9.5%	7.9%	12.4%
Associate's degree	10.4%	9.2%	8.1%	10.4%
Bachelor's degree	54.1%	38.6%	30.7%	49.1%
Post graduate	15.1%	7.7%	6.3%	9.8%
Enrolled in public school				
Enrolled in public school	87.9%	94.2%	96.7%	90.3%
Ever enrolled in gifted program	11.8%	8.8%	6.7%	12.0%

Descriptive Statistics of Sample

Table 5.2 contains descriptive statistics for many of the variables in this chapter by race (White and Black) as well as income level for African Americans. Weights were used to adjust for the survey sampling design in an effort to maintain the national representativeness of the data. Outcome variables for the two sets of investment models are displayed first. Average educational expenditures are reported first followed by average levels of school-based involvement. White households report spending \$2,162 (s.d. = 24,043) on average for educational expenditures, more than the three subgroups of African Americans who on average all spent less than \$1,000 annually on educational expenditures. There is variation within the African American sample as low income households spend the least amount of money on educational expenditures compared to their more affluent African American counterparts.

The next outcome variable displayed is the average level of parent's school-based investments, operationalized as parent school involvement. As noted earlier, this represents a composite variable based on attendance at PTA sponsored meetings, general school events, and volunteerism in a child's classroom. In general, African American parents in the sample average lower levels of involvement than their White counterparts. White parents' average level of involvement was 2.1, higher than middle and upper income African American parents who averaged 1.5. Low income African Americans' level of involvement averaged 1.3.

Descriptive statistics reveal the White sample is better-off on a number of socio-economic status variables. The wealth and income disparities found between White and black households are particularly pronounced. White households possess wealth holdings that far exceed black households with liquid assets and net worth over 4 times that of African American households. Further, results show dramatic differences in household income with Whites

averaging nearly \$79,000 annually versus African Americans averaging around \$39,600 a year. However, disparities persist within the African American population where middle and upper middle class households have incomes averaging around \$65,000 whereas lower income African American families average \$21,400 annually. Additionally, Whites are almost twice as likely as African Americans to own their own home (80.7% versus 42.3%). Among the middle and upper income African American families, 70.4% of them own their own homes. Further, in terms of parent education levels, low income African Americans had the lowest mean levels of schooling (11.7). White and middle-upper income African American households had comparable levels of schooling (13.7 and 13.3 respectively).

In the absence of a measure of neighborhood quality, this analysis includes a measure of how parents rate their neighborhood. Neighborhood context may have a bearing on parents' educational investment patterns. Parents were asked how they rate their community as a place to raise children with 1 being 'excellent' and 5 being 'poor'. Nearly 88% of White households rated their neighborhood as 'very good' or 'excellent' while only 45% of African Americans rated their communities in these categories. Lower income African Americans were more likely than other groups to rate their neighborhood as 'fair' or 'poor' with about 32% of low income African Americans rating their neighborhoods in these categories.

A higher portion of White parents than African American parents (69% compared to 46%) expect their children to attain a Bachelor's or graduate and professional degree. However, within, the African American sample, 59% of middle and upper income African Americans expect their children to attain a bachelor's degree or higher. Low income African Americans had a more measured set of expectations with 45% expecting their children to attain a high school diploma and only 37% expecting a bachelor's degree or higher. Among African Americans,

gifted designations among households was highest among middle and upper income African Americans with 12% reporting their child was ever enrolled in a gifted program compared to 6% for low income African American households.

Private school enrollment may be viewed as a viable option when your community has limited supply of quality public schools. Most households in the sample have children enrolled in public schools. Nearly 89% of White families have children enrolled in public while 94% of African Americans have children enrolled in public schools. Among African Americans, nearly 97% of low income households have children enrolled in public schools and 90% of middle-upper income African Americans have their children enrolled in public schools.

Analytical Strategy

This chapter uses Tobit regression techniques for the educational expenditure model as well as ordinal logistic regression to examine the relationships between explanatory variables and the parent-school involvement scale. To understand differences across race and within the African American population, separate models were run for White and African American samples. This movement away from using race solely as a variable is important for understanding the social and economic contexts surrounding parents' educational investment decisions on behalf of their children. Finally, the analysis also includes separate equations and models among the African American sample by using separate samples for low income and middle and upper income African American households. In this way, the chapter hopes to speak to within group similarities and differences within the African American community.

Monetary Investments

Chapter four was solely focused on the differences across subgroups in educational expenditures using descriptive statistics. However, this chapter explores the determinants of

educational expenditures, with a particular focus on the role of income and wealth holdings. The education and economics literature has only a limited number of studies exploring the relationship between household economic variables and the educational expenditures of households. The few studies that exist are about developing nations. Perhaps because the United States is a nation with free compulsory public education, the question of private educational investments is explored less. However, precisely because the United States experiences inequality in the realm of economic and educational opportunity, there is a need for an exploratory analysis of factors contributing to differences in parental expenditures as these factors may serve to undergird inequality in educational outcomes. Therefore, this chapter examines a few key economic and household characteristics for African American families in comparison to White households to better understand the role income and wealth play in the educational outcomes of African American students.

The Model for Monetary Investments: Tobit Estimations and Decomposition of Two Effects

Tobit analysis represents a class of censored regression models often used in econometric literature when significant proportion of cases are unobserved for dependent variables (Tobin, 1958). This could occur when there is a lower or upper bound restriction for dependent variable or in the case of expenditure data – a large number of survey respondents could make no purchases for a particular good or service. In this study, I utilize the Tobit model to learn more about the key determinants of household educational expenditures for African American families. Tobit analysis allows a researcher to salvage cases that might be dropped from the analysis or cases that would produce biased results using ordinary least squares. To aid in the interpretation of Tobit coefficients, I use the decomposition technique, popularized by McDonald

and Moffitt (1980). Rather than attempting to interpret the results of the actual coefficients, the decomposition technique allows the researcher to decompose the betas into two effects (1) the effect of each independent variable on the amount of household educational expenditures for households reporting expenditures greater than \$0, and (2) the effect of the different independent variables on the probability of the household making educational expenditures for households reporting \$0 educational expenditures.

The McDonald and Moffitt (1980) technique including steps for constructing the decomposition of the two effects may be represented by the following general functional form:

$$Y_i = \alpha + X_i B_i + \mu_i \quad \text{if } \alpha + X B_i + \mu_i > 0 \quad \text{(Equation 1)}$$

$$Y_i = 0 \quad \text{if } \alpha + X B_i + \mu_i = 0 \quad \text{(Equation 2)}$$

Y_i represents the amount of educational expenditures per household

α is the constant term

X_i represents the vector of independent economic, demographic, and other household variables

B_i represents a vector of undetermined coefficients for the model

From this, we can show the expected value of the amount of household educational expenditures for all families in the sample using the following equation:

$$EY_i = X_i B_i F(z) + \sigma f(z). \quad \text{(Equation 3)}$$

The $F(z)$ is the cumulative normal distribution function for the proportion of cases above the limit – in this case, it would represent the proportion of cases with positive educational expenditure values. In equations [3] $f(z)$ is the unit normal density and z is the z score for area under the normal distribution curve, σ is the standard deviation of the error term.

Taking the first-order partial derivative of equation [3] gives you the effect of a given independent variable on the expected value of educational expenditures for all households. This is noted as follows:

$$\frac{\partial EY_i}{\partial X_i} = F(z) \frac{(\partial EY^*_i)}{\partial X_i} + EY^*_i \frac{\partial F(z)}{\partial X_i} \quad (\text{Equation 4})$$

Therefore, EY^*_i would be the expected value of educational expenditures for all households with educational expenditures greater than 0. The expression $\frac{(\partial EY^*_i)}{\partial X_i}$ is the change in the expected value of educational expenditures for households making educational purchases totaling more than \$0 annually and $\frac{\partial F(z)}{\partial X_i}$ is the change in the cumulative probability of having educational expenditures greater than \$0 that would be associated with an independent variable.

As noted earlier, we are now able to decompose the effects using equation [4] as it provides a way to separate effects that a given independent variable might have on the educational expenditures of a household. Following the lead of McDonald & Moffitt (1980) and Madala (1983) we can derive equations 5 and 6. For households with educational expenditures greater than \$0:

$$\frac{\partial EY^*_i}{\partial X_i} = B_i \left[1 - \frac{zf(z)}{F(z)} - \frac{f(z)^2}{F(z)^2} \right] \quad (\text{Equation 5})$$

For households with educational expenditures equal to \$0 we calculate the change in cumulative probability of having expenditures greater than \$0 as the following:

$$\frac{\partial F(z)}{\partial X_i} = \frac{B_i}{\sigma} f(z) \quad (\text{Equation 6})$$

Using equations 5 and 6, allows us to take the coefficients from the tobit output and separate the effects of the independent variables into (1) the effect of the magnitude of educational expenditures for households that spend more than \$0 annually on education; and (2) the expected increased probabilities of spending more than \$0 for households that did not make educational expenditures.

Tobit Results for Educational Expenditures

Tobit Results for Racial Differences in Educational Expenditures

The first set of Tobit models focus on differences in African American and White households' educational expenditures for school-aged children. Table 5.3 presents these findings with separate analysis for the two racial subgroups. The first data column (column A) lists the Tobit coefficients and the significance level of each independent variable. Column B lists the change in the expected value of educational expenditures for households reporting expenditures greater than \$0. Column C provides data on the change in the cumulative probability of having educational expenditures greater than \$0 associated with a given independent variable.

For White families, the level of income, wealth, and parent education were positively associated with increased expenditures on education for school-aged children with income having the largest impact out of the three socio-economic variables. For African American families, income and net worth were statistically significant and showed positive relationships with the amount of educational expenditures for families. The results suggest African American and White households with higher income and higher net worth spend more on education for their children. In both models while income had the largest impact on household educational expenditures, net worth of the families was positive, statistically significant even after holding other variables constant suggesting that net worth has an independent effect on family's educational expenditures.

The number of school aged children in the household has a negative effect on the amount of educational expenditures for White families. This is an interesting finding that may suggest that families with more children have greater constraints on their budget and therefore might spend less on educational expenditures. Theoretical and empirical insights from economists

suggest that per capita human capital expenditures might decline as family size increases (Becker & Tomes, 1976). White families who live in neighborhoods they rate as poor spend less on educational expenditures than those who reside in neighborhoods rated as excellent. This variable was not statistically significant in the model for African Americans.

Not surprisingly, having a child enrolled in a public school as opposed to a private K-12 school causes both African American and White families to spend less on educational expenses. For African Americans, having a school-aged child enrolled in public school decreased the amount of household educational expenditures by over \$1,000 annually and decreased the probability of making educational expenditures by 49%. For White families, having a school-aged child in public school as opposed to private, decreased the amount of household expenses on education by \$2,112.

Parents' educational expectations for their children had a positive and highly significant impact on both African American and White families expenditures on education. A one unit increase in African American parents' educational expectations for their children resulted in an increase of \$67 on educational expenditures. For White parents, a one unit increase resulted in an increase of \$128 on educational expenditures. For both African American and White households who did not make educational expenditures, a one unit increase in parents' educational attainment levels for their child would increase their probability of making these expenditures by 3%.

Finally, if a White household had their focal child enrolled in gifted and talented programs, this was associated with higher levels of household educational expenditures. Among White families, enrollment in gifted programs resulted in an increase of \$263 on educational expenditures. For households that made no expenditures, White families would have

respectively, a 6% higher probability of making these monetary educational investments. It is important to note that results about gifted and talented enrollment are difficult to interpret as the results may be tautological in nature. More sophisticated causal modeling techniques may need to be employed to clearly determine the true nature of the relationship between educational expenditures and gifted and talented enrollment.

Table 5.3: Tobit parameter estimates of educational expenditures (White and African American Samples)

White Sample (N=1131) Log Likelihood: -7228			
<i>Variable</i>	<i>A: Coefficient</i>	<i>B: Expected Value (expenditures>0)</i>	<i>C: Probability (expenditures>0)</i>
Log of Income	491.24**	206.14	0.05
Log of Net worth	166.84+	70.01	0.02
Highest level of parent education	176.75+	74.17	0.02
Number of school aged children	-369.52**	-155.06	-0.04
Neighborhood rating	-311.52*	-130.72	-0.03
Enrolled in public school	-5033.07***	-2112.02	-0.49
Parent aspirations	305.07***	128.02	0.03
Age (household head)	15.58	6.54	0.00
Ever enrolled in gifted program	628.90*	263.90	0.06
African American Sample (N=1045) Log Likelihood: -4277			
<i>Variable</i>	<i>A: Coefficient</i>	<i>B: Expected value (expenditures >0)</i>	<i>C: Probability (expenditures>0)</i>
Log of Income	308.54**	102.01	0.05
Log of Net worth	119.63*	39.55	0.02
Highest level of parent education	-7.82	-2.59	0.00
Number of school aged children	48.98	16.19	0.01
Neighborhood rating	-11.79	-3.90	0.00
Enrolled in public school	-3199.26***	-1057.72	-0.49
Parent aspirations	202.76***	67.03	0.03
Age (household head)	4.23	1.40	0.00
Ever enrolled in gifted program	175.45	58.01	0.03

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, +p<.10

Tobit Results for Differences in Educational Expenditures Within the African American Sample

Table 5.4 provides Tobit model comparisons for low income African American households and middle and upper income households. For the low SES model there were five statistically significant variables. In terms of the relationship between socio-economic status of

the families and household educational expenditures within these two subsamples, only income emerged as a statistically significant determinant of household expenditures. This occurred across both African American samples and suggests that income is more important in the day to day budget for the annual expenses of low income and upper income households.

The number of school-aged children in the household was positively associated with educational expenditures for working class African American households. This is an important result that suggests having another school aged child at home would result in an increase in household educational expenditures of \$64. Moreover, for those parents in the sample who did not make educational expenditures, their probability of making expenditures given an increase in the number of school-aged children would be 5%. This result is in contrast to the results from the White model where a statistically significant negative relationship was detected for number of school-aged children in the family.

Another important difference between the low income African American sample and the upper income African American sample was related to the gifted indicator variable. This field was only statistically significant in the low income model. Low income African American households with a child who has enrolled in gifted/talented programs spent \$237 more on educational expenditures than those not enrolled in gifted programs, holding other family characteristics constant. This variable was negative and not statistically significant in the middle and upper income models.

Finally, having the focal child enrolled in public school as opposed to private schools was negatively associated with household educational expenditures largely due to the costs associated with sending children to private schools. The unconditional marginal effects (Column B) suggest that low income African Americans who reside in households with educational

expenditures greater than \$0 with children enrolled in private school can expect to spend \$227 more annually on education than those families with children in public schools. In contrast, more affluent African Americans with children in private school can expect to spend nearly \$1500 annually compared to households with children enrolled in public schools. For low income African American families who did not make educational expenditures, those with children enrolled in private school would have a 38% higher probability of making educational expenditures compared to their counterparts with children in public school. The resulting probability for upper income African Americans was similar at 39%.

It is interesting to note that the results for the pooled African American sample demonstrate a wealth effect, but when the sample is divided along class lines the impact of wealth disappears and the only socioeconomic variable that is a statistically significant determinant of household educational expenditures is income. The Tobit models presented here include only net worth as the household level wealth variable. Perhaps when examining the smaller samples of African Americans across social class, the illiquid form of wealth used is not readily associated with household expenditures on education. In other words, Black wealth is largely concentrated in housing values and this makes Black families less likely to profit from housing wealth unless they are able to sell their home.

Table 5.4: Tobit parameter estimates of educational expenditures (African Americans)

Low SES African American Sample (N=578) Log Likelihood: -1914			
<i>Variable</i>	<i>A: Coefficient</i>	<i>B: Expected Value (expenditures>0)</i>	<i>C: Probability (expenditures >0)</i>
Log of Income	445.72***	111.39	0.15
Log of Net worth	48.09	10.81	0.02
Highest level of parent education	-40.38	6.59	0.01
Number of school aged children	145.20***	64.39	0.05
Neighborhood rating	64.63	38.69	0.02
Enrolled in public school	-2504.51***	-227.85	-0.38
Parent aspirations	64.81+	31.09	0.02
Age (household head)	-0.54	-1.76	0.00
Ever enrolled in gifted program	471.57**	236.98	0.16
Middle and Upper SES African American Sample (N=436) Log Likelihood: -2196			
<i>Variable</i>	<i>A: Coefficient</i>	<i>B: Expected Value (expenditures>0)</i>	<i>C: Probability (expenditures >0)</i>
Log of Income (000s)	1576.06***	608.34	0.16
Log of Net worth (000s)	-152.43	-58.84	-0.02
Highest level of parent education	-62.19	-24.00	-0.01
Number of school aged children	-246.14	-95.01	-0.03
Neighborhood rating	-215.37	-83.13	-0.02
Enrolled in public school	-3775.91***	-1457.44	-0.39
Parent aspirations	287.15*	110.84	0.03
Age (household head)	48.00**	18.53	0.00
Ever enrolled in gifted program	-395.57	-152.68	-0.04

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, +p<.10

Parent-School Investments

Parent involvement across race and social class has been examined extensively by qualitative and quantitative researchers alike (Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). The research generally suggests a positive and beneficial relationship between parent involvement and children's educational outcomes. There is a large body of work that explores the important contribution that parents can make to their children's educational journey and there is strong evidence to support parental involvement in children's outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). In this section I explore parent-school involvement as a form of investment and try to better understand the factors that influence parent's greater involvement in the life of their children's school.

The parent-school investment variable is comprised of three forms of school-based involvement found in the PSID Child Development Supplement data set. The data reflect a range of family involvement at the school from attendance at general school-wide events, participation or attendance at PTA events, and volunteerism in their child's classroom. Table 5.1 shows low and high involvement of the entire sample based on the distribution for each construct. Households were assigned 0, 1, and 2 based on the zero, low, and high distributions. These data were then used to construct a composite variable ranging from 0 to 6, with 0 representing no school-based involvement and 6 representing the highest level of involvement by a parent during a school year. This composite variable, representing a continuum from no school involvement to a high level of school involvement, is used as the dependent variable in the second model of parent investments.

Results of Ordinal Logistic Regression for African American and White Sample

Table 5.5 reports the results of the OLS model for the level of school-based parent involvement for White and African American households. The model is similar to the model for monetary investments with the addition of variables on mother's employment status and gender of focal child.

In terms of socio-economic variables, net worth and parent's education level were statistically significant in the model for White households, not income; however, income, net worth and parent education were all statistically significant predictors of parent involvement for the African American sample. These findings replicate the conclusions of other researchers who find that social class matters in determining school-based involvement patterns (Laureau, 2000; 2003).

The amount of workplace flexibility parents have may influence their level of involvement at their child's school. In the model for White households, a mother working part-time relative to not working outside the home was negatively associated with higher levels of school-based involvement. However, for African American families, a mother working part-time or full-time outside of the home was positively related to a higher level of school involvement, relative to a mother who did not work for pay. This finding may be linked to socioeconomic status as well. African American mothers that are not in the workforce may find that they have less economic resources than their working counterparts and research suggests low income families have lower levels of traditional school based involvement (Lott, 2001). Therefore, the "mother's work-effect" that is present in the African American sample may represent another proxy for socioeconomic status. African American mothers that work full or

part-time are 1.6 times more likely than African American mothers that did not work any hours to be more involved in their child's school.

Enrollment in a public school was negatively associated with higher levels of school-based investments for White families, but positively associated with school involvement for African American families. This suggests African American parents with children enrolled in private schools are less likely than their public school counterparts to volunteer at school or attend school meetings. This is an interesting finding that may be related to perceptions of differences in school quality among African Americans (Diamond & Gomez, 2004). Perhaps Black parents believe they should be more engaged in public school affairs and exhibit a higher level of trust for private schools and believe they can be less involved. On the other hand, it may be that private schools are less likely to reach out to African American parents and fully engage them in the life of the school, in comparison to White families. In addition to the public-private school differences across race, there were also differences related to the gifted and talented designation. African Americans households with a focal child enrolled in a gifted program are 2.2 times more likely than parents of children not enrolled in a gifted program to be involved in their child's school. In contrast, the data for White families shows a negative relationship between gifted enrollment of a child and parents' level of involvement at the school.

Table 5.5 Ordinal Logistic Regression Results for Parents' School Based Investments

White Sample			
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>
Log of Income	-.0183	.0181	0.982
Log of Net worth	.0837***	.0091	1.091
Highest level of parent education	.1715***	.00678	1.187
Mother worked part-time	-.5679***	.0636	.567
Mother worked full-time	-.0587	.0520	.943
Number of school aged children	.2181***	.0130	1.244
Neighborhood rating	-.1318***	.0141	.877
Enrolled in public school	-.4869***	.0394	.615
Parent aspirations	.2897***	.00855	1.336
Age (household head)	.000040	.00201	1.000
Ever enrolled in gifted program	-.1262 **	.0405	.881
African American Sample			
Log of Income	.0729*	.0291	1.076
Log of Net worth	.0845***	.0152	1.088
Highest level of parent education	.0325*	.0133	1.033
Mother worked part-time	.4469**	.0815	1.563
Mother worked full-time	.4884**	.0725	1.630
Number of school aged children	.2177**	.0230	1.243
Neighborhood rating	-.1800**	.0232	0.835
Enrolled in public school	.5663***	.0928	1.762
Parent aspirations	.0925**	.0147	1.097
Age (household head)	.00550+	.00314	1.006
Ever enrolled in gifted program	.8009***	.0946	2.227

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, +p<.10

Results of Ordinal Logistic Regression for Low and Middle SES Households

The analysis for low and middle SES African Americans is reported in Table 5.6. For low SES households, the income and wealth holdings are not statistically significant predictors of parents' involvement in their children's school, but the highest level of parent education was statistically significant. However, for middle and upper SES households, families with higher levels of wealth and income are 1.3 times more likely to be involved in school-based investment activities. Similar to the findings for the overall African American population, enrollment in public versus private schools for lower SES families has a positive relationship to levels of parent's school based-involvement. Further, the gifted and talented enrollment emerges as positive and highly significant across low and middle to high SES African American households. African American parents are 2 times more likely to be involved if their child has ever enrolled in a gifted or talented program compared to those parents' whose child has never been enrolled in these designated programs.

The positive "mother's work effect" was present in the middle and upper income version of the African American model. Working upper income African American mothers are more likely to exhibit higher levels of parent involvement at the school than mothers who are outside of the labor force. This finding for the middle and upper class African American households suggests mothers who work full-time are 3.3 times more likely to be involved in traditional school-based parent involvement than mothers outside of the work force. Perhaps middle and upper income African Americans demonstrate a greater sense of agency when it comes to school level involvement when compared to their lower income African American counterparts.

Table 5.6 Ordinal Logistic Regression Results for Parents' School Based Investments African Americans Only

Low SES African American Sample			
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>
Log of Income	-.0608	.0805	.941
Log of Net worth	.0247	.0206	1.025
Highest level of parent education	.1591***	.0216	1.172
Mother worked part-time	.0197	.1027	1.020
Mother worked full-time	.0423	.0972	1.630
Number of school aged children	.1063***	.0306	1.112
Neighborhood rating	-.2840***	.0325	.753
Enrolled in public school	1.6442***	.1726	5.177
Parent aspirations	.1171***	.0196	1.124
Age (household head)	-.00575	.00425	.994
Ever enrolled in gifted program	.7607***	.1456	2.140
Middle and Upper SES African American Sample			
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>
Log of Income	.2620*	.1221	1.300
Log of Net worth	.2390***	.0328	1.270
Highest level of parent education	-.1141***	.0221	.892
Mother worked part-time	.8140**	.1679	2.257
Mother worked full-time	1.1962**	.1405	3.307
Number of school aged children	.4443***	.0425	1.559
Neighborhood rating	-.00495	.0401	.995
Enrolled in public school	.0664	.1317	1.069
Parent aspirations	.0868**	.0266	1.091
Age (household head)	.0137*	.00531	1.014
Ever enrolled in gifted program	.8158***	.1342	2.261

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, +p<.10

Summary

To date, there is a dearth of literature exploring the determinants of African American parents' educational investments. This chapter represents an attempt to explore in greater detail differences between Black and White households as well as differences within the African American community on parents' school-based investments, operationalized as a composite variable of parent involvement, as well as the key determinants of monetary educational investments.

In the overall African American and White samples, the findings for monetary investments show wealth and income are positive determinants of family's educational expenditures. This aligns with economic theory which suggests the more financial resources that parents possess the more likely they are to invest in their children's human capital (Becker & Tomes, 1976). However, studies of family monetary educational expenditures have not explored differences between Whites and African Americans in the U.S. While there is strong support for economic theory as it relates to income and wealth in the aggregate Black and White samples, subsequent analysis for African Americans across socioeconomic levels produced mixed results. Another key finding related to monetary educational expenditures is related to enrollment of a child in a gifted and talented program. According to the full African American sample, child enrollment in gifted programs has a positive relationship to educational expenditures for the household. This lends support to literature that suggests parent satisfaction and engagement is high among parents of gifted student (Huff et al, 2005; Jolly & Matthews, 2012).

For school-based investments, the model for the aggregated sample of African Americans reveals that income, wealth, and parent education -- key socioeconomic measures -- are all positively related to the parent-school involvement outcome. A child's enrollment in a gifted

program, mother's hours worked, and public school enrollment all increase the odds that a parent will have higher levels of school based parental investments. For working class African American households, parent's level of education, gifted child's designation, and enrollment in a public school increases the likelihood of increased school involvement with no financial resource effects noted.

These results for African American families with lower socioeconomic resources differ markedly from the results of the middle and upper income sample where income and net worth were positively related to level of parent involvement. However, in this lower income model the parent education field was statistically significant and counterintuitive suggesting that the higher the level of parent education, the lower the level of involvement at the school.

In summary, the role of economic resources emerged as a significant determinant of family investment in this chapter confirming economic theory advanced by Becker & Tomes (1976). Additionally, other non-monetary factors such as parents aspirations are also related to families investment patterns; however, one could ask, do parents invest more because they have high aspirations for their children or do they have high aspirations for their children because of their level of investments. Additional analyses are needed to fully answer this question.

CHAPTER 6: **Exploring the Social Context for African American Parents' Educational Investments**

In this chapter, I share findings from interviews with 11 African American parents who reside in Los Angeles County, California. I explore the role of social context in understanding the ways African American parents make investments across four broad domains. Using an explicit race and class framework, I examine the theme of parental expectations as this provides insight into the motivations of African American parents for their educational investment decisions. Moreover, the class-based lens provides an opportunity to investigate heterogeneity within the African American sample in the study. Next, I identify the nature of the investments parents make and evaluate parents' thoughts about what these investments mean for their children's educational and social-emotional well-being. Following this analysis, I share findings about the role of economic constraints and how this might impact African American parents' educational investment patterns. Finally, I document the way racial socialization and race-based messaging can be viewed as a form of experiential investment that also shapes the way parents make other types of investments on behalf of their children.

Data and Methods

The 11 parents interviewed for this study were part of a larger mixed method study of parent engagement in Los Angeles County. The Los Angeles Parent Engagement study was conducted in 2010-2011. The 11 parents I interviewed for the current study were part of a larger group of socioeconomically and racially diverse sample of 750 parents who participated in a telephone survey about their parent engagement practices. Of the sample of 750 parents, 510 were drawn from a random sample of Los Angeles County parents while the other 240 were randomly selected from a list of community based organizations and labor unions. Of the 750 parents initially surveyed, 70 were African American parents. At the end of the survey, parents

were asked about their willingness to participate in an in-depth follow-up interview about their survey results. Parents who indicated yes and exhibited higher than average parent engagement levels were included in the follow-up interview sample to better understand parents' background, school context, and detailed information about their parent involvement levels. These parents were more involved in the school-based context of parent-school involvement due to their more regular attendance at school-sponsored events and meetings. The first follow-up interviews were conducted during the 2010-2011 school year. During the fall of 2012, I then selected 11 parents from the initial round of interviews as informants for the second follow-up to explore themes of parent investments. Parents were chosen if they had at least one school aged child in middle or high school as a way of better understanding the investment patterns of households with adolescent youth. Interviews were conducted either in the parents' home or a local café or restaurant near their home.

It is important to note that while the Great Recession technically ended by 2009, many of the families were experiencing the lasting effects of a sluggish state and national economy. Over the one year period between the two interviews, 6 of the 11 parents reported reductions in work hours, 1 middle class parent reported her spouse had been laid off, and another middle class family had to close their home-based business. These economic circumstances impacted their ability to consistently invest time and money in their children's well-being. For example, at the time of the initial interview, one parent had a home-based business and a high degree of flexibility in his schedule to lead his daughter's booster club at her middle school. However, by the time of our second interview, he was employed full-time at a local university. This meant he had less time for the deep involvement in his daughter's school and more budget constraints for monetary educational investments.

All of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. I manually coded each transcript using an initial set of codes based on the theoretical insights framing the study, existing literature about parent investments and the research questions of the study. As I began to gain a better handle on the data across all 11 interviews additional themes and patterns emerged and I settled on the four broad themes articulated above – parental expectations, the nature of educational investments, the role of economic constraints, and racial socialization. In this study, I used pseudonyms to protect parents' identity.

Parent Expectations: Educational Aspirations for their Children

Much like national data that documents how parents across racial and socioeconomic levels have high aspirations for their children (Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009), the African American parents in the present study universally expressed they wanted to see their children obtain a four-year college degree or more. Findings about high parent aspirations are not particularly new, yet in this study, it is important to analyze parents' expectations for their children as it may provide the foundation and motivation for why parents make various types of investments. Indeed, analysis from chapter 5 shows parent aspirations was consistently positively related to parents investments in educational expenditures and level of school-based involvement. Further, as this study has done in previous chapters, this qualitative analysis attempts to examine differences and similarities within the African American community.

Table 6.1 provides selected demographic detail about each parent interviewed and provides a sense of family size and a general picture of the socioeconomic status of each household. Of the 11 parents, I categorized three as working class because the families' made between \$45,000 – 65,000 annually in Los Angeles county, with education levels ranging from high school graduate to some college. I also included one parent who did not report income in

the working class category. Three parents were categorized as working poor households where the parent made less than \$40,000 annually as single mothers. The remaining four were classified as middle class because they had household incomes greater than \$75,000 accompanied by professional careers and/or high levels of educational attainment. The sample included one grandparent that is co-parenting with her daughter who has fallen on tough economic times and had to move in with her mother. Finally, the sample also includes one African American father.

Table 6.1 Selected Demographics of Parent Sample

Parent	Household Income	Education Level	Occupation	Spouse's Occupation	Number of School Aged Children
Working poor					
Priscilla	<\$25,000	Some college	Office clerk	n/a	2
Sheryl	< \$25,000	11 th grade	Cook	n/a	3
Tammy	\$30,001 – 35,000	Associate's degree	Health care attendant	n/a	3
Working class					
Millie*	\$45, 000 – 50,000	HS diploma	Retired military	Daughter unemployed	2
Denise	\$50,000 – 60,000	HS diploma	Landscaper	Bus driver	2
Lynda	\$50,000 – 60,000	Some college	Processor	Warehouse worker	3
Lisa	Not reported	Some college	School bus driver	Maintenance	2
Middle class					
Felicia	\$75,000 – 100,000	Graduate or professional	Educator/Counsel or	Truck driver	3
Harvey	\$75,000 – 100,000	Graduate or professional	Educational consultant/trainer	Housewife	2
Martha	\$75,000 – 100,000	Some college	Office clerk	Postal worker	2
Angela	>\$100,000	Vocational certification	Executive assistant	Stockbroker	2

*Millie is a grandmother who is co-parenting her grandchildren with her daughter.

When parents were asked how far they would like to see their children go in school and why they wanted this for their children, they all stated college and beyond. However, the nature

of the responses often reflects the parents' own personal experiences with school and in many respects contextualizes why parents desire for their children to continue their education beyond high school. Harvey, a married, middle-class African American father of two children in Los Angeles public schools states the following:

[I] want them to you know minimally they have to get a Bachelor's degree and then after that it really depends on what they choose to do career wise. But you know they have to get the bachelor's degree simply because it's what's required. I'm not saying it's fair, but I think if you go to school for all the right reasons, it's a great experience. It's a truly rewarding experience and when we look back on undergrad, ...undergrad was a lot of fun. It was challenging, I'm sure we all at once crammed for the exam and we go into the library and you go in at 10 in the morning and you sleep until 12 noon and then you study and you fall asleep at three and then you wake up... I mean those days are just you know, a lot of fun. And I want them to have that experience. Also, socially they're going to need it if they want the opportunities and to live a lifestyle that I'm sure they would like to live -- it requires minimally... to have this degree.

Harvey's own personal experiences as a college-educated parent shape his aspirations for his children and provide context for why it is important for his children to pursue higher education. He also recalls his undergraduate years with fondness and views the time as a lot of fun. In this way, he may convey hopefulness about how college is enjoyable as well as rewarding to his children. Sheryl, a single working class mother of three, expressed high aspirations also:

I: How far do you want to them to go in school?

Sheryl: I want them to go all the way. I want my son...I want my kids to go all the way. I want them to be able to finish high school and get everything they can get out of high

school and go on to college. If they want to go to a two-year college, a four-year college, a community-college or close by or even live in the dorm....

I: Why do you want this for them?

Sheryl: Because I want them to be successful...I mean, I told them you're not going to be successful when you have all this bling-bling and all this money going out your ears and all that. You're not going to have all that. I say you might, but you might not - but I want you to be able to get what you can get. Don't let nobody hold you back, don't have no babies because babies will hold you back. Because I wanted to be a lawyer myself and I studied to do that, but when I had my children and didn't have no one to help I had to drop out. So, I want the best for them. I want to give them everything that I didn't have. Give them every opportunity and help them along the way if I can. So, I want them to go far and that's why I'm constantly on them and I tell them I'm on you because I want you to succeed.

Similar to Harvey's concerns about his children's life path, Sheryl expresses a strong desire to see her children succeed in college. Sheryl provides context for why this is important for her as she recounts her own experience with education and discusses how her schooling was interrupted when she entered motherhood. As a parent who did not have the opportunity to graduate high school, she also stresses how she wants to give them all she did not have in life which provides a strong basis for how her educational investment decisions are shaped. Like Sheryl, Tammy stressed how important a four year college degree is to her children's future success and juxtaposed this desire with her own personal experiences and struggles to finish school with competing family obligations.

I: How far do you want your child to go in school?

Tammy: All of them, they already know it's no excuse not to go and be a college graduate, so my focus and my prayer for them is to, you know, go and finish... Whether you go to a four year, Cal State, a J.C....If you go to a J.C., transfer, make sure you get your degree, get a career, and then start working, or working on a family.

I: Could you tell me a little bit more about why you want this for your child?

Tammy: Because I didn't do it. I've been working since I was fourteen and when I did go to a J.C., even though I got my AA, when I became overwhelmed, the first thing that I dropped was school and if I had known what I know now, back then, I would have went to school first and then decided to get married and have a family life... That's why.

Tammy, a working class single mother of three school aged children works as a health care attendant. She recalls her own challenges of finishing school and was able to obtain an Associate's degree from a community college; however, she tends to place greater value on obtaining a four year degree as she encourages her children to transfer to a four-year institution if they start off in community college. Tammy's intimate knowledge of her own employment opportunities help shed light on the educational dreams she has for her children and subsequently how she shapes the lives of her children.

In short, the parents in the study possessed high levels of aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005). Yosso defines aspirational capital as hope in one's future in spite of the presence of real and perceived barriers. This finding is in line with what many other studies site as we clearly see homogeneity across parents' aspiration levels (Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009). However, it is clear that middle class African Americans in this study are better able to articulate the specifics of their educational and career aspirations for their children and they do so with less trepidation about their children's future. In contrast, lower income African Americans are more cautious in

their optimism about their children's future. This is an important distinction as we think about within group differences among African Americans and how these aspirational dispositions shape parents' investment behavior.

Aspirations and Academic Challenges

In addition to these high aspirations, another factor that may influence parents' educational investment strategies is the academic performance –real or perceived of the child. In this study, parents were asked how their children were doing academically and the results were mixed. While universally, parents had high hopes for their children, the reality of the actual challenges their children might face in school could potentially make it difficult for their children to realize the parents' high aspirations. There was evidence that parents experienced two types of academic challenges related to special education. Parents were either reacting to or questioning the labeling of their child as “special needs” or grappling with the well-documented learning disabilities their children faced in schools. For instance, Sheryl shared that she believes her son was mislabeled as special education in middle school as a result of a behavioral challenge, yet the label and stigma have followed him into his high school years.

I felt he didn't need IEP, because there is nothing wrong with him. So, he kept that IEP until he went to middle school and until he went to high school. He's in high school now. And I think that IEP kind of messed him up a little bit. Because he wasn't in a classroom with the other kids, he was in special classes. I remember them calling him 'special ed boy' and all that. And now, you know, he's in the 11th grade. He's almost 17 and he took the CAHSEE and he passed on the first time he took it. And so now, he thinks he's just intellectual, he's just Mr. Smart-Smart. He doesn't want to go to school no more.

He's missed so much school. And that's because I go to work and I come home and I think my kids are in school.

Sheryl's concern that the IEP may have "messed him up a little bit" is related to the way he or others may perceive his ability, yet she remains steadfast in her belief that her son can be still be successful academically and has already demonstrated competency in passing the California high school exit exam. However, it is important to note that her investments, in the form of time to ensure that he regularly attends school and is fully engaged academically are thwarted by the inflexibility of her work schedule where she cannot invest as much time in his academic life as she would like. Another important point is related to the number of special education students in the study. Findings suggest parents may experience specific challenges in special education labeling that temper their aspirations for their children. Nationally, data reveal there is an overrepresentation of African American children designated as "special needs" (Blanchett, 2006; Patton, 1998; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Four of the 11 parents in the study had children with special needs and among those four there was a commonality in concern about the academic performance of their special needs children. Martha, a middle class married mother of two school-age children reflected on her sons' performance in light of their learning disabilities:

They're doing fine, like I said there are some learning differences, but Sylvan has helped and I feel with all schools a lot of times kids just sort of fall in the cracks so that's unfortunate. You know, so you have to get that extra help and luckily we were able to get it.

This insight from Martha underscores how parents make the connections between student performance and the necessary support systems to help boost their academic performance. Though her sons attend a high school that has a wealth of advanced placement courses and a

rigorous college-going curriculum, she feels her sons are not getting the supports they need. Her sons learning challenges and lack of targeted support in their high school have caused her to make additional monetary investments in their educational success. African American students with learning challenges may have a harder time transitioning into post-secondary educational opportunities (Dalke & Smith, 1987; Albrecht, Jones, & Erk 2011), yet Martha and Sheryl still embrace their children's potential to pursue higher education. However, in contrast with Sheryl, Martha's financial capital helps her pay for additional tutoring support for her sons. Martha's aspirations for her sons are explicitly articulated as a Master's degree.

I: How far do you want your children to go in school?

P: All the way, you know. At least Masters... I think having a BA – it's a lot of clerical people with BAs. I know my daughter when she got her BA, she was waitressing, you know. She had to go back and get her Masters, unless you have that entrepreneurial spirit and push that you need...otherwise it's tough.

Based on Martha's own lived experiences as well as the experiences of her daughter's post-baccalaureate life, Martha feels "at least a Masters" is the best route for her sons. Without that or personal drive, she perceives life as relatively difficult.

Lynda, a middle class mother of three boys is very involved in her oldest son's education at the high school level because of his special education designation. She comments that she volunteers less than she would like to at her younger sons' elementary school because she feels that she has to stay on top of the high school staff to ensure they are monitoring her eldest son's IEP and providing the appropriate amount of rigor for him. In her experience, she feels her son is always being pushed away from more challenging coursework that would make him competitive for college.

[The school] ...umm, they discourage kids like Emmanuel. He wants to take a foreign language. They're discouraging him from taking it because he is special-ed. Okay, like I told him 'yeah, it's going to be a lot harder than what you're used to, but you can try it'. And we'll know within the first three weeks if you're able to do it. And if not, we'll just switch your class. But they discourage the kids: 'oh, well you're special-ed, we can't give that to you.' And to go to any college, you have to have a foreign language. You and I both know that, you got to have two years.

Lynda has also paid an average of \$40 a month for an undergraduate student from a local college to help Emmanuel with some coursework and to improve his study habits which she feels has been a tremendous help. She also has his classroom lectures recorded and takes the time to review the classes and regularly assists him structure his notes and study. She shares:

I pretty much tell them it's really hard, you have to focus. I know, especially for my older son, he's dyslexic, so it's a lot harder for him. And you know, I told him, all [you] have to do is focus, like if he has to do studies in school, then we record it, it's recorded in the classroom. I mean, I know it can happen in college too because I've already done my research and things like that, that things can be recorded, so we can go over it together and I can help him as far as dictating everything.

In all three instances, the parents held on to their belief that their child's special education designation should not be a barrier to acquiring higher education credentials. Again, their deployment of aspirational capital provided the basis for their investments. It allowed them to assess their children's chances and academic abilities as attainable, in spite of their designation as special education students, a label that might be responsible for holding them back. This speaks to the enduring effect of parents' aspirational capital that if properly harnessed may be

converted towards positive outcomes for their children. In the case of Martha, she was able to make additional monetary investments in private tutoring services. Also, Lynda made additional monetary investments towards tutoring and extensive temporal investments in her regular interactions with school personnel as well as direct homework assistance with her son.

Lynda's school-based investments were really important to her and were linked to a reform-oriented stance (Diamond & Gomez, 2004) toward her son's school. A reform-oriented stance is characterized by a critique and sense of skepticism of schools and school personnel. In their study of African American parents in Chicago, Diamond and Gomez found "working-class parents were more critical and distrustful of their children's schools and sought to press them to more effectively educate their children" (p.418). I found evidence that this was true among working class parents as well as middle class parents who had children that were struggling academically. Martha's sons were attending a public high school with a high proportion of rigorous course offerings and a fairly affluent majority white student population. Only 8% of students in this school were African American and 28% of students were receiving free or reduced priced lunches. In addition to the monetary investments for private tutoring, Martha also regularly attended African American parent group meetings which were focused on strategies to close the achievement gap between their children and other students in the school.

The calculus that parents employ with respect to aspirations is not a new research finding, but I conjecture that the confluence of structural economic forces and African American parents' own experiences in the workforce frame their thinking about the economic returns to degree attainment. The African American parents in this study have an understanding that increased human capital investments lead to better career options and improved life chances, but they also seek to make their children well-rounded individuals by exposing them to art and spirituality.

Taken as a whole, these understandings helped formulate their actions which I view as investment behavior. In the next section, I explore the nature of parents' educational investments in greater detail providing examples of school-based investments, monetary investments, and what I call experiential investments. Each of these is heavily influenced by the schools' context, parental dispositions, and parents' own lived experiences.

Table 6.2 Summary of Parent-School Based Investments and School Context

Parent	Household Income	Types of parent-school investments	School type	1st School: %African American and %Free/Reduced Lunch	2nd School: %African American and %Free/Reduced Lunch
Working poor					
Priscilla	<\$25,000	Parent-teacher meetings, classroom visits	Urban magnet high school	56% / 75%	Same
Sheryl	< \$25,000	Parent education workshops, parent-teacher conferences, open houses	Urban public high school	19% / 90%	Same
Tammy	\$30,001 – 35,000	Parent meetings; school improvement meetings	Urban charter middle school /urban middle school magnet	19% / 74%	
Working class					
Millie*	\$45,000 – 50,000	Parent center volunteer, parent education workshops	Urban public middle school	20% / 77%	Same
Denise	\$50,000 – 60,000	Parent meetings, school improvement meetings	Urban public high school	10% / 57%	Same
Lynda	\$50,000 – 60,000	Volunteer, parent meetings, school committee meetings	Suburban public high school	4% / 87%	Same
Lisa	Not reported	Parent-teacher meetings	Suburban public high school	28% / 63%	Same
Middle class					
Felicia	\$75,000 – 100,000	Fundraising, open houses, back-to-school nights	Urban public high school	11% / 74%	Same
Harvey	\$75,000 – 100,000	Booster club/fundraising, , school-community meetings, school improvement	Urban magnet middle school / Urban magnet high school	59% / 50%	28% / 44%
Martha	\$75,000 – 100,000	Parent-teacher conferences, African American parent meetings	Urban public high school	8% / 28%	Same
Angela	>\$100,000	Classroom volunteer, field trip volunteer, PTA, school improvement meetings	Urban charter school / private girls school	2% / 7%	6% / NA

The Nature African American Parents' Educational Investments

One of the aims of the study is to better understand how African American parents across social class make educational investments. In this section, I explore what African American parents' school involvement looks like and how parents are involved in their child's life outside of school. Equally important to children's overall development is the planning and facilitating of extracurricular activities in an effort to expose children to academic supports as well as enrichment such as music, dance, and spiritual development.

Table 6.2 provides summary data on the range of school-based investments parents made, plus additional data on racial and socioeconomic composition of the various schools the focal child attended. The majority of the parents in the study sent their children to schools where over 50% of the students qualify for free or reduced priced meals. Only two parents listed their children attending schools with a majority African American population. In Los Angeles County, African Americans make up only 9% of county residents, yet there is a high degree of residential segregation that clusters students in schools that have high proportions of students of color. In spite of this, parents in the study had children attending schools with proportions of African Americans ranging from a low of 2% to a high of 28%. As a reminder, the sample was drawn from a more actively involved set of parents; therefore, most parents participated in school meetings, fundraising, and general volunteering at their child's school. This type of involvement is considered traditional school sponsored and organized parent involvement efforts.

School-sanctioned involvement

Millie, a retired member of the armed forces is co-parenting her grandchildren with her daughter who is a single mother. Millie has stepped in to provide stability for her daughter and

her grandchildren. Millie shares that her daughter lives with her and has been facing financial challenges on her job where she's experienced a reduction in work hours. Millie's retired status and military benefits allow her the opportunity to bridge the financial gap for her family as her daughter seeks more work. It also affords her time to volunteer at her grandson's school. Millie states:

Well I volunteer at David's school every Friday. Umm and I go any other time that they call me and need me... I have my grandson involved in the AVID program -- the college prep program and I did it because I was working in the parent center and I found out about the program ...I will have to stay on him with these grades. He gotta stay on his grades I do not accept anything lower than a 3.0 so that's why I'm really involved in [his school] and plus he a boy [also].

Millie's involvement in the school is fairly extensive given that research shows how parent involvement wanes as children get older (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Millie's grandson David was enrolled in middle school at the time of the interview. She volunteers at the school's parent center and through this social network, she found out about the college preparatory program. The investments she makes in time have also helped influence additional investment opportunities such as David's enrollment in AVID. Her motivation is clear as his participation in this program aligns with her desire to help him maintain a minimum B-average in school. She also makes an interesting point about her involvement being important because of her grandson's gender. It would be instructive to explore gender differences in parents' investment strategies and involvement practices, yet this is beyond the scope of the current study.

Millie is not the only parent who volunteers at their child's school site; Felicia manages to adjust her work schedule to volunteer at her daughter's high school whenever she can, but

wishes she could volunteer more. Since she has 3 school aged daughters at home, she chooses to focus most of her school involvement on the student that is closer to graduation. In her mind, she still has time to volunteer and address issues with her younger daughters. When asked about why this was important to her, she shares the benefits that she extracts from being involved at her daughter's high school:

I feel more involved in her education and not like I'm just sending her off to school when I don't know the teachers that are teaching her or the students that she's - you know, that she's around. I feel like I know the students, the teachers, some other parents, so I feel... I feel better about her being safe and that she's in good support. So, it's a big benefit. I wish I could do more to volunteer more, but because I work, I can't.

Though Felicia tended to minimize her volunteer efforts, her involvement at the school included a lot of fundraising and volunteering at parent-centered meetings at the school. Felicia's assessment of her daughter's school as well as her experience in volunteering was fairly positive. Similarly, Harvey was also fairly involved in key volunteer positions at his daughter's middle school as he states:

I: And have you ever volunteered at the schools?

Harvey: I have, I was actually the President of the Booster Club for my daughter's middle school until she left there and uh, frequently volunteer for some of the social events, the fairs...my wife and I, Katy, we volunteer. That's important.

I: You think it's important?

Harvey: Oh, absolutely.

I: Why do you think it's so important?

Harvey: Well you know, I believe that we parents – well, I don't believe, I know that's a fact, we parents model behavior for our children if we're cognizant of that fact or not. So since we're going to go ahead and be responsible for modeling what we want our children to do, uh probably more important than what we say we want them to do, they see what we do. So it's important to demonstrate education and I think by attending these events then we're modeling and reinforcing that kind of stuff.

Harvey's time commitment at his daughter's school is deemed critical to the messaging about the importance of education for his children. He feels that his involvement communicates to his children that there is a strong emphasis on education in their household. In this way, the investments that he's making at the school in fundraising aids all families, but it also provides spillover effects into his daughter's psyche to see her father in a respected leadership capacity among parents at her school. Harvey is the only father in this study, but his involvement defies the stereotype of the absent, uninvolved African American father. It lends support to findings that African American fathers are playing crucial roles in their children's educational journey (Reynolds, Howard, & Jones, 2013). It is important to note that Harvey's time commitment was made possible by a high degree of flexibility in his and his wife's schedule. At the time of the initial interview, Harvey, who possesses a graduate degree, owned his own home-based business. This degree of professional autonomy and flexibility of schedule is often linked to parents' commitment to school volunteering.

Work flexibility is an important consideration in the amount of time that parents can invest in school-based involvement. For example, Tammy, a single mother of three school-aged children works as a health care attendant which provides her with limited flexibility in her work

schedule. Although she has numerous time constraints, she manages to volunteer at her son's elementary school.

I: Have you volunteered at the schools?

Tammy: Actually, my son's school, the elementary, I have...As for my daughters school no I haven't volunteered, I just recently took a leave so I could be available, but normally I'm at work.

I: Do you see a change in your volunteerism from elementary to middle to high school?

Tammy: Yeah, because at the middle school level, they really don't ask for volunteers. It's like a lot of the schools say they want parent involvement, but my experience is, they want us, but once you get there, they really don't want you there.

While Tammy does volunteer at her son's elementary school, she states that her work hours are normally a factor in her not being able to participate at higher levels. There also appears to be an issue of differences across school context that she alludes to with respect to elementary versus middle school outreach to parents on involvement. She comments that she is invited to participate at the elementary school more, but does not feel as welcomed to participate in the same capacity at her daughter's middle school. Not feeling welcomed to participate in the school was more common among working poor African American parents compared to more affluent African American households. Sheryl often felt her participation at school meetings was deemed a nuisance. She shares:

When my elementary daughter was in school, she was in pre-school, pre-K and they used to have like council meetings and mandatory meetings we had to go to in order for your child to stay in pre-K. So, I went to that. I didn't go to all of them, because like I said, I have to work and I couldn't go and I got a certificate for it. They didn't want to give me

the certificate. The lady said I didn't come enough and I'm like well, I participated, you know, but she didn't really like what I had to say. Because you know they ask questions and like me, I ask a lot of questions. Because if I don't know something I'll ask – like 'what is this and why didn't they do this' and she didn't like that. Every time she see me, she would ignore me. And I'm like, why you ignoring me, you see me with my hand up. I'm a parent too, you know. Just because the other parents sitting back like this, I'm not the kind of person that just sit there and just listen. If I don't understand then I'll say something – "I don't understand what's going on there, can you explain this to me". If you explain it already and I didn't get it can you run it over to me again, because I need to know what's going on these are my kids. So, I think she didn't like that.

Sheryl's rebuff by school staff for asking more questions than other parents demonstrates that sometimes when working class African American parents with lower levels of educational attainment attempt to engage school personnel, they are left with the impression they are not welcomed to fully participate. Low income parents often receive chilly receptions from school personnel, have suggestions and concerns that are not well received, and are sometimes made to feel as if they wield less power in school settings than their middle class counterparts (Lott, 2001). Diamond & Gomez (2004) document that working class and middle class African American parents are often navigating strikingly different school contexts. All of Sheryl's children attend schools near her low income community with high proportions of low income students and English language learners. As Table 6.2 shows, Sheryl's son attended a school with a high percentage of students enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program and only 19% of the population was African American. Later in the interview Sheryl states the following:

But you see, I think right now, the school system is kind of messed up because I have no issues with Spanish people, but it's a lot of Spanish kids and it's a lot of Spanish parents. You know, they want to try to teach them English or whatever, but they're overcrowding the schools.

Based on this and other comments about her workplace experiences, Sheryl feels like an outsider among parents at her children's school, in her neighborhood, and on her job where she works with a majority Latino staff. This lends support for Diamond & Gomez's (2004) findings that working poor and working class African American parents are often navigating more challenging educational terrains with less valued economic, social, human, and cultural capital. Many are successful in doing so because they possess what Yosso (2005) calls navigational capital. Navigational capital is defined as the skill to maneuver through systems or institutions not designed for communities of color. In several instances evidenced above, parents with fewer socioeconomic resources and less educational credentials were able to make critical investments in their children in spite of these limitations.

While some parents were actively involved in more traditional forms of parent involvement in the school, other parents were developing their own involvement tactics as a way of staying engaged with their child's education and to literally monitor their school behavior. Priscilla, a single working poor mother liked to conduct what she described as "sneak attacks" on her high school daughter's classroom to observe her conduct and performance in class:

Priscilla: Because I think, they like- they have to- they don't let you get in the classrooms as much as I think they should. Because if you coming up there to check on your kids to make sure your kids are doing what they supposed to do, I think that a parent should be able to go and see what's happening in the classroom.

I: So you've been stopped when you wanted to do that?

Priscilla: Yeah, they wouldn't let me do that.

I: So why do you think they did that?

Priscilla: I don't know, but I didn't like it. I didn't like it because I wanted to see exactly -- you know, because you teaching my child. I need to know exactly how you teaching my child and what you teaching my child and I think that every parent that wants to go sit in the classroom or whatever and watch and observe what's going on should be able to do that, but they wouldn't let me do that. And I felt like if here's a parent trying to watch out for their child, trying to make sure that their child do good, you should be willing to let them in. Why call me when there's a problem later?

This type of parent-initiated school based involvement was deemed difficult for her to conduct, but she felt she had a right to do this in order to check on her daughter's behavior and performance. School personnel and staff are sometimes not equipped to properly address the incongruence between families and school personnel (Lott, 2001; Gillies, 2005). For disfavored parents it may prove more difficult for them to craft their investments strategies within the school context as their struggles to participate in the school space often parallels the discriminatory reaction they receive in other areas of their life on the basis of race and class.

Concerted cultivation through organized enrichment activities

Annette Lareau (2003) has found that social class is a more powerful determinant than race in the way parents order the lives of their elementary age children. Her evidence suggests that middle class families regardless of race, practice what she calls concerted cultivation. According to Lareau, upper and middle class parents engage in a deliberate form of social and cognitive development through highly structured time outside of school. They also exhibit a

preference for a communication style with their children based on reasoning instead of directives. By contrast, working class families are more likely to communicate in directives using language that emphasizes restrictions that are placed on children and pay less attention to structuring their children's time outside of the school environment. In her study, social class was the biggest determinant of whether parents practiced concerted cultivation or natural growth. For example, patterns of concerted cultivation include parents scheduling their children's extra-curricular time outside of school with academic and social supports among other behaviors. Whereas natural growth is when parents have less structured time for their children planned and children spend more out-of-school time playing or watching television, often unsupervised. However, parents in the current study, regardless of social location sought opportunities for their children to gain academic supports and overall enrichment and they either managed to make it fit into their overall budget or they did so through their social and personal networks when there were limits on their ability to pay for these experiences.

Tammy, a working poor mother of three discusses how her daughter's participation in a writing program has helped her gain more independence. Though Tammy possesses limited financial resources for her household, she has managed to enroll her daughter in a writing program.

My daughter's in this program called WRITE Girl. It's like a writing workshop. At first she was reluctant to go, but now she loves it. All of a sudden now she's coming to me, 'Oh, I have a workshop quiz', like she had one this past weekend, and she was like, 'I have another one coming up this weekend'. So she kind of mapped it on, I think that was better for her instead of like I'm always scheduling, having her do things. I'm kind of letting her do it on her own.

Tammy's daughter was also a praise dance leader at her church and a girl scout. These additional activities were important for Tammy to maintain for her daughter especially given she was in a new school with less emphasis on non-academic extra-curricular programming. She commented that when she moved her daughter to her current school, she lost a lot of extra-curricular activities:

Unfortunately the school she's at is a high ability magnet, so they have a lot of academics, as in [her previous school] was the performing arts where she had more electives. And you know, with all the cuts in the District that was like the ideal school because she still had music, band and dance, you know, so we had to give up a lot. In the end - it's like, we can compensate for the band and you know, things like that, you can do that outside the school. But I just know that that keeps her more focused, because, you know, with school work she's always bored. You know, she's still an honor roll student...at the school she's at they have the American Young Scholars Association, so she's part of that.

Tammy's understanding of the appropriate balance that her daughter needs between a rigorous academic environment and one that also encourages artistic expression is important because without the presence of this in the school environment, she has to seek out these opportunities in the community. This underscores the investment logic that parents in this study employ that suggests an evaluation of school offerings and school context helps to shape parents' efforts at concerted cultivation. Again, this is in contrast to Lareau's thesis which might suggest, Tammy – a working single mother – would subscribe to the natural growth approach. The most important point to make is that this thought process is happening across socioeconomic level within the African American population and parents' aspirational capital and understanding about their

child's school context plays a role in African American parents' investment decision making process.

Church is an important social institution that often provides structure, spirituality, and social networking opportunities to families. Historically, churches in African American communities have also been important sites for community organizing and racial socialization and respite from racial discrimination and bias (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Patillo-McCoy, 1998). Utilizing the church for youth activities and as a way of exposing them to positive youth development opportunities was a common finding among parents in the study regardless of their economic positioning. Lynda, a working class mother discussed how her son chose to be involved in church-based activities:

He's very involved in church - very involved. Out of all of my three children, he's the one who is mostly into doing church things and church activities and functions and going on retreats. He also gets tutoring there and lots of academic help.

Likewise Felicia, a middle class mother shares that her high school daughter, who was heavily involved in her high school's choir, is also involved with a dance group at her church.

Well, she's a praise dance leader at church.... she's getting the spiritual aspect, and she is a strong leader, so I think it gives her the opportunity to express herself. And you know, lead, and make decisions that you're going to have [to make] tomorrow and you know, go on this journey in life... I like the different fields that she's involved in, because hopefully-- I'm hoping that it will give her a balance and make her well-rounded.

Further, a working class parent like Sheryl's fear of her children having similar life experiences coupled with her limited financial and temporal resources means that she relies heavily on regular church attendance and Christianity which can be viewed as a form of spiritual

capital (Perez Huber, 2009). Spiritual capital represents another dimension of community cultural wealth that is characterized by beliefs and practices that are “rooted in a spiritual connection to a reality greater than oneself”. (p.721) One of the most important investments she makes outside of the school context that fits within her budget is regular church attendance and involvement by her family. Sheryl states,

[Church attendance] is important for me because I feel it keeps them out of trouble. I figure, if you're at church then you can't hang out on the street, because you're going to school Mondays through Fridays, and you have some Saturday school... I want them to be more involved in God because there's no one to save you, but Him.

Involvement in church was critical for many families and served as evidence that they practiced a form of culturally specific concerted cultivation where attendance and participation in church life was strongly encouraged and supported. These parents' teens were heavily involved in church-based programming and their engagement may be thought of as conscious efforts at concerted cultivation on behalf of their parents. This finding was documented across social class providing detail on the homogeneity of these experiences for African American families in this study. For families, these low to no cost extracurricular activities provide the types of cultivation required that nurtures their academic and racial identity. In this way, their investments in church based activities represents an investment in a nurturing social structure that provides an important set of supports for families in this study.

Budget constraints and concerted cultivation

Nearly all parents discussed the financial strain that their efforts at concerted cultivation had on their household budget. This was likely exacerbated by the fact that many parents in the sample were impacted by the ripple effects of the nation's economic crisis. However, as parents,

they viewed these costs as their responsibility as they sought to provide their children with a set of opportunities, even when these extra-curricular items clearly posed financial strains on their household. Harvey discusses his daughter's cheerleading costs with a mix of humor and exasperation:

I: Can you talk a little bit about how you and your wife come out of pocket for expenses for your children, like what types of things come up that you have to plan for or pay for, and how do you work that out?

Harvey: Yeah. This is when I work my moonlighting job (laughter). It's expensive, you know, her [cheerleading] uniform is \$700.

I: Wow.

Harvey: That's what I said, with a couple more expletives. So yeah, you know, their activities, Brian buying, getting a new guitar and the lessons, and we try to budget it in, what we will do, we try to budget it in, but I'll be honest sometimes Katy and I make a sacrifice, you know, to make sure that we can ensure that Crystal has her shoes or Brian has the guitar lessons. Thank God she stopped the competitive [cheerleading] -- that was four grand a year! But yeah, it's important, you know. Because right now they're still finding their interest, and we don't want to inhibit that type of journey, because if we say no to something that maybe they would have found of interest ... we have to allow them, within a certain parameter, to discover their passion, whatever it is in which they excel, and so we really try to help that. A couple of times though, we shouldn't have, but we have.

A conversation with Sheryl revealed similar costs associated with competitive cheerleading and while she wanted her daughter to be able to participate in these activities, the cost was

prohibitive. She remarks, “My daughter, she likes cheerleading and wanted to be a cheerleader, but that was ‘bout to cost me a fortune...they wanted me to pay \$2,000 almost \$4,000 for the outfits, the pom-poms and they said it covered trips, when they go on trips and stuff and I said ‘oh no, you can cheer at home’.”

While Sheryl would like her daughter to participate in cheerleading, the cost was deemed too high for her family budget. Even for Harvey’s middle class household, the cost of cheerleading is a significant expense in their household budget. Yet he deems it important for his children to explore their interests. Meanwhile, Sheryl made fundamental sacrifices as she purchased a computer for their household to aid her daughter’s regular homework completion that had increasingly required more use of internet research. She utilized her income tax refund to make this purchase, but felt this was important in order to support her daughter’s educational goals.

Felicia, whose daughters are involved in a number of enrichment activities outside of their school had recently sent her two oldest daughters to a church retreat that was a substantial expense for their family, but she felt the experience for them was well worth the cost. She commented that she plans to send them every year even though it was so costly. For her, it is truly an investment because of the leadership skills and spiritual capital they acquire through their participation. However, in light of her husband’s recent layoff, she discusses her strategies in continuing to make various investments in her daughters going forward. She shares:

We just figure it out, and my husband, he did just get laid off last November, so that’s why I said, this year with the three girls and he’s not working...I think it’s going to be tough. We may have to ask both sets of grandparents to help, whereas before we never

really asked them to help with the track and field expenses, but I think we will have to ask, 'Can you help us?'

While Felicia's middle class lifestyle was being threatened due to her husband's recent layoff, she still wanted to keep the extracurricular activities in tact for her daughters and was devising a plan to reach out to her parents and in-laws to maintain their children's experiences. She was also hoping that her focused investments in her daughter's track and field expenses would pay off in athletic scholarships for college later. At the time of Felicia's second interview, one daughter was enrolled in Spelman College and she reflected on her own college experience and the costs associated with her daughter's college choice:

Well we're going to be indebted for life! See, when I went to college, number one, college was not that expensive, I went to UCLA as an undergrad and I went to Cal State Long Beach as a graduate student. So it wasn't that expensive. And then it's just me and my brother, and my brother didn't do any college, so my parents paid for everything cash. You know they didn't qualify for any grants or Cal Grants or anything, so they paid for it but it wasn't that expensive. Now it's like super expensive, and we still don't really qualify for any grants or anything, so it's like loans. So I'm just like, I just keep thinking... I'm thinking, when are we going to pay this off exactly? So that's another thing that kind of motivated us with track, in hope of track scholarships for the other three, where we don't just have to pay out of pocket completely for their college education. So I'm really hoping -- or an academic scholarship because Alicia is very bright -- but I'm hoping that track will be a way for us not to be in debt for the rest of our years.

In spite of the financial changes in her household, Felicia and her husband are managing to make monetary investments by relying on savings and a modest household budget, but they are also able to receive support from their parents during the economic downturn. The economic fragility of the Black middle class has been documented by researchers who show Black middle class families are often more vulnerable than their White counterparts as they usually have lower levels of wealth, income, educational attainment, and homeownership – indicators of a solid middle class life (Patillo & Heflin, 2006; Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009).

Experiential Investments: Parent messaging about racial bias and achievement

The role of race in parents shaping the lives of their children in Laureau's work on parents and inequality was found to be less prominent than social class. African American middle class children were said to have more in common with their white middle-class counterparts than the black working class or working poor in terms of time scheduled after school as well as a stronger sense of entitlement that comes from a life of privilege.

Aside from the complex ways in which social context and parent experiences influence their educational investment behavior on behalf of their children, I found race to play a salient role in this study primarily through what I call experiential investments. Experiential investments may be understood as a set of life lessons that help pass on wisdom or critical values to a child. Experiential investments can encompass warnings or cautionary messages that a parent shares with their children that helps them avoid similar mistakes, experiences or setbacks in the own child's life. In this way, experiential investments act to prepare children for situations and circumstances that may limit their potential. In general this can manifest as general life lessons that have little to do with race, such as the way in which parents displayed their aspirational capital earlier in the chapter. In this section, I show how experiential

investments were made through racial socialization. Racial socialization is defined as specific racial messages that are passed on to youth to shape their beliefs and attitudes about race in a racially stratified society (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Bowman & Howard, 1985; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Lesane-Brown, 2006). Through racial socialization, parents in this study placed emphasis on their children's achievement in the face of bias and discrimination. This was true across all socioeconomic levels – from working poor parents to middle class parents. Angela, a middle class mother of two school-aged children who resides in a beach side community in Los Angeles County stated the following:

Well, here's one thing to remember. Even with President Obama and the position that he's in, he still has to prove himself. And if your president has to prove himself and he's a person of color, you're always going to have to prove yourself, and for you to remember that you're always good enough, you're always smart enough. You just need to have the confidence within yourself to get done what anyone else doubts about you. If you have the confidence in yourself to know that you can do it, you can do it. And there are always people that will hurt you, no matter where you are and no matter who you are. But you cannot let that deter you from anything that you ever want to do. Period.

At the time of her second interview, Angela's daughter was attending an elite all girls private school in Los Angeles which enrolled only a small percentage of African American students. Angela, discussed how she prepares her children for impending racial bias with the understanding that you constantly have to prove yourself. From her perspective and experiences, she believes it is important to send the message to your children that you are "good enough" and "smart enough", and even in the face of discrimination, you must be determined to be successful and not be discouraged from reaching your goals. This was a common theme as many parents

often have discussions with their children about their academic performance and racial perceptions of others.

Like Angela, Harvey believes in having race-based conversations but within the context of preparing his two children for the biased expectations of others. He also shares that as parents raising bi-racial children, he and his wife try to create an environment of openness through their racial messaging as they prepare their children for racialized experiences.

I don't want to buffer them from things. I soften the blow, but not buffer them – I try to manage their expectations, and so, we always encourage our children to always excel, never to have any self-imposed limitations, because others try to do that for you. And then I kind of explain that to them. And I kind of tell them, there will be other people telling you what you can't do, so they're trying to impose limitations on you, but never tell yourself what you can't do. So that's the values that we try to instill, some of the core values that we try to instill in the children. My children are bi-racial, and so they get the chance to see both sides of the fence... And so we have very candid and frank discussions at home, and what we try to do is to not buffer them, but to make them aware, to try to let them see both sides. We believe empathy goes a long way in life. And so if someone is being an idiot we try to get them to understand, well maybe this is their exposure, this is their experience, and that could be influencing why they see things a certain way.

Harvey's approach to racial socialization is grounded in his own experiences with negative racial experiences in high school and college. He shares a poignant racial experience while an undergraduate attending an honors convocation where he was questioned about his presence. He

also links this to his experiences as a student in high school where both incidents were meant to question or limit opportunities for him on the basis of his race.

You know, when I was younger, society was a bit different, and so people used to tell me what you couldn't do and what your place was, what your role was. And I never subscribed to that. And I had the fortune of having friends and family that gave me that exposure and an opportunity. I remember being an undergrad, we were at this honors convocation, and there was only a handful of minorities that were part of, out of three hundred less than five percent were a part of this honors convocation. And I remember someone said to me, you know, 'Whose ass did you kiss?' And I looked around at everyone and I didn't hear anyone else being asked this question. And I thought, you know what, man, well, screw you. And I said to this person, 'Well I thought I earned it. I thought by my studies and my academic accomplishments I thought I earned it just like you did.' But it was that type of experience, through life...I remember when I was applying for undergrad and this counselor told me, 'Do you think you're ready to go to college? Maybe you might want to go to LA Trade Tech'. And I was like, 'What? What?' And so, I remember I was pissed and so I took the GED in high school and then I took the ACT and got into school, and made it in Who's Who and all this other crap. But these people were trying to inhibit with these barriers. And so I guess that's it, I was never going to put these barriers on my children.

Harvey's experiences help frame the race based experiential investments he feels he must make in his children. The discriminatory experiences that were erected to "inhibit" him shape and mold how he approaches race-based socialization of his children. The fact that his wife is not African American adds another dimension to the types of investments he has to construct on this

front. For example, because he feels his children “get it from both sides” he and his wife strive to nurture their bi-racial identity through positive affirmations that encourage his children to take pride in their multi-racial heritage. So, while the previous data highlight the marginality that comes along with a stigmatized racial identity, this comment shows how liberating a healthy sense of racial identity can be for children:

My kids are balanced and healthy when it comes to race. They feel they are the future.

And you know, I think they’re right. And they’ll tell you what they are. If you ask them, they’ll name it off. “I am Swedish-African American”, you know, and with pride. And that’s what’s cool, they’re proud of who they are. And we also instill that - be proud of what you are. So it’s cool.

Angela and Harvey represent parents in the survey with relative affluence as they reside in solidly middle class communities, are homeowners, have households where both spouses work and thus possess dominant forms of economic, social and cultural capital that can help buffer them from some instances of racial bias. However, Sheryl, a single mother, who dropped out of high-school, works as a Cook and lives in South Central Los Angeles has to contend with multiple marginalities. Her views on race and achievement are partially shaped by tensions between low income Latinos and African Americans in her community. Sheryl is one of only two African Americans on her job where the majority of the staff is Latino. She views Latinos as the favored group in her community and in the workplace. In her opinion, they not only have access to jobs, but they make up the majority of the population in schools within her neighborhood. In many ways, Sheryl feels like the presence of a large Latino population has the potential to diminish opportunities for African Americans. In spite of this perception, she still encourages her children to try their best to do well as she states:

I feel like black kids just being pushed back. And I don't want my kids to grow up like that. I don't want my little kids to grow up thinking that you don't have a chance and you don't have a voice. You do have a voice. You're one of God's kids, you have a voice. You can say whatever you want – if it's appropriate. If it's appropriate, the right forum and taste you can say it – you have a voice, but you don't deserve all this stuff us black people went through – growing up and trying to get to the point where we are now. You shouldn't have to take a back seat to anything. You can achieve any goal you want to achieve, you just have to work hard at it and do it, because sometimes it gets frustrating, like “I can't do it, I can't do it”. Never say you can't do anything. You can do anything you want, you know. I know people that have grew up in broken homes and they've become doctors and lawyers. Now you can do it if you try to do it. You gotta want to have it, you gotta want it for yourself. If you want it for yourself you can achieve it. And that's just the way I feel about it.

Like other parents in this study, Lisa prepares her son for potential incidences of racial bias. These biases are embedded in society, but she is careful to make sure her son knows that the opinion of others about him should not be internalized and shape how he feels about himself.

If it comes down to someone doesn't like him for the color of his skin, I teach him, that's their problem. And that's something that they have to deal with themselves. You can never change someone else, you can only change who you are. But you never let...you don't change you to please someone else. Because anything can be conquered. Anything can be conquered if you put your mind to it. I mean, you might have to fight discrimination, you may have to fight racism, you might have to fight all that, but it's a fight. But I think you can do anything that you put your mind to, no matter who you are.

The majority of parents in the study discussed how they contextualize racial bias and discrimination that their children may face by encouraging them with positive talk about their abilities to overcome any form of adversity. Sometimes parents did this in ways that clearly articulated their feelings toward a belief in the permanency of race based discrimination and the inevitability of it touching their children. Yet they always conveyed a hopeful message that their children had the ability to overcome the bias. Through their personal guidance and supportive messaging about race and achievement, the parents in this study shared their wisdom and racial logic through experiential investments. However, there was a particular case of a parent choosing not to frame the messaging about hard work in the context of the racial oppression. Felicia states the following:

I really try not to discuss race and discrimination with my daughters. Mainly I tell them to work to be the best person you can be to contribute to society, be a productive citizen, is what I always tell them. Don't be just on your butt and not contributing. You know what's going on, you get out there, you make your way, and you contribute. And I try not to place too much emphasis on African American and non-African American.

Felicia's shying away from race talk with her daughters represents a disconfirming case of evidence as it relates to the saliency of racial socialization in experiential investments, as she chooses to take more of a self-development approach by skirting talk about the harsh realities of racial discrimination. Disconfirming cases are thought to strengthen the evidentiary assertions in qualitative research (Erickson, 1986; Creswell & Miller, 2000). This finding is consistent with prior research that has found a percentage of African American families minimizing or avoiding race-based messaging altogether (Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2009; Caughy,

Nettles, & Lima, 2011; Paasch-Anderson & Lamborn, 2014). While it is not clear if she takes a color-blind approach to child rearing based on the quote alone, I conjecture the messaging from this parent has more to do with a strong self-development message than a color-blind ideology. For example, it is important to note that there is specific attention paid to her daughters' racial identity formation through their orientation and involvement in a predominantly African American church where her oldest daughter is involved in a host of programming with cultural implications such as praise dancing. Moreover, at the time of her second interview, Felicia's oldest daughter was preparing to attend Spelman College, a historically black women's college.

Summary

Parents in this study made essential and non-essential monetary, school, and experiential investments in their children's education and social development of their children and they use various forms of capital to make these investments. Many of the investments made by parents were influenced by their own experience with schools as well as their lived experiences as African American parents raising children in a world where families of color still contend with vestiges of racial bias and discrimination. The qualitative findings also illuminate how African American parents across social class make attempts to cultivate their children's social and academic development in an effort to encourage them to become well-rounded individuals. Much of this concerted cultivation is handled in the midst of household budget constraints in middle class, working class, and working poor households. Certainly these budget constraints were sometimes made on non-essential activities such as competitive cheerleading in the case of Harvey; however, Becker (1981) reminds us that most parents are altruistic and may make some decisions that simply maximize their child's utility. He states, "...many economists dispute that altruism is important in families, even though these same economists often deny themselves in

order to accumulate gifts and bequests for their children” (p. 9). In other words, parents may make decisions on behalf of their children out of love or desire to see that their children are happy.

The findings in this chapter extend Lareau’s work on African American families across social class in two important ways. First, it documents the dimensions of concerted cultivation linked to extra-curricular activities for African American households with adolescents and teens as the focal child. Second, it interrogates the role of race in the area of socialization in parenting to better understand the ways it impacts parents’ various investment strategies.

Moreover, the findings from this qualitative inquiry document the tremendous amount of aspirational capital that may be leveraged and combined with parents’ social and economic capital to foster critical educational investments for their children. Indeed, parents’ investments in traditional school involvement send clear and distinct messages to their children about the importance of education in their household. Finally, the finding that most parents buttress their tangible educational investments with experiential investments that illuminate ways to resist the labeling that comes with racial bias and discrimination is an important contribution to our understanding of the ways African American parents make key educational investments.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

This study examined the educational investments of African American parents with a focus on highlighting race and class based differences across households and social class differences or similarities within the African American community. Data from two national datasets were used to identify patterns of investment. I also used qualitative data to elaborate on the racial and social context parents face when making educational investment decisions. In this way, I seek to extend the approach that economists take beyond trade-offs and choices and infuse more sociological approaches to the literature on family investments. In this final chapter, I review the key findings from each chapter, connect findings to theoretical frameworks guiding the study, outline implications for social and education policy, and articulate limitations of the study.

Summary of Key Findings

Family Investments: Race and Economic Capital

In chapter 4, I explored differences in families' educational expenditures by race and income. While findings show low income families and African American families spend less in absolute dollars on education items, there is a substantial willingness to pay across racial and socioeconomic categories as the share of after tax income that goes to educational expenditures is similar across race and income. This is an important finding as scholars are beginning to link inequality in educational and economic outcomes to inequality of opportunity as well as disparities in family investments (Reardon, 2011; Kornrich & Furstenberg, 2013). Kornrich & Furstenberg (2013) found lower income households actually spent a larger percentage of their income on children's expenses in comparison to upper income households. Their results may

differ because they analyzed data for a broader category of expenditures and for children up to age 24. However, the point remains that they also found a strong willingness to pay for child related expenses among low income families. If the demand for educational expenditures is inelastic or sensitive enough, then one could argue that increased social supports for low income families could aid in the reduction of inequality in educational opportunity. Increased and targeted social supports linked to educational expenditures could potentially help to mitigate growing educational inequality.

In chapter five, when examining determinants of monetary expenditures, the results show that economic measures such as income and net worth explain the differences between African American and White households. Further, we learn that wealth has a separate and distinct relationship to educational expenditures. In other words, family's household assets play an important role in families educational expenditures, independent of family income. This is a key finding as much of the research on inequality tends to conflate income and wealth or narrowly focus on income to the exclusion of an examination of household assets and its impact on parents' educational investments. Two other important variables that emerged as determinants of African American families' educational expenditures were parent aspirations and enrollment in gifted programs. Both of these variables had a consistently positive relationship with the two types of educational investments.

Chapter 6 drew on interviews to explore the nature and character of Black parents' educational investment behaviors. Findings reveal African American parents across socioeconomic status find ways to make critical investments in their children's academic and social well-being. The parents in my study all believed their children could be successful in college and beyond. To the extent that they could, these parents made choices in order to

maximize the opportunities and expose them to academic enrichment as well as an array of extracurricular activity. Parents recognized this and relied on their economic and social capital to surround their children with these critical opportunities. Contrary to some of Lareau's (2003) seminal findings on concerted cultivation across social class, the sample of parents in this study sought out ways to practice forms of concerted cultivation even as these efforts were constrained by household resources.

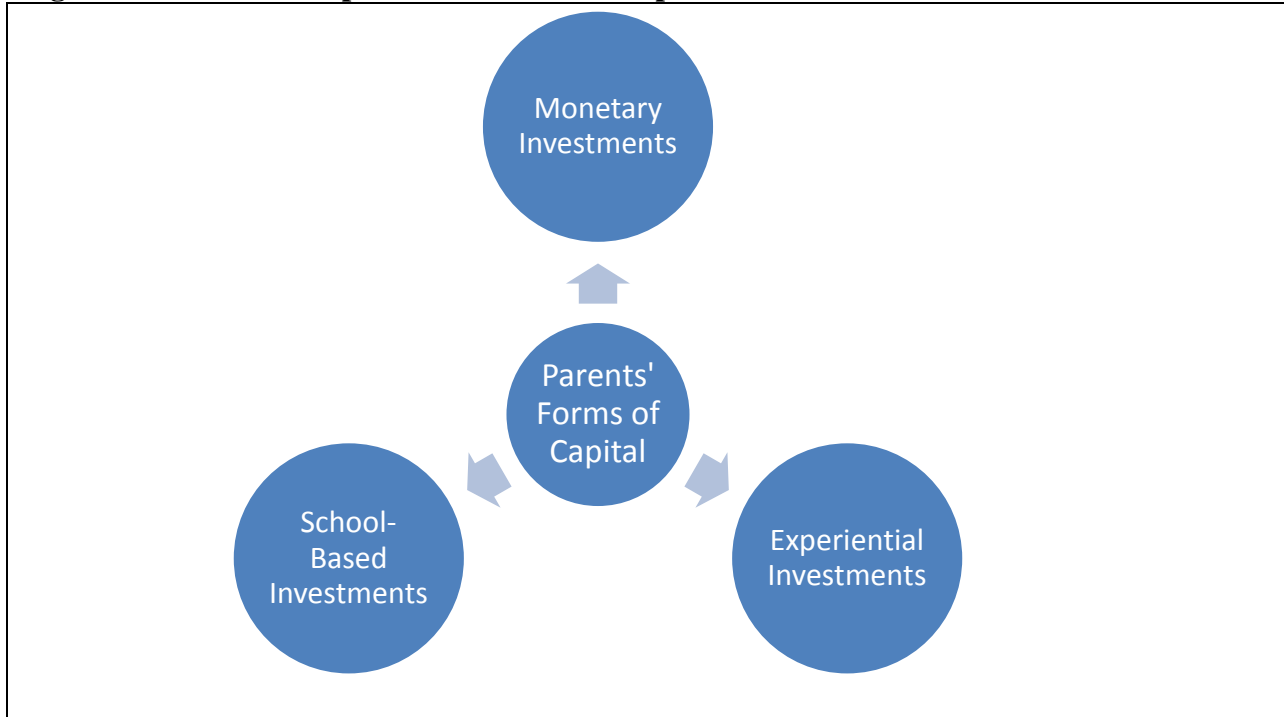
Further, the data reveal the role of race in socializing African American youth for a highly racialized and potentially discriminatory world which I characterized as an experiential investment. Parents across socioeconomic lines acknowledged how experiencing racial bias is a harsh reality their children must eventually face. However, they universally believed bias and discrimination were surmountable. Further, the way in which many African American parents order and enrich their children's lives relies on community based organizations, schools, and majority African American churches. For example, Millie learned about the AVID program from her grandson's school, Priscilla and Lynda both had their sons involved in community based football programs, and many parents incorporated church services and youth ministry activities into their weekly routine as a low-cost way to keep their children engaged in extra-curricular activities. Often when parents rely on the social ties in these spaces it may help mitigate the impact of economic constraints on African American households.

Findings and Theoretical Frameworks

It is important to revisit the theoretical frameworks which guide the study and make connections between theory, findings, and the notion of investments. In this section, I examine the theories outlined in chapter 2 which were used as guides for much of the themes that

emerged from the qualitative analysis. I also lay out some conceptual points about the relationship between capital and investment.

Figure 7.1: Relationship Between Parental Capital and Parental Investments



The most straightforward conceptualization of how capital and investments interact among families is to think of the way capital in the financial sense can be converted to money. Indeed, Bourdieu (1986) reminds us of this very point when he states, “*economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money” (p. 47). In fact, Bourdieu provides examples of how cultural and social capital may also be convertible. The key point here is that the forms of capital are convertible into something of additional value. In this study, the mere possession of myriad forms of capital makes it possible for parents to take the capital they possess and leverage it for the purpose of investing in their children. This is why Yosso’s (2005)

articulation of aspirational and navigational capital provides such a strong basis for the investment orientation of the African American parents in this study.

Figure 7.1 shows a visual representation of the relationship between parents' various forms of capital (i.e. aspirational, economic, navigational, and social capital) and how parents in the current study convert their capital to make important investments in their children. When capital is in the embodied state, Bourdieu claims it is "in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" (p.47). In the case of parents, capital encapsulates what parents know and do in child-rearing to craft their particular investments. This figure may be connected to the visual representation of parents' investment decisions that was articulated in chapter 1, Figure 1.1. Based on the findings presented in this study, we now have evidence that parents' investment decisions depend on an array of factors outlined in Figure 1.1 such as economic constraints, parental dispositions, family endowments, race, social class, etc. While Figure 1.1 outlined the factors surrounding the individual decisions, Figure 7.1 makes the connections between capital and investments and thus represents the mechanisms in play before the investment decisions are crafted. The figures are not meant to oversimplify the relationship between capital and investment, but to actually bring about greater conceptual clarity. Further, just as Bourdieu sought to extend the notion of capital outside of the purely economic understanding, this study has attempted to advance a conception of investments beyond the conventional economic framework.

Intersectionality: Race and Social Class

This study sought to better understand particular social locations of parents and how these social identities interact to shape parents' investment decisions. An intersectional analysis was important to move beyond the monolith of Black parents and their children as is often

represented in educational research (Gosa & Alexander, 2006; O'Connor, Lewis & Mueller, 2007)). This framework allowed me to characterize the situation of some of the working poor parents such as Priscilla, Tammy, or Sheryl as facing multiple marginalities, particularly when facing challenges at their children's school through their school-based investments. The data also showed how the relative privilege of being middle class still had its limits given the racial experiences of the Black middle class. They were aware of how the racial perceptions of others have an impact on their children's lives and they were preparing their children through racial socialization or experiential investments. The study was able to look at three social categories of African American parents in chapter 6 and document the differences and similarities in parent investments across the sample of 11 parents. Additionally, attempts were made to explore differences within the African American parents in the quantitative sample as well.

Homogeneity and heterogeneity abound in the sample of African Americans interviewed for this study. All parents shared high aspirations for their children, yet at the same time, there were differences in the formulation of these aspirations. This largely resulted because the aspirational capital they possess was born out of the parents' unique experiences with education. Further, when parents had children who struggled in school, their school-based investments looked similar. This was present irrespective of social class – as they adopted a more proactive reformed-based approach to monitoring the school and their children's experiences within the school. This was particularly acute for parents of children with special learning needs.

There is also the finding that all families commented on household budget constraints and how those shaped their investments in their children. Certainly, the Black middle class was able to seek additional resources or rely more on dominant forms of financial, cultural, and social capital to bridge the financial divide and continue providing concerted cultivation opportunities

in the form of extra-curricular activities for children. However, working poor and working class parents exhibited a high degree of resourcefulness in seeking out opportunities for their children and thus practiced concerted cultivation within the limits of their budgets. This resulted in their children being enrolled in free or low-cost after school programs or programs through their family church.

I sought to challenge the implication that being Black in America is a static social position that can be represented in a predictable and non-differentiated way by seeking heterogeneity among the sample of African American parents interviewed for the qualitative inquiry. In my attempts to deal with these complexities, I also ignore other intersections such as gender of the parent or the focal child. Future studies employing the intersectional theoretical lens should seek to explore additional crosscutting social identities. Individuals do not live compartmentalized lives, but researchers often make decisions in measurement and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data that constrict the interpretation of the experiences of individuals with intersecting social identities (Bowleg, 2008). O'Connor, Lewis, and Mueller (2007) suggest often when researchers take on intersectional empirical work, "they do not offer a concomitant analysis of how the participants' social class or gender locations interface with racial location to explain the noted differences" (p. 545). In this study, I made attempts to do more than highlight differences across the sample as much as possible. For example, Sheryl's narrative evokes an analysis that considers the multiple marginalities that she endures as a working poor, African American mother.

Racial socialization and the formation of experiential investments

In an excerpt from a personal letter to his daughter Yolande dated October 1914, W. E. B. Du Bois penned the following:

Study, do your work. Be honest, frank and fearless and get some grasp of the real values of life. You will meet, of course, curious little annoyances. People will wonder at your dear brown and the sweet crinkley hair. But that simply is of no importance and will soon be forgotten. Remember that most folk laugh at anything unusual, whether it is beautiful, fine or not. You, however, must not laugh at yourself. You must know that brown is as pretty as white or prettier and crinkley hair as straight even though it is harder to comb. The main thing is the YOU beneath the clothes and skin—the ability to do, the will to conquer, the determination to understand and know this great, wonderful, curious world (p. 207).

This letter was written nearly 100 years ago by Du Bois, who was writing his daughter as she settled into her new school and environment. Du Bois knew that she would experience a series of racialized incidences at her elite private boarding school in England and wanted to encourage her to excel in spite of these challenges. Though Du Bois does not represent the average or typical African American father, his sage advice in preparing his daughter echoes sentiments of what was found in this study through the qualitative inquiry.

Today, in 2014 where people of color have experienced improved social mobility over time and lived to see the election of a president who identifies as African American, many Black families still know they have to raise their children with the consideration that they may encounter bias and racism in life, school, and career. Hughes *et al* (2009) define ethnic socialization as “the full range of parental practices that communicate messages about ethnicity and race to children” (p.226). In this study, I characterize racial socialization as a form of experiential investment by Black parents who are shaping their children’s educational and social-emotional development. Scholars have documented the critical role of racial socialization in the

households of African American families and have found that there are many different varieties ranging from cultural pride, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism/valuing diversity (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hughes, *et al*, 2009). This particular study found evidence of parents passing along racial messaging in the form of discussions about cultural pride, egalitarianism or valuing diversity, and preparation for bias or discrimination. In the narratives from parents in chapter 6, these explicit racial messages are a form of investment on behalf of parents and formed by parents' own lived experiences. Their investment in this type of conversation or messaging is meant to prepare children for success and protect them from harm. In the instances where parents did use racial messaging to socialize and orient their children towards a racialized world view, they often made a point to convey positive messaging about educational achievement in spite of racial bias and the discriminatory thinking of others.

Implications for Education and Social Policy

While there are regular news reports about income and wealth inequality, public policy has yet to keep pace with these concerns as there is a movement away from provisions for social safety nets and more toward neoliberal market-based policies that may do little to address equity concerns. Education policy that addresses the social location and economic well-being of families as well as students' teaching and learning opportunities might yield a more equitable society. Indeed, the policy and research agenda advanced by the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education Policy coalition should be supported, particularly as it relates to providing increased holistic support to children and families. Only through more comprehensive strategies and increased public support of low income or low wealth families will the nation begin to offset the advantages that accrue to more affluent households through their private educational spending.

Another important idea is the expansion of socioeconomic policies beyond a focus solely on income inequality. While income inequality persists, wealth inequality is far more pronounced and impacts families' abilities to weather economic downturns (Shapiro,2005). Social policy that is sensitive to the issue of wealth inequality might be crafted to provide relief to households with negative wealth holdings that impede their economic mobility as well as their ability to provide enriched educational spending for their household. Further, given the independent effect of family assets on parents' monetary investments, devising programs to incentivize higher asset accumulation for low income and low wealth households through matching savings accounts, and Individual Development Accounts could have a positive impact on parents' additional monetary investments.

In addition to the wealth building policy prescriptions, there may be an opportunity for tax policy to reduce inequalities in educational spending by providing parents additional tax credits for education related expenses. For example, several Midwestern states offer a K-12 education tax credit to low to moderate income households for education related expenses. The policy is designed to increase the after-tax income of families and incentivize lower income families to make monetary investments in education throughout the year. Low to moderate income families might respond positively to such an effort given the results of the federal earned income and child tax credits. An evaluation of the national earned income and child tax credits by Hungerford & Theiss (2013) has found that many low income families and children have benefitted from the policy and the policy has managed to reduce income inequality. Indeed, in chapter 4 of this study, there was evidence that lower income households exhibited a willingness to pay given the share of their after tax income devoted to educational expenditures compared to their more affluent counterparts. Finally, there was evidence provided by Sheryl's narrative

where she purchased a computer with an income tax refund for the sole purpose of helping her daughter with her homework as her new school required use of technology through internet research and type written assignments. More insight is needed about the potential benefits of a K-12 educational tax credit for low to moderate income households.

Implications for Schools

Schools remain the site of many temporal and monetary investments by parents. Parents in this study managed to volunteer a significant amount of time in their schools and sometimes faced barriers to their involvement. In the case of parents who have children performing well academically, their involvement orientation was supportive of the school and less critical overall. As a result their participation was welcomed by school sites. However, it was clear, if a student was designated as special needs or if a parent was having a particular problem with the school, the parents' involvement was more strained. Researchers have identified that African Americans parents who have children with special needs often face struggles with school staff who tend to devalue parents' knowledge about their children's abilities (Harry, 1992; Harry, Allen & McLaughlin, 1994). Indeed, findings from the present study revealed incongruence between school evaluations of children with special needs and parents' perceptions of their children's ability. This study could not fully tease out why this was the case without investigating the challenges from the school personnel's perspective as well, but I argue it was clear that race and/or social class of the parent became a factor when the parent took a more reform-oriented stance (Diamond & Gomez, 2004) toward the school.

This raises important questions about how schools not only engage African American parents, but also about how they engage parents of children with special needs. Although Tammy, one of the parents designated as a working poor single-mother, did not have children

with special needs, she had a challenge with her daughters' school site as her daughter was the target of racial bullying in a majority Latino middle school. If you recall, she said the following during the course of her interview about her involvement at her children's schools: "It's like a lot of the schools say they want parent involvement, but my experience is, they want us, but once you get there, they really don't want you there." Tammy's statement encapsulates the feelings of other African American parents in my study across social class who raised questions about school personnel and the treatment of their children within the school. In this way, parents perceive their investments are less valued by school sites. Schools seeking to resolve challenges with children would do well to patiently address the concerns of parents with a strong advocacy stance. Partnerships with parents and authentic engagement around the common ground of student success and social-emotional well-being should be the priority.

Limitations

Much of the quantitative analysis in the study is exploratory based on a limited set of predictors and household characteristics. I was particularly interested in school level determinants that might impact parents' educational investments. However, because I did not have access to restricted use PSID files for this study, I was unable to include school and community based variables. This led to a reliance on individual factors that are important, but may not reveal the entire picture. Evidence from the qualitative findings as well as prior research suggests that school factors play a role in parent engagement levels (Lareau & Shumar; 1996; Marschall, 2006; Rogers, Freelon, & Terriquez, 2011). I argue that school and neighborhood context may also influence parents' monetary investments as well. Another challenge is the use of data that provide a snapshot of one point in time. While the income and wealth data are constructed using the power of the longitudinal nature of the PSID file, other

characteristics about the household and family were taken from the 2002 Child Development Supplement so the analysis was merely cross-sectional.

The qualitative inquiry also presents a set of limitations. With only 11 Los Angeles area parents interviewed for the study I am unable to make broad, generalizable claims from such a particular set of parents in one region of the United States. While these interviews are insightful, we cannot assume that this analysis is representative of experiences of African American parents nationwide. Another limitation might be the focus on an African American sample with no comparison group of parent interviews with another race or ethnic group. This might make it difficult to delineate which of the findings may be attributed more to social class versus race alone and vice versa. At the same time, it provides some glimpse into the experiences of some African American parents and thus provides insight about family processes that could be explored further in future research.

Reflections on qualitative field work

One of the limitations of this study is the inability to connect key data points across data sets in the style of a truly integrated mixed-methods study. The analyses in this study were from three separate data sets that were not connected. Chapters 4 and 5 each had a dimension in which data on household expenditures and key demographic characteristics were used to understand differences across race and income level. And while I did have data on the social location of parents in my interview sample, there were additional themes that were difficult to explore in the one-on-one interview with participants. For example, there were times when I wanted to know how much parents spent on educational and extra-curricular activities for their children. This was a difficult line of questioning for some and difficult for them to enumerate with a set of categories or probes from the interviewer. In the end, I believe my probes were too

general and a better way to gather information from parents about the specific educational and extra-curricular activities they paid for was through a short pre-interview questionnaire.

There were also times a parent did list activities their children were enrolled in during the interview, but they would struggle with sharing the specifics of how they managed to pay for these activities. Particularly when interviewing Priscilla about how she manages the expenses for her sons' concerted cultivation programming, she used phrases such as "I make it work" or "I just figure it out." Given that she had recently been laid off by the time of the second interview, I knew there might be new financial challenges in her household, but I felt concerned about sacrificing the interview and natural flow of the conversation, so additional follow up questions on the topic were not pursued. Especially when it came to discussions about how parents arranged their budget and paid for specific activities, supplies, or services, I was self-aware and concerned with pushing too much for the parents' personal information. I thought critically about my role as a researcher and felt that I could not probe too deeply about the subject of money and finances available in the household. Further, the parents who felt most comfortable with me shared specifics about their financial situation freely, while others were more guarded in their details about how they were surviving in the midst of the economic downturn. The rapport between interviewer and informant is critical to obtaining meaningful data during qualitative inquiry. In an ideal situation, I would have had more engaged contact with study participants and developed ways to gather the information from parents about their financial situation. This represents a limitation of the study and provides a challenge for making stronger connections between the findings in the quantitative chapters versus the work of the qualitative inquiry.

Directions for further research

At the inception of this research project, I sought to push back against deficit portrayals of Black parents and felt it important to conceptualize African American involvement using the investment framework. An investment framework that exploits the use of the forms of capital and community cultural wealth would help more see the relative contributions of Black parents to the educational trajectory of their children. Further research is needed to clarify the relative contribution of embracing the economics framework of investment for parents and my attempts to expand the framework to consider more aspects of social structure as well as non-economic forms of investment patterns. A future scholarly article could develop this idea more using the example of African American parents as an example.

Given the imperfections and challenges outlined in the current study and the preliminary nature of some findings, I believe further study is warranted to solidify some claims articulated in this study. The use of the restricted Panel Study of Income Dynamics would be important as it will allow access to the full restricted data files to incorporate the concept of school context into models on the determinants of parent investments, particularly the model on monetary investments. Unfortunately in the absence of school institutional data, there was more of a focus on the characteristics of individual families in this study. However, there was evidence from interviews with parents that alluded to some interplay between investments and school context. A new study could explore this more directly with full data on schools of the focal child.

Parents' school-based investments and the needs of special education children emerged as an important finding and warrant further investigation. Future work could document and highlight the various types of investments and strategies these parents employ to navigate the individualized educational program terrain. Findings from this study suggest that parents

questioned the validity of the designation regarding their sons' special education label. Given research documenting the overrepresentation of students of color (Harry & Klingner, 2006) and African American males in particular (Adkinson-Bradley, 2006; Harry & Anderson, 1994) it seems important to explore parent roles in the designation and monitoring of children with special needs.

Finally, though gender of the child was not a key factor in much of the quantitative findings, it may play a role in shaping what and how parents do on behalf of their children. I did not formally explore gender themes for this study, but in retrospect, I wish I had. At least three parents alluded to concerns or specific strategies to employ due to the fact that they were raising African American males. At least two of the three parents were concerned about the criminalization of young Black males. Future work should incorporate gender into an analysis of within group differences in investments among African American parents.

Closing Thoughts

By examining parents' educational investment patterns using quantitative and qualitative data, this study interrogated the prevailing deficit thinking about African American parents involvement in their children's educational trajectory. This was accomplished by examining private investments of households. However, this study's focus on families' private investments is not meant to supplant thoughtful discussions about the role of public investments in children's human capital formation. While African American parents are making important investments in their children, families with more preferred social status and dominant forms of capital continue to maintain advantages in a stratified society. Even when African American parents possess the forms of capital that places certain investments within reach, they still navigate a racialized educational terrain that has potential to impact their children's outcomes. Disrupting persistent

inequality in educational outcomes must start with a close examination of how families' private inputs and family processes along race and class lines undergird the cycle of cumulative advantage in education.

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