SCIENTIA EST PROPENTIA: SCHOOL PERSONNEL PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE IN EMPOWERING A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE AMONG LOW-INCOME AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS IN A MID-SIZE, PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Few studies have conducted research examining how the contextual layers that inform an organization's habitus influence a school district's college-going culture for its low-income African American students. This qualitative case study examines the perceptions of school personnel that potentially impact educational attainment of low-income African American students in a largely blue-collar, post-industrial city. The grand tour question guiding this research is: *What is the college-going culture for low-income African American students in a mid-size, public Midwestern school district?* The existing college-going culture was investigated through the use of McClafferty's (1997) definition of organizational habitus and Perna's (2006) college choice model.

Employing a purposeful sampling method, sixteen in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with school personnel to better understand the current college-going culture for low-income African American students in a large public school district. Three main themes emerged from the reflections of school personnel: (1) evidence of a college-going culture in the school district; (2) perceptions of low-income African American students and their families; and (3) perceptions of the city and school district. The findings from the research indicate the presence of the major principles and conditions of a college-going culture, although varying in strength (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002). The findings also support the intersection of Perna's (2006) contextual layers by exploring the connection of the organizational habitus of the educational system and the city of Woodview. Practical implications for school districts, researchers, and low-income African American students conclude the study.

To my ancestors who fought for my right to an equal education.

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Although only my name appears on this dissertation, I did not go through this arduous process just for me. My family has sacrificed much to help me achieve my dream and so I did this for them too. To my grandparents, my angels, I hope I have made you proud. To my parents, Eddie and Tina, I promised I would become a doctor. To my sisters, Tai and Raisa, I will always work hard to be your role model. To my aunts, uncles, and cousins, thank you for your support and encouragement through the years and remember I am still Gianina from the block. To my husband, Ron, thank you for believing in me and supporting me these last six years. I know it has been hard raising our three boys, especially during all those late nights, but I promise you it was worth it. I hope we continue to make memories while encouraging each

other's dreams. I love you. Lastly, to my sons – Ronald, Talin and Braden, I tried my hardest to

stay in the moment and appreciate any time we spent together while going through this process.

I do this for you to show that nothing is impossible, to continue sharing the lesson that

knowledge is power, and to continue to encourage you to reach your dreams.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot,
nothing is going to get better.
It's not.
>   ~Dr. Seuss, The Lorax

Background

As the United States works to improve its ranking in educational attainment, shifting

attention to populations of students underrepresented in higher education may significantly

contribute to increases of college graduates. In 2001, the United States ranked 5th in the

percentage of young adults (aged 25-34) with a postsecondary credential (OECD, 2012). By

2012, the United States had dropped to 14th, with countries such as Belgium, France, and Israel

moving ahead. The Obama administration recognized the need to increase educational

attainment and intentionally developed initiatives to increase college participation that result in

the completion of college degrees, certificates, and industry-certified credentials—often cited as

the 2020 Completion Agenda (The White House, 2012).

Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson (2009) asserted that large gaps in educational

attainment by race and socioeconomic status still remain. Even though college aspirations are

quite high for all students regardless of race, ethnicity, and/or socioeconomic status (Venezia,

Kirst & Antonio, 2004), gaps still remain between racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups in

accessing postsecondary education, college readiness, and success in college (Bowen et al.,

2009; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009). Kim (2011) found that from 1989 to 2009, the

bachelor degree attainment gap among young adults (aged 25 to 29) widened from 11% to

almost 18% between Whites and Blacks and from 14% to 23% between Whites and Latinos.

Moreover, enrollment of individuals from the lowest income quintile in 2008 did not come close to the enrollment of individuals from the highest quintile in 1984 (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). In fact, 83% of those in the highest income quintile graduated within six years compared to 70% of those in the lowest income quintile (Baum et al., 2010).

Education for Low-Income African American Students

The persistent aspiration-attainment gap highlights the need to analyze systemic barriers within the educational system that prevent college-going among non-traditional student populations, especially students who are low-income and of color. The statistics above highlight the need for efforts promoting college completion for low-income African American and Latina/o students. Completion for this group of students could result in significantly higher educational attainment rates in the United States. Educational attainment of underrepresented groups is a "compelling interest" to meet the demands of an educated workforce, reap the social and economic benefits of a college education, and enhance the critical thinking of today's high school and college classrooms (Bowen et al., 2009).

Structural and individual inequities placed on students of color in education have served as "a prime institutional site for passing along inequality from one generation to the next" (Shapiro & Johnson, 2005, p. 245). Bourdieu (1977) explained that the educational system is one of the main perpetrators of continuing inequities. Those inequities are a direct result of the "growing disparity between our shared national ideal of equity in educational opportunity and the policies and practices that increasingly limit access to postsecondary education for low-income students" (McPherson & Schapiro, 2002, p. 73).

Examination of institutional educational inequities for African American students, especially those who are low-income, are present in the scholarship. While African American participation in higher education has steadily been increasing since the 1960s (Rury & Hill, 2011), retention of these students is of concern as "vestiges of segregation" still remain and play a role in preventing access to postsecondary education (Chapman, 2005). This segregation is institutional in that it is hidden in policies and procedures often formalized and implemented by school personnel. These policies and procedures can affect the creation and sustainment of a college-going culture as well as the college-going rates of these students (McDonough & Polzer, 2012). Designed to counteract the effects of past racial discrimination, seemingly progressive policies of access and equity (i.e., affirmative action) have instead been somewhat regressive in the 21st century, especially in certain states, for African Americans (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009). Harper et al. (2009) suggested that certain paths for African American students still result in inequities present in the African American community. Further, Harper et al. (2009) contended "policymakers in public and institutional sectors must be made aware of the structural barriers that produce racial disparities in college access and attainment" (p. 409). Such structural barriers are oftentimes institutionalized making it difficult to separate when studying organizations.

Focusing on efforts to increase the educational attainment of students who are historically underrepresented and underserved is difficult; however, these efforts might assist in advancing toward more equitable outcomes. While race and class for low-income students of color play a major role in their educational experiences (Zamani & Brown II, 2003), few studies intersect race and class to understand how both play a role in student outcomes. Harper et al. (2009)

posited that failed attempts regarding the educational attainment of low-income students of color "will continually manufacture insufficient access and equity barriers for those who could ultimately benefit from college participation" (p. 410).

Understanding the college choice process of low-income African American students is a considerable task. Class and race disadvantages for low-income African American students stem from historical inequities in the educational system; therefore, efforts that work to remove these barriers to educational attainment for students of color are complex but of necessity (Shapiro & Johnson, 2005; Ward, 2006). Defining and researching a college-going culture may provide more understanding of the historical and current educational structures and how these contexts shape opportunities for underrepresented student populations.

Research on systemic educational barriers includes curriculum misalignments between secondary and postsecondary institutions, inconsistent high school graduation requirements, and varying college admission prerequisites (Bragg, 2012; Green, 2006; McDonough & Polzer, 2012; Venezia, Kirst & Antonio, 2003). College readiness addresses these issues in hopes of impacting the Completion Agenda, yet there are still lower rates of educational attainment for African Americans compared to those of Whites (Kim, 2011). Progress in each of these areas requires dialogue between various stakeholders. For a true cultural shift to occur and make an impact on educational attainment rates, it is important to address the mental models of school personnel trying to affect a college-going culture. Through dialogue, the internalized beliefs and attitudes (or mental models) of school personnel, regarding the education of their students, surface. There has not been research in this area not only because of the intensive work required to understand an individual's perspective on access to higher education, but because there is also

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a degree of trust needed to engage in such dialogue. Uncovering these hidden assumptions will result in an attempt to remove systemic inequities in the educational system.

Using qualitative research methods, this study examined the embedded language, context, and power of school personnel in a mid-size Midwestern educational system in relation to the college-going culture for low-income students of color. The semi-structured interviews with school personnel focused "on the power of language to reveal habits, practices, and norms that are often hidden" and "pay attention to history, situation, and local context" (Kezar, 2011, p. 16). These habits, practices and norms within an educational system can affect the college choice process for low-income African American students.

Problem Statement

An exploration of the systemic factors of a college-going culture could potentially account for the educational disparities of low-income African American students. Few studies have conducted research examining how the contextual layers that inform an organization's habitus influence a school district's college-going culture for its low-income African American students. Therefore, it is important to study how such layers contribute to or create barriers to college-going with a specific focus on the beliefs, expectations, and behaviors of the school district's personnel. Mediated by, or even entangled in, the organization's habitus, the beliefs, expectations, and behaviors of school personnel play a role in the educational outcomes of its low-income African-American students. By studying how school personnel use their personal and professional experiences to make sense of their current context, it is the hope that an understanding of the pertinent factors that affect organizational habitus will become apparent in order to effect change. By addressing the root causes of systemic inequity and low college-going

rates of low-income African American students in small cities, progress toward the large goals of the Completion Agenda can be made.

Research Questions

Using Creswell's (2003) approach of grand tour questions, there was one primary research question that guided this research. In addition, sub-questions aimed to seek a greater understanding of mediating factors affecting the current college-going culture for low-income African American students. The primary research question and related sub-questions of this study were as follows:

RQ: *What is the college-going culture for low-income African American students in a mid-size, public Midwestern school district?*

SQ1: How does the organizational habitus of a mid-size, public Midwestern school district shape the college-going culture for low-income African American students?

SQ2: How does the organizational habitus of a mid-size, public Midwestern school district intersect with the beliefs, expectations, and behaviors of school personnel in promoting a college-going culture for low-income African American students?

SQ3: How is the school district impacted by the larger sociopolitical context in terms of college-going?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how the contextual layers of school and community inform the current college-going culture of a mid-size Midwestern school district. Understanding the external factors that inform an organization's habitus as well as how school personnel make sense of its organizational habitus are vital to improving a school district's

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college-going culture. Overall, this study explored how school personnel perceived and interpreted the current college-going culture for low-income African American students. Thus, this study addressed a call from a large body of literature urging researchers to explore disparities in educational systems with a particular look into culture and context for low-income students of color.

  Context. As the researcher, I was interested in understanding how context played a role in the educational attainment for low-income African American population in Woodview[1]. Examining data of peer counties situated Woodview County (and Woodview) and provided the context for this study.

  To increase its college enrollment and attainment rates, educational systems within the state of Illinois participate in a few initiatives: e.g., Race to the Top, a longitudinal data system, and the College and Career Readiness Act. Ranked 15th nationally in educational attainment in 2012, the state is above the national average in the percentage of working age adults (aged 25-64) with at least an Associate's degree (Lumina, 2013). Disaggregating the data by race shows almost 28% of the state's African American population hold a college degree compared to a little over 27% nationally (Lumina, 2013). Thus, it might seem as though the state is doing reasonably well with educational attainment among African American students. However, disaggregating the data further shows educational attainment rates of African Americans residing in small cities with high-poverty and high-minority concentrations that are lower than those in

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[1] To protect the confidentiality of participants, a pseudonym (Woodview) is used for the city under study.

larger cities with similar populations (see Table 1). Additionally, the following table notes the

percentage of residents in poverty. According to 2013 U.S. Census Bureau data, all of the

counties discussed have higher poverty rates that than those of the state or nationally.

Table 1

Bachelor Degree Attainment, by County

County (Small City)	Poverty Status[2]	African American Residents	African American Residents with Bachelor Degree	Percentage Difference
County 1 (Woodview)	15.0%	14.8%	5.99%	-8.81%
County 2 (Dogwood)	18.8%	11.6%	7.96%	-3.64%
County 3 (Redwood)	16.8%	11.34%	8.66%	-2.68%
County 4 (Coulter)	15.8%	25.54%	18.55%	-6.99%
State	13.1%	14.8%	28%	+13.2%
National	14.3%	13.1%	27.14%	+14.04

Note. Source: Lumina, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013.

The data presented in Table 1 show a noticeable difference between the percentage of

African American residents and the percentage of African American residents who have obtained

a Bachelor's degree. This difference provided strong justification to examine factors to

understand the low rates of educational attainment for those living in Woodview County.

Woodview is home to the majority of the African American population in Woodview County, as

opposed to the other cities and towns that comprise Woodview County (Illinois Courts, 2013;

U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

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[2] A family is declared in poverty if their total income is less than their threshold determined by the Census Bureau and based off their cash income before taxes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Woodview, demographically similar to other small cities, has a high-poverty, high-minority population, but the U.S. Census Bureau does not consider it an urban city. These non-urban, non-rural cities are studied less because of their status as small cities, yet they are essential for states needing to increase their overall educational attainment rates. Furthermore, since it is classified as a Metropolitan Statistical Area due to its population being over 50,000, the government of Woodview qualifies for additional federal funding. The unique context of Woodview as a small city provided an interesting backdrop when trying to understand the low educational attainment of its African American residents. Many initiatives found to be best practices for urban cities with high-poverty, high-minority populations continue to be implemented in Woodview; however, the educational attainment rates have not increased significantly among its African American residents since 1980. Figure 1 shows the percentage of Woodview County residents who hold a college degree, by race. A limitation to the data was that it was only available at the county level; however, as stated earlier, it was easy to infer that Woodview deserves attention, as the majority of the African American population of Woodview County resides there. More data and information regarding contexts of Woodview can be found in Chapters 3 and 4.

Figure 1 shows that since 1980, the educational attainment gap between Whites and African Americans widened over 6%. The educational attainment of African Americans saw slight increases in a 30 year period and remained relatively stagnant, while the educational attainment of Whites increased by 8% over the same period. The figure below justifies deeper examination of factors stagnating the educational attainment of low-income African Americans in small cities. Understanding the barriers and challenges to counties with lower education

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levels among their African American population needs to occur if each state is to reach Lumina's

2025 goal of 60% of its state population being a recipient of a college degree, certificate and/or

industry recognized credential.

Woodview County Bachelor Degree Attainment, by ethnicity
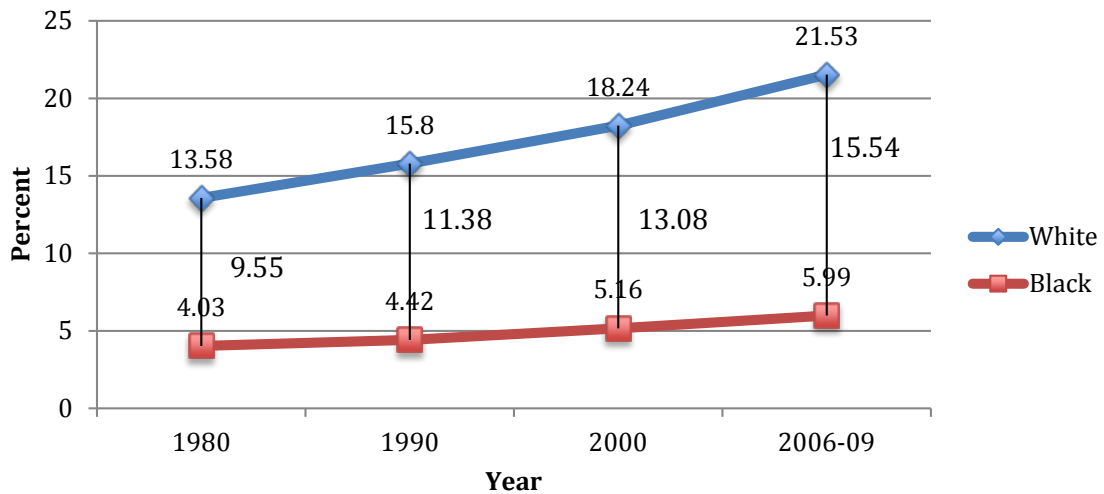

Figure 1. Woodview county bachelor degree attainment, by ethnicity. Note: adapted from The Chronicle of Higher Education (2011, January 23).

Summary

As the nation changes demographically, it is increasingly important to make educational

outcomes equitable for all populations. In order to do so, a close examination of the beliefs and

expectations, and practices of school personnel within their educational system needs to be

undertaken as it may affect the educational outcomes of low-income African American students.

As stated by Jones, Bensimon, and Dowd (2012), "Creating an equitable, college-going culture

in high schools is essential to improving educational achievement disparities" (p. 50). Decisions

made now regarding access and equity will affect forthcoming policies, programs, and practices

for future generations of America's population (Fitzgerald & Delaney, 2002) as well as the beliefs and expectations of school personnel regarding their students. If President Obama's 2020 goals are to be reached,

> Especially in the current environment of high accountability, limited funding, and scarce resources…we must continue to ask which policies, programs, and curricula place underserved students at a greater disadvantage, and which are more successful in helping them access and succeed in college. (Green, 2006, p. 24)

Bowen et al. (2009) agreed that "reducing disparities in outcomes and improving national levels of educational attainment are mutually reinforcing goals" and that this is important to producing equitable educational outcomes for underrepresented and underserved students (p. 207).

The findings of this research provided a unique contribution to the scholarly literature on the broader topics of the role that administrators, teachers, and staff play in the creation and sustainment of a college-going culture for low-income African American students in mid-size cities. More school districts are reviewing their policies and practices to see if they are creating unnecessary barriers (both physical and mental) for students, particularly for those students who are often underserved and underrepresented. Thus, this study is useful in understanding how an organization's habitus, including past and current policies and practices (perhaps rooted in a city's racial history), affect the beliefs and expectations of school personnel regarding education for low-income African American students.

Review of Subsequent Chapters

Chapter 1 provided a broad overview of college completion in the United States and a brief description of educational attainment among the population pertinent to this study.

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Research questions that helped guide this study were also provided. Chapter 2 highlights the

three main concepts that lay the foundation for this study and clarifies a conceptual framework

that guided data collection and analysis. Research methods used within this study (including

justification for the use of a qualitative case study, information about the selection of participants

and data sources, and study limitations) are documented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 reveals the

study's findings as well as an analysis of each theme. A summary of the findings, implications,

and recommendations for future research concludes Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

For the purposes of this literature review, I explored research addressing the role that organizational habitus plays in the development of beliefs of school personnel engaged in creating a college-going culture among the school district's low-income African American students. The keywords used in the literature search included "organizational habitus," "teacher expectations," and "college-going culture" and were examined through different databases (e.g., ERIC, Education Full-Text, Google Scholar, ProQuest and SOCIndex). Separating the keywords or utilizing two instead of three terms allowed for the most effective search of this under examined area, expanding the literature pertinent to this review.

The review begins with an examination of the three main concepts—organizational habitus, teacher expectations, and college-going culture. The discussion of the literature studied provides common themes and findings. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a conceptual framework that examines the relationships of the three concepts within an educational system and its surrounding community.

Organizational Habitus

Researching successful transitions of high school students to postsecondary education involves some study of organizational habitus (Smyth & Banks, 2012). Coined by McDonough (1997) organizational habitus, or "the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual's behavior through an intermediate organization, the high school," developed in the field of education (p. 107). Organizational habitus, also referred to as institutional habitus, is important

to understand when researching school culture; however, organizational habitus is not to be confused with school or organizational culture. While organizational culture focuses on the practices, beliefs, and rules of an organization, organizational habitus intersects organizational culture structures with race and class to provide an understanding of such interactions of those working toward a common mission (Horvat & Antonio, 1999). For example, by examining the link between organizational habitus and the socioeconomic status of the high schools studied, McDonough (1997) highlighted "how social class operates through high schools to shape students' perceptions of appropriate college choices, thereby affecting patterns of educational attainment, and how individuals and schools mutually shape and reshape one another" (p. 107).

Organizational habitus stems from the habitus literature. Habitus, a concept formulated by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, provides an explanation of the human action involved in educational choices through a class perspective. Simply, habitus is shared principles and/or perceptions acquired as a result of social class experiences or interactions within structures, or different social institutions (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu (1977) originally defined habitus as concerning "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures…" in order to explain socioeconomic class differences within individuals in France (p. 72). When studying the educational attainment of working-class people in France, Bourdieu (1977) noticed that values adopted by the working-class population were formed from the structures of the dominant class. In this case, the dominant class was the elite French. Thus, economic capital was powerful in the formation of values, norms, and of the working-class and shaped structures of French life. While the elite helped shape values of working-class people, it was those people who played a daily role in their early experiences,

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most likely other working-class people that influenced the formation of their aspiration and beliefs about education. All in all, the formation of habitus can be understood through one's internalized beliefs, attitudes, values, and expectations, often influenced by the groups (e.g., social class, gender, race/ethnicity) to which he/she belongs. These internalized principles and/or perceptions become so pervasive and subconscious that human actions become second nature (Bourdieu, 1977).

Education can present one of the single most important opportunities to change one's circumstances; however, habitus reminds us that regardless of education, the thoughts and actions of individuals reflect those of others who were present in their experiences (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu (1977) believed that educational systems were prime sites of inequality as their social structure aided in perpetuating social reproduction, especially in terms of access to education. Thus, the analysis of the organizational habitus of a school district allows researchers to gain more insight into issues that are a result of that structure.

Organizational habitus allows for macro level analyses of micro level issues (Diamond, 2006). Tate (1995) agreed, claiming "educational systems are built on laws, policies, and folkways requiring macro level analyses that overlap with micro level issues such as curriculum and pedagogy" (p. 219). Diamond, Randolph, and Spillane (2004) asserted that there are few studies examining "the influence of race and social class on teacher expectations within an organization," which are important to successful outcomes of underrepresented students (p. 78). They posited that the school's student body composition, in terms of race and social class, and its micro political context, defined as "the day-to-day interactions through which people value and make sense of difference," are prime factors in understanding organizational habitus (p. 78).

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Teacher expectations have yet to become a common point of interest in studies on organizational habitus and college-going culture. For this reason, teacher expectations was the main (or micro-level) issue central to this study to help understand an organization's habitus.

Teacher Expectations

Since early studies of teacher expectations, researchers have realized that other individuals, in addition to teachers, can impact student achievement. Thus, studies on guidance counselors and those in leadership commenced. There was a breadth of literature suggesting that high school guidance counselors have the most college knowledge but are seen as "gatekeepers" of that knowledge, preventing students from reaching their full potential (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2009; McDonough, 1997). Additional "gatekeepers" include administrators in charge of setting and enforcing policies; however, much of the literature only focused on the expectations of teachers regarding their students, as opposed to that of administrators and counselors. For this reason, this literature review focuses primarily on teachers' expectations of students.

Early quantitative studies found no relationship between teacher expectation and student performance; however, more recent studies observed significant relationships between the two (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). One of the earliest studies on teacher expectations can be traced to Becker. Becker's study (1952) found that teachers and administrators in Chicago schools "expect less from lower-class children, the gap in learning widens through the grades, teachers are offended by the attitudes and hygiene of the children, and teachers transfer to 'better' schools as soon as they can." Boyle's (1966) exploration of the influence of teacher expectations on their students expanded this literature. Boyle's (1966) study examined primary teachers'

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expectations of students at both working-class and middle-class schools and found "teachers in predominantly working-class schools come to expect less of their students than teachers in more middle-class schools and to key their teaching to these expectations" (Boyle, 1966, p. 631). Students who were working-class attending middle-class schools still had higher expectations of them and were more likely to continue their education after high school (Boyle, 1966). A few limitations arose during this study. First, little research during this time period included the variables of race and social class. Noting the year of this study, with desegregation of schools occurring at this time, it would have been interesting to see the effects of race and class on teacher expectations—for instance the possibility that being a working-class student of color might have a greater effect on teacher expectations. Second, there was mention of the outcomes of working-class students in middle-class schools, but it was still unclear of the outcomes of working-class students in working-class schools. These outcomes are of interest to the current study. Lastly, it was unclear about how the educational system plays a role and which school, or student-level, variable had the greatest impact on student outcomes.

While Boyle (1966) concluded that teacher expectations strongly influenced student achievement, other studies sought to prove or disprove his findings. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) were next in building literature on teacher expectations and examined the effect of the student's socioeconomic status on teacher expectation. The researchers' main finding, still cited today, was the correlation between a teacher's expectation and student performance and was the focus of their book, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*. Such beliefs can alter a trajectory or even lead to self-fulfilled prophecy particularly for a student who has lower chances for success. Other researchers did not believe teacher expectations impacted student achievement and sought to

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explore other factors that would contribute to student outcomes. However, few were able to do so. Elashoff and Snow's (1971) critique of the *Pygmalion*, though not confirming all of Rosenthal and Jacobson's findings, did state, "There is legitimate concern about the possible negative effects of teacher expectancy on some children" (p. 65). Other researchers also tried to disconfirm the evidence (Jensen 1969; Thorndike, 1968). Yet Rosenthal and Rubin (1978) published a follow-up article to address the critiques and asserted that the original findings still confirmed their Pygmalion Effect findings. A few limitations arose from these studies on the effects of teacher expectations on student achievement. Understanding that Chicago is relatively diverse, more explanation on the selected schools and on the rationale for those chosen would have been useful in order to see if race impacted teacher expectation. Second, while some researchers found conflicts with Boyle's (1966) original finding, it is still unclear as to what variables, other than teacher expectation, played a large role in a student's achievement. Many of the studies sought out to disprove the finding but did not arrive at an alternative explanation to disprove that teacher expectations did not directly impact student achievement.

College-Going and Access

Initially established for White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant (WASP) male students, access to postsecondary education has been a concern in the United States historically for women, students of color, working class students, and students of immigrant or undocumented status (Gelber, 2007; Randolph, 1990; Thelin, 2004). The desegregation decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 allowed African Americans to start attending predominately white institutions in larger numbers (Gasman, 2008). Although African Americans were able to gain

access to places like Oberlin, there were still plenty of struggles for these students, the main one being segregation (Waite, 2001).

The lasting effects of inequality and inequity as a result of segregation have proven to be extremely detrimental to America's educational system (Anderson, 1988). While customary in the South, segregation became more prevalent in Northern schools after World War II (Clotfelter, 2004). Plagued by *de facto*, rather than *de jure*, segregation, many Northern towns, including Baltimore, St. Louis, and Boston, maintained segregation illegally (Clotfelter, 2004). In an attempt to remedy the inequalities exposed through *A Nation at Risk,* the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision overthrew the "separate but equal" ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson.* Since the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, executive orders from the federal government forced communities across the United States to integrate (Alexander & Alexander, 2011; Hunter & Donahoo, 2003). Following *Brown v. Board*, the *Milliken* decision of 1974 declared that only public schools were subject to desegregation, and the *Brown II* decision left communities to figure out how to integrate "with all deliberate speed." Additionally, the Higher Education Act of 1965, drafted during the Johnson administration as the "War on Poverty," sought to create various opportunities for those disenfranchised because of historical inequities (Heller, 2002). These events and others eventually led to an increase in college-going for these populations once denied an education.

Despite many efforts, including those mentioned above, underrepresented students have struggled to obtain equal access to higher education. This is important to note as "students who fail to graduate high school prepared to attend a four-year college are much less likely to gain full access to our country's economic, political, and social opportunities" (Greene & Forster,

2003, p. 1). As discussed in Chapter 1, African American and Latina/o students continually

participate in higher education at lower rates than White students. However, as the racial and

ethnic demographics of the country shift, it is important for educational institutions to work on

the transition from secondary to postsecondary education, not only to enroll these students but

also to assure their matriculation to graduation. Collins (2011) and Mortenson (2010) noted that

the gap widened by 50% between low-income students and all students between 1998 and 2008.

Furthermore, only 55% of African American and 53% of Latina/o students enrolled in

postsecondary education immediately following high school graduation, though nearly all

aspired to attend higher education (The Education Trust, 1999; Kirst & Venezia, 2004). There is

something to account for this aspiration-attainment besides a student's lack of motivation, an

often cited reason for low educational attainment rates for these groups of students.

Studies attempting to understand a college-going culture examined the many factors

related to the college choice process (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Freeman, 2005; Walpole, 2007).

However, research on individual factors affecting the college choice of students dominate the

literature (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Freeman, 2005; Hanson & Litten, 1982; Hossler &

Gallagher, 1987; Walpole, 2007). These individual factors include the following—parental

education and expectations; student, parental and peer engagement; parental marital status;

participation in college readiness programs and actual enrollment in college; student mobility;

and access to financial resources—all factors that affect the college choice process of low-

income students (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Freeman, 2005; Walpole, 2007). Efforts to address

these individual factors still have yet to result in a significant increase of underrepresented

students accessing postsecondary education.

While studying the individual factors regarding different populations of students was an initial focus in the college-going culture literature, researchers have realized that in order to create and maintain such a culture, a systemic approach with more understanding of organizational change is needed. For example, in Craig's (2013) study the researcher interviewed 13 school personnel in an attempt to understand the key elements needed to sustain a college readiness program that had been financially discontinued by the federal government in Tennessee. Four themes emerged from her discussions with interviewees: elements and procedures important for continuation; effective collaborative organizations; expectations of school personnel of their students; and discontinued programs. Within the theme of elements and procedures needed for continuation, Craig (2013) stated, "An effective college culture necessitates a systemic approach to serving students" (p. 104). The importance of these systemic characteristics is not represented in traditional college choice models (Hanson & Litten, 1982; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) as it is viewed as an individualized process. However, efforts to study such systemic factors are needed to affect the college-going of underrepresented high school students significantly. Moreover, few studies seek to understand how organizational habitus plays a role in the development of an individual's habitus in terms of college going, either positively or negatively.

College-Going Culture

College-going culture is a relatively new concept in the P-20 literature. While scholars still seek to conceptualize this term, there is now more research to understand the elements needed to produce an effective and successful college-going culture. McClafferty, McDonough and Nunez (2002) were the first to capture common elements of schools that were successful in

effecting a college-going culture with large populations of underrepresented students. The

researchers' college-going theory highlighted nine principles central to the high schools' efforts.

The nine principles include college talk, clear expectations, information and resources,

comprehensive counseling model, testing and curriculum, faculty involvement, family

involvement, college partnerships, and articulation.

College talk focuses on the role that school personnel play in the college preparation

process and "requires clear, ongoing communications with students about what it takes to get to

college" (McClafferty et al., 2002, p. 10). Within this principle, school personnel share

experiences of their educational background and unearth hidden assumptions about who should

access college. In clear expectations, self-awareness and reflection clarify the role of school

personnel in the college and career readiness of their students (McClafferty et al.). Information

and resources refer to counselors providing the majority of "comprehensive, up-to-date and

easily accessible" information about college (McClafferty et al., p. 14). A comprehensive

counseling model refers to the intrusive advising process of guidance counselors to prepare

students for college or careers (McClafferty et al.). Testing and curriculum refer to a

commitment from school personnel to prepare students adequately for college admission tests

through relevant curriculum. Adhering to this principle, students are aware of tests, understand

the purpose, have access to college prep resources, and take advantage of existing curriculum.

The principle of faculty involvement refers to faculty being active partners in the college

knowledge process and being involved in professional development opportunities that inform

current practices that positively affect college-going. Family involvement refers to collaboration

with parents and other family members who become "informed partners" in the college-going

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process (McClafferty et al., 2002, p. 21). College partnerships extend collaboration with local colleges and universities to extend pathways to college (McClafferty et al.). Lastly, articulation uses vertical and horizontal alignment to provide a "seamless" pathway from prekindergarten to 20th grade, referred to as P-20 (McClafferty et al., 2002, p. 25).

In addition to the nine principles, McClafferty et al. (2002) identified four conditions necessary to fully realize a college-going culture. The four conditions include committed leadership, a consistent message about college-going from all school personnel, counselors' access to college knowledge tools, and partnering opportunities between school personnel, students, and parents. Moreover, these principles and conditions make clear that the responsibility of student learning and building and maintaining a college-going culture falls to school personnel. Corwin and Tierney's (2007) work for the Center for Higher Education Policy confirmed that committed and active involvement of administrators, teachers, and counselors is needed for those wanting to effect a college-going culture.

Alternative College-Going Culture Definitions. While McClafferty et al.'s (2002) initial definition of a college-going culture has since been enhanced, this definition has helped describe critical pieces needed to establish and sustain such a culture. Others have since tried to simplify McClafferty et al.'s (2002) college-going culture theory, but the comprehensiveness of their definition has yet to be replicated. For example, The College Board (2006) defined college-going culture as a culture that "builds the expectation of postsecondary education for all students—not just the best students. It inspires the best in every student, and it supports students in achieving their goals." MacDonald and Dorr (2006) provided another definition of a college-going culture as a culture "for all students to be prepared for a full range of post-secondary

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options through structural, motivational, and experiential college preparatory opportunities."

Further still, Spokane Public Schools (2011) provided a third definition of a college-going culture by elaborating on what they perceived as the four characteristics of an effective college-going culture—academic rigor, clear college-going mission and expectations, access to college resources (college knowledge), and alignment of systems to support college-going. It seems as though in an attempt by each of the organizations above to group the nine elements of McClafferty et al.'s (2002) college-going theory to provide clarity, they still did not provide the depth needed to understand the requisite elements for a college-going culture to be sustainable. Additionally, the four conditions essential to McClafferty et al.'s (2002) original definition may or may not be present in the definitions above; these definitions are overly simplified and not studied enough to provide the full picture.

However, two definitions closely capture the complexity included in McClafferty et al.'s (2002) college-going culture. Both definitions address the systemic nature of an educational system wanting to positively influence a college-going culture among its students. College Tools for Schools (2012) defined a college-going culture as the "environment, attitudes, and practices in schools and communities that encourage students and their families to obtain the information, tools, and perspective to enhance access to and success in postsecondary education" (College Tools for Schools, 2012). This definition allows for exploration in the six dimensions needed for an effective structural institutional analysis, as discussed by Kezar (2011), and for the examination of one of the many root causes of low college-going rates. The other definition comes from Kalamazoo Public Schools (2013). Their definition listed eight components found necessary to build and maintain such a culture: high expectations from leadership toward

students and staff, access to college knowledge, meaningful assignments, culturally relevant pedagogy, high rates of literacy, parental engagement opportunities, strengthen critical thinking, and more practice with student success skills (i.e., time management, test-taking skills, etc.). One critique of this definition is that it does not systemically examine an educational system and that the responsibility of the creation and sustainment of a college-going culture is unclear. While this definition does place particular focus on the structural elements, it still does not pay attention to the culture or relationships that help shape the attitudes and beliefs of school personnel, an important element that provides a deeper look into the structure. Moreover, in all of the aforementioned definitions, a focus on the organizational habitus, or the beliefs and expectations of those most influential in the system, is absent.

Research conducted on understanding factors affecting college-going has led to small increases of educational attainment rates of individuals, especially for students of color; however, continued efforts to address culture systemically will need to happen to make significant progress in addressing the gap between White students and students of color. In order to meet the Obama administration's goal of 60% of the American population having a degree, certificate or credential from a postsecondary education institution by 2020, Engberg and Wolniak (2010) agreed that "we must continue to explore the ways in which the structures, resources, and organizational norms of high schools facilitate college enrollment" (p. 368).

The educational system is very complex and its policies and practices are often hard to deconstruct, especially when trying to understand how race and racism affect these systems. Thus, studying the organizational habitus within an educational system is a "useful theoretical tool in unmasking misrecognitions of power" (Horvat & Antonio, 1999, p. 339). Furthermore, as

Cornbleth (2010) stated "Attention to institutional habiti unmasks key ways in which the status quo and its inequities are maintained or modified" (p. 296). The next section examines literature that intersects organizational habitus, teacher expectations, and college-going culture in an effort to "unmask" potential inequities.

College-Going Culture and Organizational Habitus

Understanding the historic context of an organization's habitus helps identify potential gaps of educational attainment of particular populations of students. Schools are powerful organizations and have a role in shaping the experiences of those within their structure (Brown, 2008). Thus, organizational habitus uses structures to make sense of experiences (Thomas, 2002). The structures within studies of organizational habitus are often situated within the high school context (Bell, 2008; McDonough, 1997; Nunez & Bowers, 2011). Engberg and Wolniak's (2010) primary assertion was that the context of the high school helped determine the postsecondary outcomes of its students. Using data from the 2002 Educational Longitudinal Study, the researchers found a relationship among students, their high school and resulting postsecondary enrollment.

High school environments, in addition to other school and student-level variables, shape a student's educational trajectory (Bell, 2008; Nunez & Bowers, 2011). Both Bell (2008) and Nunez and Bowers (2011) used hierarchical linear modeling designs to investigate the effect of organizational habitus of a high school on the college-going of its students. Nunez and Bowers (2011), using data from the National Center for Education Statistics Educational Longitudinal Study 2002/06, examined student-level and school-level variables leading to enrollment at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI). School-level variables studied included region, control,

student-teacher ratio, enrollment, teacher and student demographics, and student college-going. Student-level variables included attendance at HSI, gender, immigrant status, native language, socioeconomic status, standardized math score, and individual habitus variables. When controlling for student- and school-level variables, the researchers found that the high school context was the most significant in understanding student college-going in comparison to the other school- and student-level variables.

Utilizing the NELS 1988 dataset, Bell (2008) separated school-level and student-level variables. Student-level variables included parental expectation, involvement and contact with school, parental discussion about college, NELS reading and math achievement test scores, mobility, school location, immigrant status, study habits, and the college-going of friends. School-level variables included an average of each student-level variable in addition to variables of parental education, control, and school demographics. Bell found that the school-level variables of control, racial and ethnic demographics, and the college-going of friends had significant influence on college enrollment. Furthermore, Bell found that after controlling for student- and school-level variables, there was still some variance at the school-level left unaccounted.

In each study, the researchers studied both school-level and student-level variables and found that school-level variables were significant in a student's college choice (Bell, 2008; Nunez & Bowers, 2011). Additionally, both studies utilized quantitative designs and gained valuable insight into variables at different levels affecting college choice. While the findings highlight the need to explore additional school-level variables to help explain the significance, a qualitative design might have provided some explanation needed to account for the variance.

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Regardless, the findings asserted the need for additional examination of school-level variables not accounted for through quantitative analysis of the large data sets. One of those variables not explored was teacher expectation, a focus of this study.

Little attention has been paid to other contextual influences on an individual's habitus outside of a high school context. Perna's (2006) multi-layer habitus model visually displayed contexts that potentially have large influences on an individual's habitus. Perna (2006) used her model to examine the effect of various contexts on an individual's habitus concerning college choice. A comprehensive look at how an individual's view of the return on investment of higher education attendance forms is viewed through four contexts that affect college choice—social, economic and policy; higher education; school/community; and individual habitus (Perna, 2006). The social, economic and policy context examines trends within the labor market as well as population demographics in relation to college enrollment. The higher education context examines the culture (i.e., traditions, philosophy, etc.) of education within a community to help explain college enrollment. The school and community context includes factors pertaining to college readiness, including the availability and types of resources, structural supports, and barriers. Lastly, student-level variables such as race, socioeconomic status, and parental education are factors within individual habitus influencing college enrollment.

By unpacking and examining these four layers systemically, researchers are better able to understand how various organizational contexts play a larger role than previously thought in a student's college choice, or individual habitus process, and vice versa. In fact, Perna's (2006) model assisted in developing an understanding the effects of various layers of organizational habitus on financial aid (Perna, 2006; Perna, 2008; Tierney & Venegas, 2009), college

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counseling (Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson & Li, 2008), parental involvement (Rowan-Kenyon, Bell & Perna, 2008), academic performance varying by race and ethnicity (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009), college readiness, specifically college knowledge (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon & Perna, 2009), and high school context in terms of feeder networks (Wolniak & Engberg, 2007). While scholars have studied Perna's findings extensively, most of the above studies have exclusively occurred at the school and community contextual level.

Researching an effective college-going culture includes a look into the systemic nature of its organizational habitus. When studied systemically, organizational habitus reveals "how high schools' organizational cultures are linked to wider socioeconomic status cultures…thereby affecting patterns of educational attainment, and how individuals and schools mutually shape and reshape one another" (McDonough, 1997, p. 107). Organizational habitus subconsciously inform the resulting actions of school personnel. This subconscious behavior, influenced by an organization's habitus, creates tension depending on its alignment or misalignment with the individual's habitus. Organizational habitus differs from habitus in that it examines an organization's context and culture, and includes the beliefs and expectations of those within the system, while also playing a role in the decision-making of individuals (McDonough, 1997). Therefore, understanding this tension, or the underlying message about college-going within a school district's culture, can help explain the organization's habitus. Furthermore, examining an organization's habitus through the beliefs, expectations, and resulting behaviors of school personnel results in a shared responsibility of students' learning, while elucidating the role of school personnel. It is important for those insisting on changing a culture to have knowledge of

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the habitus of both the individuals within the organization and the organization itself in order to understand possible barriers to changing an organization's habitus.

Organizational Habitus, College-Going Culture, and African-American Students

Scholars rarely investigate how the habitus of an organization influences teachers and students, particularly among groups of underrepresented students functioning within a college-going culture (Diamond et al., 2004; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005; Weinstein & Strambler, 2004). Race and class play a role in shaping the educational experiences of low-income African Americans students, yet studies exploring how the race and class of students shapes daily practices of school personnel are under-researched (O'Connor, Lewis, & Mueller, 2007). Researching students from high schools of varying contexts (i.e., socioeconomic status, geographic regions, low and high concentrations of students of color, etc.) allowed McDonough to understand how the social construction of high schools negatively affected the college choice of those students who were not in privileged positions. Horvat and Antonio's (1999) study was central to expanding literature on how organizational habitus affects college-going of African American students. While defining organizational habitus as "class-based dispositions, perceptions, and appreciations transmitted to individuals in a common organizational culture" (Horvat & Antonio, 1999, p. 320), the researchers interviewed six African American females within an elite, predominantly White high school to understand how race and class shaped their high school experiences. Differentiating between organizational culture and organizational habitus allowed the researchers to understand how race and class shaped the organizational habitus, which in turn marginalized the dispositions and experiences of the African American females within the high school (Horvat & Antonio, 1999).

Knight-Diop's (2010) study of college-going culture was pertinent to this literature review in understanding successful college-going cultures. In order to study a school working to build its college-going culture, Knight-Diop and her team of researchers conducted 51 semi-structured interviews, 13 student focus groups, and a large number of observations with 15 Black students, teachers, counselors, and administrators within Denver High School in New York City. Part of a larger study, this piece examined students in relation to building and sustaining a college-going culture. Knight-Diop acknowledged three structural supports needed for such a culture: academically rigorous environment, college advisement, and co-curricular/extracurricular activities.

While it has been well noted that the counselors play an important role in promoting a college-going culture and could be considered "gatekeepers," it is also known that they have very large case loads, especially in school populations where the students tend to be high-poverty and high-minority (McDonough, 1997). Because of this high case load, it is imperative that counselors are not the only source of college knowledge but that the administration and teachers help reinforce and build such a culture if they are truly committed to seeing their students succeed. McClafferty et al. (2002) acknowledged this in their examination of college-going cultures. They asserted that cultural change in schools, stemming from reflection of all school personnel, allows for meaningful, long-lasting change in addition to building an effective college-going culture.

Organizational Habitus, College-Going Culture, Teacher Expectations, and Students

Most studies conducted on building and sustaining a college-going culture focused on one segment of the population—determined either by income level or race—but did not examine

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the intersection of the two in order to make meaning of this phenomena. Kezar (2010) asserted

the need to study less researched issues such as the intersection of race and class to understand

how such issues impact educational attainment systemically. Using the qualitative method of

case study, discussed in Chapter 3, this study examined the narratives of school personnel

concerning the organizational habitus of college-going culture in relation to the low-income

African American students in a mid-size Midwestern educational school district. Unlike existing

literature, this study put organizational habitus in the foreground rather than masking it with

other factors that might affect a college-going culture by examining the beliefs, expectations, and

practices of school personnel.

Successful college-going cultures of low-income African American students have

conducted a semi-systemic approach. Roderick and Nagaoka's (2011) study used a hierarchical

linear modeling (HLM) quantitative design to examine 2005 Chicago Public Schools (CPS) data,

predicting the enrollment of urban high school students by measuring different aspects of a

college-going culture. The researchers reviewed student-level data as well as teacher

assessments in relation to a college-going culture. They found that low-income and minority

students have differential access to college resources and support compared to their White

counterparts (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2011);

however, the researchers were still not able to understand which effects (selection, peer,

contextual, and teacher and staff behavior) had a strong correlation and role in facilitating a

college-going culture.

The college-going rates of low-income African-American students remain stagnant

despite access and college readiness programs designed for this population (Roderick et al.,

2009). College readiness literature is populated with examples of how high schools are working to improve conditions that promote the college enrollment of students. Almond's (2013) research of an organization's habitus helped to explain the successful college-going outcomes of African American students in two separate urban, public charter schools. Almond (2013) defined organizational habitus as "the collective beliefs of people within an organization and how those beliefs lead to actions that successfully put to work the organization's mission." Through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and document analysis, Almond researched how the actions and beliefs of school personnel affected student outcomes. Two elements found essential to the successful college-going culture of the charter schools involved teachers using practices that supported the school's mission and teachers having high expectations of their students (Almond, 2013). Additionally, Almond found elements of Conley's college readiness model present that were positive, even though college-going rates were not significantly affected. Welton and Martinez (2013) also acknowledge the oversimplification of high school context and the experiences of underrepresented students in the college readiness literature.

Dr. David Conley's (2007) model of college readiness is the primary model used in education. Since his original model, Conley (2011) expanded the understanding of college readiness to include seven principles that high schools successful in matriculating their students into and through college possess. The seven principles include the creation and maintenance of a college-going culture, access to college-ready curricula, a focus on academic behaviors, academic rigor, emphasis on the senior year, and articulation with postsecondary institutions.

Conley's four components of college and career readiness also emphasize individuality instead of examining the system as a whole. Additionally, some of the principles focus on the

individual student rather than the school system. It is not clear if all of these principles need to

be present to aid in the success of college-ready students, but it is acknowledged that these are

the conditions that should be present not only to help increase college readiness but also to

encourage a college-going culture. Moreover, these principles are clear that the responsibility

for student learning, and for building and maintaining a college-going culture lies with the school

personnel. One difference between the models is that Conley (2011) discusses college-going

culture in one bullet point while McClafferty et al.'s (2002) college-going culture model expands

beyond the seven principles identified by Conley (2011) and provides a more comprehensive

look at such a culture. Critics of Conley's model often cite the lack of attention paid to culturally

relevant pedagogy (Bragg, Baber & Castro, 2011). Furthermore, Conley's model does not

address systemic issues in relation to college readiness for students (2011). Despite the many

college readiness programs currently available to students, disparities for certain communities

still need to be addressed.

According to Deil-Amen and DeLuca (2010), the responsibility to build and sustain a

college-going culture depends on the engagement of personnel throughout the entire school.

They assert:

> The experiences of the college coaches and school administrators in trying to combat
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> resistance on the part of their colleagues—resistance rooted in skepticism of the
>
> feasibility of preparing all students for college and in weariness from an abundance of
>
> educational reform initiatives—made it clear that before any real change in the schools
>
> could occur, widespread attitudes and ideas about who can and should go to college
>
> needed to be addressed. (p. 367)

For this reason, I focused on the awareness and experiences of administrators, teachers, and counselors as they are pertinent to achieving a college-going culture. The nine principles and four conditions identified by McClafferty et al. (2002) are necessary for an effective college-going culture. In the authors' research, there is no hierarchy between the nine principles, each plays an important role in producing a college-going culture. For this study, I asserted that two of the principles—college talk and clear expectations—form the foundation of a college-going culture. Both college talk and clear expectations are two of the hardest principles to impact because of the self-awareness and reflection work required by school personnel; however, these two are the most important in the creation and sustainment of a college-going culture. Change in these two principles can impact several of the other areas, a point central to systems thinking.

Since the late 1990's, educators have often viewed their students within the deficit paradigm (Valencia, 1997). Pervasive throughout educational literature were articles on the deficit thinking paradigm and how it impacts students of different backgrounds, including those with disabilities (Weiner, 2006), along with students of color, low socioeconomic status, and ESL needs (Green, 2006). Within the deficit paradigm, teachers are able to place the blame outside their classroom and institutional environments and onto familial and individual characteristics, social environments, and student traits (e.g., laziness, unwillingness to learn, lack of motivation, little family support and interest, etc.) (Green, 2006; Valencia, 1997). Green (2006) agreed that the deficit model "emphasizes students' inabilities rather than their abilities, and encourages policies and programs that view underserved students as less than their peers who have traditionally populated colleges and universities" (p. 25). Consequently, educators operating from the deficit paradigm are unable to realize the inequities they perpetuate regarding

the outcomes of their students. In recent years, many education professionals have realized that blaming students for their circumstances was inappropriate. Teachers began to understand that they could not "solve problems associated with pipeline issues, deficit thinking, or limited college access without clearly confronting and understanding how current curricular pathways serve as structural barriers for underserved students" (Green, 2006, p. 26). Patterson at al. (2007) found a difference in the teachers' espoused theories and the theories-in-action regarding their students. Through eight individual interviews, three focus groups (with a total of 22 students), and document analysis (i.e., student handbook, accreditation reports, school data, etc.), the researchers observed that while the teachers had the students' best interests at heart, the words used in the interviews and focus groups indicated a deficit view of the students. Stanton-Salazar's (2011) work on the college-going outcomes of low-income underrepresented students showed a relationship with high status institutional agents, or those who "occupy relatively high positions in the multiple dimensional stratification system, and who are well positioned to provide key forms of social and institutional support" (pp. 1074-1075).

Deficit views, combined with low expectations of their students, potentially have devastating effects on students' college aspirations and resulting attendance. High expectations of teachers and other school personnel form one of the strongest indicators of students developing aspirations for college attendance (Slocum & Gerardi, 2006). Research continues to be conducted on the relationship of teacher expectations and student achievement since the early studies of Becker (1952) and Boyle (1966). Auwarter and Aruguete (2010) surveyed 106 teachers in Missouri's rural public schools to understand the effect of teacher expectations. The teachers reviewed four scenarios in which the child's socioeconomic status, gender and race

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varied to understand five measures: future expectations for student, need for academic support services, personal characteristics, believability, and the socioeconomic status of the student (p. 244). Using a quantitative analysis, Auwarter and Aruguete (2010) found a significant difference in the way teachers rated children from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds; thus these "feelings of low efficacy may lead to fewer teaching efforts and, therefore, perpetuate low student achievement" (p. 245). This finding supported Benner and Mistry's (2007) study that teacher expectations affect low-income, urban student's outcomes. Additionally, ANOVA analyses showed interaction effects between gender and SES. Thus, teachers have lower expectations for boys from low SES families. Auwarter and Aruguete (2010) asserted that their findings highlighted the "probability that multiple student characteristics are working together to affect teacher expectations" (p. 246). These findings supported the notion that multiple parts of student backgrounds amplify the effects of teacher expectations. However, this study did not consider the effect of race on student achievement.

As enrollment declines and graduation rates persist in higher education institutions, it is important to examine four coexisting perspectives as determined by The Center for Urban Education's (CUE)—access, retention, institutional receptivity, and excellence—that allow "evidence teams" to assess their institutions' role in providing equitable and successful educational outcomes for students (Bensimon, Hao, & Bustillos, 2003, p. 5). Examining these four perspectives also requires those on the evidence team to examine their own mental models and allow time for reflection both of themselves and of the institution in which they work. The result is that more students will succeed in high school, thus impacting the school district's college-going culture. However, without a systemic approach to impact organizational habitus,

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efforts to establish and sustain a college-going culture cannot be successful. Until school personnel take an in-depth look at their past and current inequitable outcomes, any efforts toward progress will be thwarted.

The Equity Scorecard of the CUE is an example of how school personnel at educational institutions can "generate knowledge of problems on their own campus, their engagement in the process of knowledge creation contributes to their openness to arguments for change and their willingness to advocate for new policies and practices" (Dowd, 2005, p. 16) regarding equitable educational opportunities. Combining concepts of equity with the social science discipline allowed for the directors to instill and inspire equity-mindedness, or "the demonstration of an awareness of and willingness to address equity issues among institutional leaders and staff" (Center for Urban Education, 2010). This shifted the responsibility of prioritizing issues of equity from students to the individuals within those institutions and to the organization in which they work.

While there are many articles on organizational habitus, teacher expectations, and college-going culture separately, a comprehensive review of the literature yielded two studies pertinent to this research. In their interviews with 51 teachers, Diamond et al. (2004) examined how power, process, and language within a high school can affect organizational habitus either positively or negatively. By analyzing how power exists in language and observing interactions between students and teachers, the researchers found that teachers' beliefs and expectations of their students affected their responsibility for student learning throughout the school. According to Diamond et al. (2004), "The substance of everyday teacher interaction, those conversations about and evaluations of students that make up the micro political context, are the waves of

sentiment that accumulate and give direction to the stream of beliefs" (p. 76), thus shaping school culture or organizational habitus. Halvorsen, Lee and Andrade (2009) researched responsibility for student learning by interviewing teachers about the beliefs and expectations concerning their students. The researchers found that those teachers who felt supported by their school and principal took responsibility for their students' learning. However, similar to the Auwarter and Aruguete (2010) study, Halvorsen et al. (2009) examined low-income students without consideration of the intersection of race and class. Similar to other studies, the context for Halvorsen et al.'s (2009) study was set in an urban area rather than a small city.

The Halvorsen et al. (2009) and Diamond et al. (2004) studies both effectively captured the micro political context of teacher expectations. Both studies illustrate how an organization's habitus subconsciously informs internal beliefs and can impact teacher responsibility and student learning. As individual behaviors and attitudes, or microprocesses, present themselves to the organization, it is the knowledge and experiences of dominant social groups that are privileged (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008). This privilege is discussed less yet plays a central role in the social reproduction present in the current educational system (Bourdieu, 1977). Diamond et al. (2004) posited that "the very ordinariness of these interactions makes them crucial for understanding social reproduction because they carry racializations" (p. 77).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study incorporates the contextual layers of Perna's (2006) college choice model to help understand influences on organizational habitus. The main focus of this study is within the school and community context; however, the other layers are added to show the influence among the contexts. Each context impacts the next. For example,

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the social, economic, and policy context positively or negatively influences the higher education context. Looking at the model, the school and community context then impacts the individual's habitus, specifically involving college choice. The combined layers positively or negatively amplify the effects on an individual's habitus.

In order to understand the individuality of the college choice process, it is necessary to study the systemic, contextual layers in which it is situated. As this study focused on the school district, it was the school and community context that served as the center of this study. Since understanding the school district was central to this study, the research and interview questions posed focused in on the school and community context. Additional sub-questions were asked to understand the effects of the social, economic, policy, and higher education contexts on the school and community context.

Noting the lack of attention paid to organizational habitus in regards to creating an effective college-going culture, the conceptual framework for this study was formed through a review of the literature and was studied during the interviews with school personnel. Conceptual frameworks frame relationships between variables in a clear visual format (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1998). Thus, to situate the literature in this research and help explain the conceptual framework outlining this study, there were several considerations. McDonough's (1997) and Diamond et al.'s (2004) work informed my understanding of organizational habitus and helped to focus this study on teacher expectations. Perna's (2006) model gave credence to the use of the high school in understanding organizational habitus but also recognized that other contexts play a role in an individual's habitus.

Figure 2 shows the relationship between college-going cultures and the beliefs, attitudes and expectations of school personnel with the mediating factor of organizational habitus. Little is known about how these practices, policies, and norms play out for individuals involved in orchestrating a college-going culture. Understanding why and how they chose to be employed in the field of education helped to bring insight into why and how such beliefs arose. It is my hope that the reflection of these beliefs will result in real change in creating and sustaining an effective college-going culture.

Several sources define variables within the conceptual framework. In terms of organizational habitus, I used Almond's (2013) definition. Almond (personal comm.) defined organizational habitus as "the collective beliefs of people within an organization and how those beliefs lead to actions that successfully put to work the organization's mission." Organizational habitus subconsciously informs the beliefs and expectations. The collective beliefs of school personnel and their subsequent actions and behaviors affect the college-going culture within the school and possible school district. To understand the different pieces of the framework, I relied on two of McClafferty et al.'s (2002) principles of creating and sustaining a college-going culture—clear expectations and college talk. The beliefs and expectations in the conceptual framework matched up with McClafferty et al.'s (2002) definition of college talk in which

A college culture requires clear, ongoing communications with students about what it takes to get to college, so that they understand what is required and expected of them if they want to stay on a college path. Faculty and administrators share their own experiences and discover their own assumptions about their roles in preparing students for college. Through this College Talk, a

college culture becomes clearer and the college preparation process becomes more effective. (p. 10).   McClafferty et al.'s clear expectations principle defined actions and behaviors in which:

> All students are to be prepared for a full range of postsecondary options and the explicit goals of this preparation must be clearly defined, communicated, and a part of the daily culture of the school, such that students, family, teachers, administrators and staff recognize the role that each plays in preparing students for college. (p. 12)

In this study, I posited that college talk and clear expectations lay the foundation to a successful college-going culture. Thus, beliefs and expectations as well as the actions and behaviors of school personnel were the focus of this study.

While the concepts identified to study organizational habitus related to a college-going culture, I did not map out the conceptual framework visually until I attended a Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQIN) Institute on systems thinking. My previous experience as a Research Assistant at the Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) initially exposed me to systems thinking through one of the projects on which I worked. Systems thinking, the fifth discipline of learning organizations, allows organizations to see "the 'structures' that underlie complex situations, and for discerning high from low leverage change" (Senge, 2006, p. 69). The other four disciplines include personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning (Senge, 2006; Senge, 1990). Of the five disciplines, challenging mental models of those within the organization is the most essential component to shifting the vision of a learning organization. In order to effect systemic change, it is important to examine mental models (Bolman & Deal, 2011). It is important to recognize the mental models about
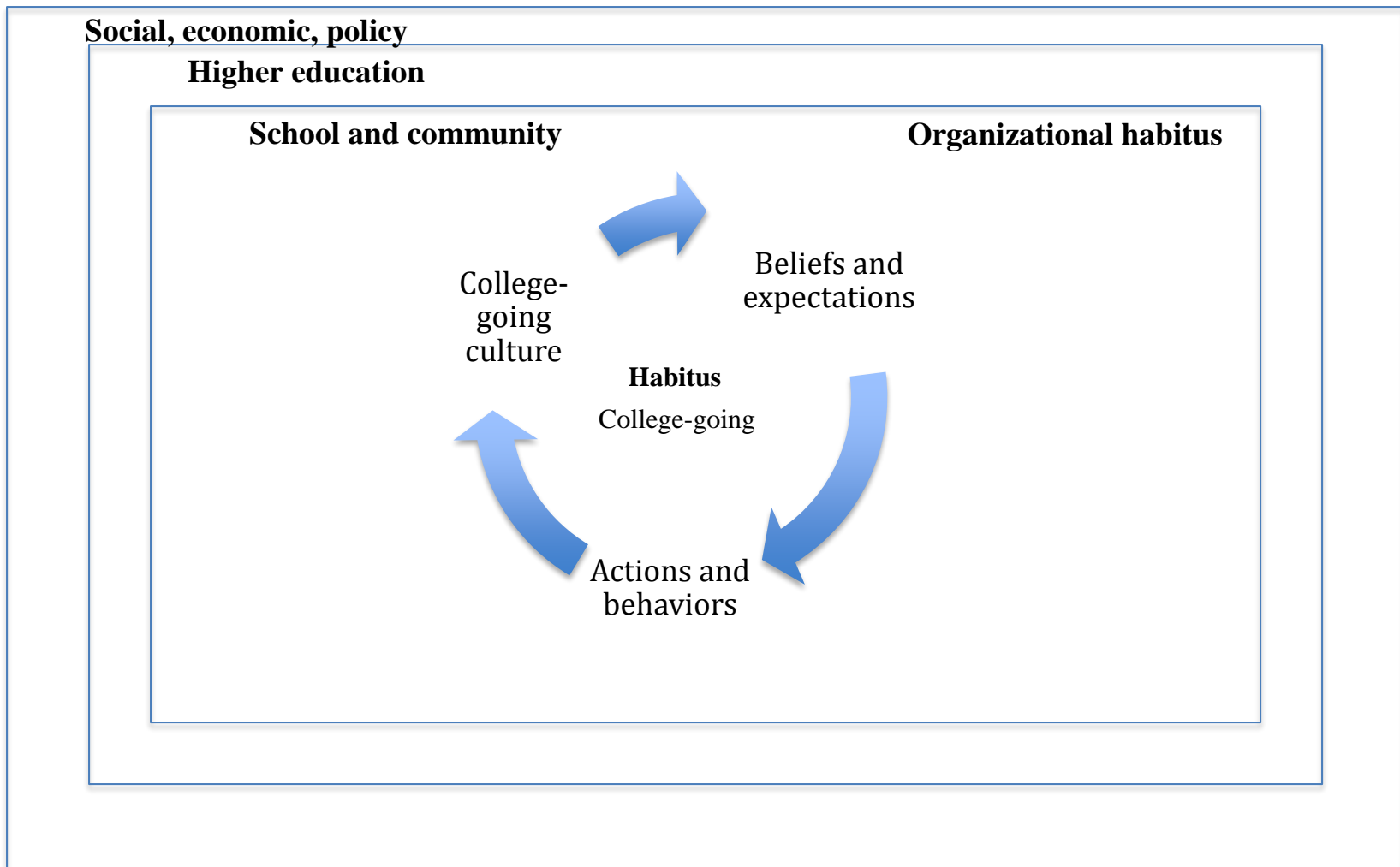
Figure 2. Conceptual model showing relationship between organizational habitus, college-going cultures, and belief and expectations of school personnel.

education that school personnel bring with them each day that inform their current work or beliefs about particular students.

Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, and Dutton (2012) described the difficult task of unmasking mental models and how "one of the critical acts for a learning school is to develop the capability to talk safely and productively about dangerous and discomfiting subjects" (p. 7). According to systems thinking literature, the mental models held by school personnel, especially teachers, about their students play a role in the way they interact with their students. As systems thinking literature focuses groups and individuals to enact small changes that can provide the biggest impact, the reflection work of school personnel regarding their beliefs and expectations can make greater and more lasting impacts to creating and maintaining an effective college-going culture. Attending this conference and my experience at OCCRL justified the purpose of the study in understanding the mental models guiding the behaviors of school personnel working to create and maintain a college-going culture.

Conclusion

Reviewing literature related to organizational habitus, college-going culture and teacher expectations resulted in noticeable gaps. Separately, each concept has literature to establish its base, yet few pieces exist to tie them all together. Halverson et al. (2009) and Diamond et al. (2004) both explored the intersection of race, social class, and teacher expectations and served as evidence for this study. Thus, when studying the organizational habitus of schools, the intersection of race and class can complicate contextual factors. This study extended the literature base and possibly provided additional explanations of barriers of school personnel to college-going cultures of low-income African American students within a certain organizational habitus.

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Many studies of organizational habitus and college-going cultures take place in urban settings (Lewis, James, Hancock, Hill-Jackson, 2008; Liou, Antrop-González & Cooper, 2009; Patterson, Hale & Stessman, 2007), often populated with high poverty and minority groups. Additionally, the work of Almond (2013), McDonough (1997), Horvat and Antonio (1999), and Perna (2006) situated organizational habitus within the context of high schools to understand college-going among underrepresented students. Few studies investigated organizational habitus and college-going culture in contexts other than urban environments. Thus, this study explored the organizational habitus and college-going cultures of a public school district in a non-urban, non-rural environment.

Lastly, individual factors of the college going of special populations of students have been examined; however, college-going cultures of low-income African American students have been less explored. Current studies include students of color or underrepresented students but do not tease out these student populations for further explanation. Diamond (2006) stated that while the integration of schools is still important, efforts need to be shifted to ensure a quality education for all, not just the privileged.

Using the conceptual framework described, this work aimed to address school personnel attitudes about college-going among low-income and African American students, as suggested by Deil-Amen and DeLuca (2010). This research provided a unique opportunity to better understand the beliefs and expectations of current and past school personnel regarding the college-going of low-income African American students in Woodview. The underutilization of studies of college-going culture within an organization's habitus may contribute to persistent

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educational attainment gaps between students of color and Whites, thus, furthering inequities in

the field of education.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

This chapter describes the qualitative methods used to investigate the research questions provided in Chapter 1. In addition, this chapter includes descriptions of the research design, participants, data collection, and analysis of the research, along with detail of the educational system in Woodview. The chapter concludes with sections describing the researcher's reflexivity as well as ethical considerations of this research.

Multiple research methods are used in educational research. Studies of organizational habitus in higher education often use qualitative analysis to better understand the beliefs, expectations, and behaviors that make up the mental models of school personnel uncovered through self-reflection. Seldom used are quantitative methods as such methods make it difficult to capture subconscious mental models. Often, the researcher's lens lends itself to certain methods. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) asserted that "…choice of method reflects researchers' deeper assumptions about social life and how to understand it" (p. 10). Taylor and Bogdan (1998) posited that "as a qualitative researcher, your role is to capture how people define their world or construct their reality" (p. 52). Each qualitative researcher might observe something different when observing a person and his/her interactions depending on their own backgrounds and experiences. Therefore, I describe my lens of the world in the researcher reflexivity section.

Qualitative research is important in helping to situate phenomena, or issues, mired in complex layers of context. Qualitative methods offer deeper explanations of the issue because of

attention paid to contextual information. In fact, Gottlieb (2006) posited that qualitative methods "help to understand depth rather than breadth" (p. 51). As a result, generalizability is not necessarily an outcome, but the findings can be applicable to similar contexts. While qualitative research is time-intensive and often subjective (Stake, 2010), in order to understand the issue or subject in question, these risks need to be taken. Merriam (1998) asserted that qualitative research is useful to study the field of education as it gives privilege to the underprivileged voice. Underrepresented populations historically have not been represented in the literature, especially in quantitative research, as it is difficult to catch the nuances within aggregated data. Qualitative methods, however, work to disaggregate such broad data and capture the unique experiences of underrepresented populations.

Qualitative research can be conducted through the use of several methods. Methods that place context central include ethnography, case study, and phenomenology. Each method provides a different way to ask research questions and analyze the resulting data. As this study aimed to learn about beliefs and expectations of school personnel, a qualitative research design best captured their subjective experiences, which would not easily be obtained through quantitative methods such as surveys. Perecman and Curran (2006) stated that "qualitative methods have the potential to explore ruptures between individuals' stated opinions and beliefs…and their actual behaviors…since the latter may not always reflect the former" (p. 48). Thus, research questions asked in this study can best be answered through the use of qualitative research methods as they allow for "experiential understanding," a reflexive role of the researcher, and for the discovery of new knowledge (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995, p. 37). Additionally, qualitative research acknowledges "multiple realities," an important feature when

trying to understand an organization's habitus through the mental models of those interviewed (Stake, 1995, p. 43).

A common data collection method among qualitative researchers is the use of the case study. Case study allows the reader to understand the case through its context (Merriam, 1998). Case study, as defined by Merriam (1998), is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 21). For the purposes of this research, a case study of a school district was conducted. Below is an explanation of case study and how applying a case study method assisted in data collection and analysis.

Case Study

Case studies help understand cases and issues in further detail. Not designed for "hypothesis testing" but rather for "insight, discovery and interpretation," case studies provide a in-depth understanding of a situation or process (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). There are three main researchers of case study: Merriam, Stake, and Yin (Brown, 2008). While all three of the researchers write about conducting case studies, there are actually few ways in which their definitions converge. Yin (1993) referred to case study as "an empirical inquiry in which the number of variables exceed the number of data points" in educational research (p. 32). Stake (1995) defined case study as the "study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). While the rigorousness of Yin's design and the thick description of the issue central to Stake's design have helped to shape case study research, both do not fully capture the detail wanted of this descriptive case study. Thus, using Merriam's above definition of case study, I posited that

Merriam's (1998) use of qualitative case study, including data collection and analysis, seemed most appropriate to this study.

Merriam's (1998) case study design suited this type of case study, along with its sampling methods and proposed data analysis. Merriam (1998) defined three types of case studies: descriptive, heuristic, and particularistic. The case is descriptive in that it presents "multiple realities" all specific to the case. The case would not be considered heuristic because it would be impossible to narrow the issue to one reason. Nor would it be considered particularistic as the phenomena, or issue, are presented rather than solved. Through case study work, phenomena are identified within that particular context (Merriam, 1998). However, the relationship between the political, social, historical, and personal contexts—including their subsequent intersections (i.e., socio-political, socio-historical, etc.), and the issues, or phenomena, is often not clear (Stake, 1995) lending itself to a descriptive case study (Merriam, 1998). Next is a discussion of the background, or context.

Context. The more we understand the context, the more we understand the case, or issue. Merriam (1998) asserted the impossibility of separating the issue from its context. Yin (2003) agreed that case study is used for those researchers who wanted to "deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions – believing that they might be highly pertinent to [their] phenomenon of study" (p. 13). Examples of contexts include cultural, political, ethical, economical, organizational, curricular, legal, professional, policy, and collegial (Abma & Stake, 2001).

In order to learn more about the unique and complex history regarding the education of its African American residents of Woodview, a qualitative case study approach seemed most

appropriate. In order to understand more about the organizational habitus of the school district, I examined the practices, beliefs, and expectations of school personnel working to build a college-going culture for their low-income African American students.

Background Information of Woodview. This section provides a short description of the context of Woodview. An examination of foreground and background is central to case study work. Stake (2010) asserted that an explanation of background is what is "needed to better understand what is being studied" (p. 50). The foreground in this case study are the habits, norms and practices of school personnel teased out of the contextual background of Woodview as a small city. The history of Woodview, mired by a declining population, constant job loss and racial tensions, is important to understand the shaping of current perspectives of school personnel. These perspectives, situated within the context of the school district's organizational habitus and shaped by the context of Woodview, are the focus of this study. In this case study, the context of Woodview is "important to the story, but they are not what the research is about" (Stake, 2010, p. 50).

Woodview Public School District, referred to as WPS, formed in 1865 (Woodview Public Schools, 2011). Made up of 13 kindergarten to sixth grade elementary schools, two kindergarten to eighth grade schools, two middle schools, two high schools, and one alternative education program (Woodview Public Schools, 2011), WPS currently enrolls more than 8,600 students. Considered part of an urban school district because of their high-minority, high-poverty student population, public high schools in Woodview are often a popular choice for many of its residents (Lena, personal communication). However, many of the private high schools are now drawing from this population, too.

Data from the Illinois' Interactive Report Card (IIRC) helped clarify the school demographic population of Woodview. The report card was a useful source for information on all of the public schools in the state. It did not, however, show private school student data in the city of Woodview, all of whom have religious affiliations and primarily serve the White population. The lack of enrollment and demographic data for these schools was unfortunate because it left an incomplete picture of the total (public and private) school population in Woodview. During 1999 to 2014, enrollment declined for WPS from 11,168 to 8,613 students (IIRC, 2015). This stands in contrast to what is happening in the state. In this state, the number of students in public education increased from 1,962,026 to 2,054,155 in the same time span (IIRC, 2015). While WPS's dropout rate in 2013 was at 4.4%, down from 10.2% in 1999, its graduation rate has remained somewhat steady even as calculations of graduation rate have changed (see Table 2). The two public high schools are similar in student makeup, with 74% of the district considered low-income[3], compared to 49% statewide (IIRC, 2015). The data regarding the district's students, as well as its socioeconomic history, provide an interesting backdrop in understanding the current situation of building and sustaining a college-going culture.

While Woodview has a significant African American population, its policies, programs, and practices to promote educational attainment are a bit uncertain as there has been tension

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[3] "Low-income" refers to students from "families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds, or eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches" (IIRC, 2014).

between the two. A long history of racial tension in Woodview can be found in its different

contexts, especially in its educational system. One author wrote that "deficit, delinquency,

Table 2

Woodview Public School District and Woodview High Schools Dropout and Graduation Rates.

	Dropout Rate 1999	Dropout Rate 2013	Graduation Rate 1999	Graduation Rate 2011
State	5.9	2.4	81.9	83.2
WPS District	10.2	4.4	71.8	66.2
High School 1	8.7	4.6	73.5	62.3

Note. Source: Adapted from Interactive Illinois Report Card, 2015, http://iirc.niu.edu/

drugs, dropouts, desegregation, and a 14-day walkout by teachers" have plagued Woodview

(Banton, 1976). Banton (1976) discussed several events and/or issues in the Woodview

educational system attributed to racial tension, which included:

> Athletic events, student boycotts of classes, and demonstrations against
>
> busing…confrontation of two citizen groups: the Community Commission on Integration
>
> and United School Action, both with plans to solve school problems, polarized
>
> community thinking; closing of [elementary] school. (p. 460)

Long (1918) observed, "The negro in Woodview enjoys the privilege of a good education

through the free public school system…With these facilities there is the possibility of a good

education for any one who will attend" (p. 12). Many might argue that the situation has changed

since then. These historical narratives, in addition to the figures in Chapters 1 and 3, highlight

the need to focus on the educational attainment of low-income African American residents in

Woodview.

Participants

      This study utilized qualitative methods to examine the beliefs and expectations of school personnel, developed through their organization's habitus, for the district's low-income African American students. The population for this study were school personnel (administrators, teachers and counselors) of the Woodview Public School District. A historical perspective provided by former school personnel was needed to better understand the current structure. Interviews were the main data source while observations, journaling, and document analysis rounded out data collection.

      Using purposeful sampling, I invited current and former district administrators, teachers, and counselors to participate in an interview in a location of their choice via email. Purposeful sampling allowed for depth rather than breadth by sampling those who had been successful or unsuccessful in creating and sustaining a college-going culture (Patton, 1999). Through purposeful, or theoretical, sampling, I identified 16 interviewees who agreed to reflect on their experiences in the school district. Both current and former administrators were interviewed. Table 3 provides aggregated descriptions of the participants in order to maintain anonymity. In addition, I conducted a number of informal interviews to fact check.

      Of the 16 participants, nine were administrators, three were counselors, and four were board members. Participants reported working from one to 34 years in the school district. Eleven interviewees were female and seven indicated that they were first-generation students (meaning neither parent obtained a Bachelor's degree). Only five of 16 participants were raised in Woodview. Eleven of the interviewees identified as White and five identified as Black. I was able to secure a relatively representative group in terms of race/ethnicity and gender of the

interviewees; however, I was not regarding social class. Realizing that some of the current personnel did not have recollections or experiences of some of the past school and community contexts, I included former administrators, teachers, and staff in this study. These interviewees provided historical context. To protect the individuals, particular demographic information is not shared.

The University of Illinois campus IRB and school district approved this research study. After obtaining approval from my committee, I contacted both the current Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent to proceed with the study. Approval from the IRB office was granted in early 2014. In the spring of 2014, the superintendent resigned, and I was not able to get an interview. A new superintendent was hired in early summer 2014. This superintendent reapproved my study. I conducted interviews between July and November 2014.

After initially identifying individuals, I sent an email to potential interviewees explaining my study and included contact information if they chose to participate (Appendix A). I was able to schedule a few interviews immediately after sending out the first round of invites. A second reminder email was sent for those I did not hear from initially. As a result, a few interviewees told me to contact their administrative assistant to schedule an interview. Through this method, I was able to contact most of the individuals I initially identified. I utilized Facebook to gain contact to former Woodview school personnel. Through Facebook Messenger, I sent the email invite, as well as contact information, to set up a possible interview. Lastly, I used snowball sampling, where interviewees gave the names of individuals that might add information to the current study, as another method to attract potential interviewees. Of those names given during the interviews, I followed up with three participants.

As the researcher, I was the primary screener of information. The initial invites requested 45-60 minutes, but many of the interviewees continued the conversation well over the hour mark. Overall, the semi-structured interviews lasted an average of 66 minutes. A list of interview questions can be found in Appendices B and C. Attached to the email invite was the approved informed consent form. At the beginning of each interview, I handed the interviewees two copies of the form, one for them to keep and one for my records. All participants signed the informed consent form before the interview and all agreed to be audiotaped (see Appendix D).

Data Collection

Four sources of data collection were included in the study: interviews, documents, journaling, and observations. Three of these data sources—interviews, document analysis, and observations—were consistent with the data needed for case study work according to Merriam (1998). Using these specific sources allowed for triangulation that would "seek convergence in the data and to confirm/disconfirm emerging categories and themes" (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Moreover, while the use of more methods might increase triangulation, these were best suited to provide the most triangulation possible to answer the proposed research questions. Interviews, observations, journaling and reviewing documents also allowed for data saturation. Regardless of the source, all data collected through electronic means were stored on a password protected computer only accessible to the researcher.

As qualitative methods consider the researcher as the instrument of analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility and standardization of the structure of questions, an optimal approach stated by Taylor and Bogdan (1998). I developed an interview protocol in which I pre-emptively prepared probes and prompts to assist in capturing

needed data. The interview questions were grouped into clusters and included questions on

personal educational experiences; current situation and expectation of students; parental

expectations; professional development; school and community; and greatest challenges to

achieving a college-going culture. Probes and/or prompts were used to encourage interviewees

to elaborate and provide context for their initial response. Appendices B and C display

demographic questions and interview questions with probes and prompts.

Interviews can be very time-intensive, yet according to Cuadraz and Uttal (1999)

interviews also privilege the voice of those of interest to the research study. Each interview was

digitally audio recorded with the permission of the participants, both by audio consent and by

signing an informed consent form before conducting the interview. The audio recordings of the

interviews were transcribed using a transcription company, Verbal Ink. Once the transcriptions

were returned, I made clarifications and provided language where it was missing. All

interviewees were then sent their corrected transcriptions to review for approval, a process

known as member checking. Member checking allows the interviewee to review for accuracy

and offer feedback (Stake, 1995). All interview data collected continue to be maintained

confidentially and individually identifiable information will not ever be reported if the researcher

decides to publish. When coding and transcribing the interview data, pseudonyms were used

instead of the individual's name to protect their confidentiality. To ensure confidentiality as

much as possible, a pseudonym is also used for the city under study.

Observations allow the researcher to capture additional contextual information. To

structure information obtained from observations, I used Merriam's (1988) checklist of elements

(see Appendix E): physical setting, participants, activities and interactions, conversation, subtle

factors, and my own behavior (pp. 97-98). Observations of school board meetings resulted in few notes. The sensitive parts of the meeting were done in closed sessions and only the highlights, or successes around the school district, were previewed. Meeting observations included: a member of the local NAACP chapter speaking of unfair hiring practices of minority candidates within the district, local residents speaking of their unhappiness of the school board deciding to hold high school graduations during the week instead of the weekend, and spotlights of activities going on throughout the district. A short presentation on student mobility was given by one of the administrators ensuing a small discussion on homelessness of students in the district. The School Board has a procedure in place which prevents them from replying to the speakers at the meeting. Thus, this study was not able to gain much from such presentations. Merriam's (1998) checklist provided structure to the observations, however, there was not much to glean, especially in relation to the college-going culture for low-income African American students. The observations of the open house proved to be fruitful. Listening to the "oohs" and "aahs" of those visiting the new buildings showed signs of approval and potential uses of such buildings. Pictures, or still images, were taken only of public spaces to capture the context of Woodview and not of any of the school personnel involved in this project. Unfortunately, many of the pictures taken contained potentially identifiable information and may identify Woodview's real name; therefore, picture images were not used.

Journaling allows researchers the opportunity to reflect at any point during the research their personal thoughts, ideas gained from interviews or further research, and insights that assist in the final analysis. It also allows for the recording of research activities during the research process. Journaling is an important part of the research process and is often overlooked. Thus, I

used a journal to capture my thoughts and reactions both before and after participant interviews. Journaling before the interviews allowed me to check my biases before entering the room. Reviewing my journals, I was often surprised by the interviews, especially the willingness of the interviewees to talk openly about potentially sensitive subjects. Moreover, I unanticipated the number of interviewees who talked about their expectations of students without being prompted. Most of all, the journal was my reflective tool to gain insight into some of my findings. I was able to capture a few quotes following the interviews that served as titles of themes and patterns for this study.

The last tool for data collection within this research study was document analysis. Document analysis utilizes the examination of documents pertaining to a particular subject (Jupp, 2006). Document analysis applied criteria such as authenticity, credibility, and meaning to documents important to this study (Jupp, 2006). The documents used for analysis included WPS's mission, strategic plan, school board meeting minutes, and the most recent job posting for a new superintendent. There were not many materials available for public consumption on the district's website. In fact, the strategic plan was not available during the time of the study. Instead, one of the interviewees provided a sample along with an explanation of the current goals of the district. Again, sensitive information is not maintained in the school board meeting's public minutes. Therefore, it was difficult to analyze the minutes for information in relation to this study. Minutes of closed board sessions may provide more insight into beliefs, expectations and behaviors of school personnel regarding low-income African American students in the district. The state report card proved to be invaluable in helping understand student demographics within Woodview's school district.

Data Analysis

For the purposes of this study, I used a qualitative case study design to gather data. The qualitative case study focuses on questions developed to help break down institutional structures. To understand how institutional structures work within a system, structural institutional analysis focuses on examining the mission (organizational goals, purpose, vision), culture (dominant beliefs, proper behavior, criteria for success, rules of the game), structure (pedagogical approaches, social interaction, communication, activities to accomplish basic tasks, procedures) power relationships (access to hierarchy, openness to issues of class, grassroots participation in key decisions), and resources (materials, people, money, facilities, information) (Chesler & Crowfoot, 1989; Kezar, 2010). By asking questions to analyze the different structures included in the institutional analysis, inferences can be made about the organizational habitus in which they operate.

Initially, I had hoped to employ a narrative analysis approach using full stories of the interviewees; however, this did not happen as a result of limitations mentioned in Chapter 3. Narrative analysis allows the stories of the interviewees to "forge connections between personal biography and social structure" (Jupp, 2006, p. 189) and to convey meaning (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1998). Instead, I explored the current college-going culture of the district with minimal focus on trying to pull stories from the interviewees. As a collective case study, this focus on a particular theme lends itself to the narrative analysis approach of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis allows such stories to be organized around themes (Jupp, 2006; Reissmann, 2008). Excerpts from interviews, observations, journal entries, and documents illustrate concepts within themes to construct meaning. Thus, "emphasis is on the content of a text, 'what'

is said more than 'how' it is said, the 'told' rather than the 'telling'" (Jupp, 2006, p. 186). The stories of the interviewees intertwined deeply with the context. Both the interviewing and data analysis process pointed to a thematic analysis approach to assist in teasing out pieces of a story and to help understand how context plays a role in developing a person's internalized beliefs.

Through thematic analysis, I used open and focused coding of the stories of interviewees', along with observations, journaling, and document analysis. According to Schwandt (2007), coding "disaggregates the data, breaks them down into manageable segments, and identifies or names those segments" (p. 32). Additionally, Taylor and Bogdan (1998) stated, "Coding is intended to help you develop insights and generate theoretical understandings, not to produce frequency counts to prove your hypotheses" (p. 154). The first step of coding involved open coding techniques, which formed the base for analysis. Open coding allows the researcher to identify ideas and potential themes through reading the data collected in detail (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Open coding was used to find emerging themes from the study as a whole. Themes developed as I looked collectively at the codes in order to categorize. Thus, codes develop through an objective look at the data rather than coming up with themes and fitting data to them. The second step involved focused coding techniques. Focused coding allows for Merriam's constant comparative method in relationships between data form (Merriam, 1988; Merriam, 1998). In focused coding, only narratives relating to set codes were documented. Data from the transcripts, observations, and documents were examined in relation to the three main variables of this study—organizational habitus, college-going culture and the beliefs and expectations of school personnel—to highlight relationships. Any pertinent observational notes taken during the interviews, school board meetings, open houses, and journal

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Table 3

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Role	First-Generation student (Y/N)	Time in district	Gender	Race	Biggest influence to attend college	Raised in Community (Y/N)
Beth	Administrator	Y	31 years	Female	White	No one	N
Renee	Administrator	N	6 years	Female	Black	Parents	N
Judy	Board Member	N	16 years	Female	White	Parents	Y
Thomas	Administrator	Y	34 years	Male	Black	Coaches	Y
Lena	Administrator	Y	12 years	Female	White	No one	N
Marie	Administrator	*	8 years	Female	White	Others	N
Grant	Administrator	Y	23 years	Male	White	Parents	Y
Sheila	Board Member	Y	4 years	Female	Black	Parents	Y
Robert	Board Member	*	15 years	Male	White	No one	Y
Adrienne	Counselor	N	4 years	Female	Black	Parents	N
Robin	Administrator	N	*	Female	Black	Parents	N
Michelle	Counselor	Y	4 years	Female	White	Family/Parents	Y
Derek	Administrator	N	7 years	Male	White	Father	N
Jillian	Board Member	Y	12 years	Female	White	Parents	N
Stacy	Counselor	N	10 years	Female	White	Mom	N
Maurice	Administrator	N	1 year	Male	White	Parents	N

Note. *Data not reported by interviewee.

entries were reviewed during the coding process for inclusion in the findings.

The overall purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of school personnel that potentially impact the educational attainment for low-income African Americans in blue-collar, post-industrial towns. Through the use of a qualitative research design, this study examined the embedded language and power of school personnel in a mid-size Midwestern educational system in relation to its low-income African American students. Therefore, this research, using qualitative methods, helped to provide more understanding in this understudied area.

Researcher Reflexivity

"We must work to get everyone involved in education to remove attitudinal and policy and practice barriers that result in the failure to recognize, value and encourage the contributions of its Black students," I presented to the Woodview School Board regarding my participation in WPS's "Scholars & Mentors" gifted program. Titled "How to Motivate African American Females to Pursue Academic Success in Woodview Public Schools," my presentation involved my partnership with a community mentor to conduct an independent project which examined the college aspirations of African American girls in Grades 4-6 during my senior year in high school. In total, I met with 18 young females from five elementary schools and asked them questions regarding their families (e.g., family demographics, income), school information (e.g., race/ethnicity of teachers, personal characteristics), and future goals (e.g., high school/college/career).

Most of the girls had decided that they wanted to enter a specialized career such as cosmetology. For many of these girls, college was not an aspiration or even a thought. One potential explanation for this finding is that there was little to no discussion of expectations of

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attending college in the home. Of note, a majority of the girls were raised in single-parent

homes. I remember feeling that this was the first time many of the girls had ever been asked what

they wanted to do after high school.

Upon designing the current study, I was reminded of this experience and what the girls

taught me. I went back and read the final report and presentation I gave to the Woodview School

Board where I expressed the conclusions and recommendations I found in my work and

encouraged the School Board to assist in the actualization of the girls' aspirations. In doing so, I

realized that I had applied many of these concerns to the reasons for conducting this study.

While these girls' experiences were unlike my own, as my parents told me that I was going to

college at an early age because "knowledge is power" (*scientia est potentia*), I still was a young

African American female in the district. I felt all around me the stereotyped expectations (i.e.,

having a child at a young age, struggling to make it day-to-day, just becoming another statistic,

etc.) from institutional agents. I fought hard to make sure that was not my story but I paid (and

still pay) a price for my determination. Out of all the African American females that graduated

in my senior class, I believe I was the only one to graduate in four years from a university with a

Bachelor's degree. There a few peers that I still keep in contact with who have since graduated

with a degree or certificate. On the other side, I have been doubted in my attempts to further my

education and myself. My abilities have been questioned, resulting in a feeling of a constant

need to emphasize my credibility or go above and beyond to prove I could do the job.

While I was not privy to the conversations occurring in my fellow classmates' homes,

much like those young girls, I am not sure how much the topic of "college" was a part of their

everyday conversations. In my mind, I was quite lucky. My dad had graduated from a four-year

private university and my mom had attended a year at a four-year public university. Therefore,

both of my parents had college experiences they recollected. Both urged for me to attend so that

I might engage in some of the same experiences. In addition, I had a few teachers take an active

interest in my learning and who urged me to take on high school experiences for additional

leadership experience as they realized my potential to go to college. I know for a fact that

several of my fellow African American classmates were not as encouraged by school personnel

to realize their potential and told that they, too, could attend college. It was not until later in my

life that I realized the large effect that administrators, teachers, and staff can play in promoting

college-going, not only within a student but also within an entire student population. My story is

not unusual to my context, and I offer it to serve as a reason as to why I wanted to conduct a

study to help understand more about the effect of the beliefs and expectations of school

personnel on the college-going culture for low-income African American students.

Lastly, I have done several presentations and attended others at a local diversity

conference. I am still amazed at the number of African Americans who grew up and attended

Woodview schools who reflect on their experience in the local educational system and describe

what their counselors and teachers told them. Instead of preparing future scientists and doctors,

teachers and counselors prepared students to be factory workers, secretaries, and housekeepers.

During each presentation, these men and women recounted those painful stories and pondered on

what they could have been had they been supported and given guidance much like their fellow

White students. These people spoke to the history of Woodview, a community still feeling the

effects of racial discrimination, with no solutions yet for the resulting inequities.

While I am from Woodview originally, I did not foresee any potential conflicts in

conducting this research. My "insider" position allowed me the ability to navigate the social

settings and to understand the context of Woodview without having to spend valuable interview

time doing so. While I have experienced Woodview as an African American female from a lower middle-class (or as my parents would say "working poor") family, I have not had the perspective of those that I plan to interview. Perspective taking was important for me to keep in mind to reduce bias as I interviewed. Additionally, I am currently an administrator at the local community college in charge of making the institution more effective in meeting its mission and implementing its vision. I have promised the Deputy Superintendent of WPS that the data I receive or data repositories accessible to me will not be used for any other purpose than for my dissertation.

Ethical Considerations

There are a few risks of this study to my participants. Privacy is one risk, but I believe I employed enough safeguards concerning data collection to protect against this. In terms of time commitment, participants were told up front the estimated time it would take to complete the interviews. Additionally, the interviews with all participants were scheduled upon their convenience. The average interview lasted 65 minutes, as participants wanted to continue the conversation well over the allotted 45 to 60 minutes.

There were also risks to reputation of the Woodview School District and its students, especially if the answers of my respondents were not favorable to the audiences of my dissertation; however, I planned to provide a fair and balanced paper with the information I received from my participants. It may have been difficult for participants to disclose information that would be perceived as negative about themselves or their school. However, I assured all participants that their participation in this study would in no way affect their relationship with the school district. All in all, I believe there is great potential for this study to provide WPS personnel with a unique opportunity to understand more about how its policies, practices, and the

beliefs and expectations of its current and past personnel affect its current educational system, regarding the educational attainment of low-income African American students' in the district.

The fact that this study could provide important information not only to the Woodview community but to many others just like it outweighed the risks. The results of this work could have wide positive implications for low-income African American students and the districts that serve them. The knowledge gained from this project could be invaluable to informing the fields of education, organizational change and behavior, and my own future professional and personal work.

Transparency, Coherency, and Credibility

Transparency, coherency, and credibility are threats to qualitative research. For this reason, I address each briefly, along with the steps taken to reduce each of the risks. Transparency is the understanding of the steps taken to complete the research for replicability (Sampson, 2012). In order to address transparency, I journaled during the data collection process. Because of racial, and other implications that may have precipitated during the interviews, journaling before the interviews allowed me to check my potential positive and negative biases that may have affected the interview and resulting findings. Journaling after the interview allowed for reflection time and added to the quality of the dissertation.

Using multiple sources to make sense of the data is a concern of coherency (Sampson, 2012). For this reason, I used several data sources rather than one to capture the data needed to answer the research questions that guided this study. This method also allowed for triangulation and data saturation. Moreover, I attempted to contact a few authors and discover how they defined organizational habitus and college-going culture and reviewed their interview questions; although only one returned my email (Almond, 2013; Diamond et al., 2004).

Credibility ensures that the results of the study are reliable, relevant, plausible, and that they demonstrate competency (Sampson, 2012). I formulated the study because of my experience with the environment, believing that I might be best suited to tell the story. My qualitative research training, including graduate coursework and counseling practicums, were useful in designing the research study and interview questions. Furthermore, this experience was also important to data collection analysis. As a former counselor, my experience in developing good rapport and self-disclosure quickly with potential participants served me well. The interpersonal communication component was very important to develop rapidly as this research included single interviews. Lastly, I identified each of the interview questions with one of the major concepts of this study – organizational habitus, teacher expectations, and/or college-going culture. By doing such, I eliminated questions that might pose alternative explanations of the findings adding focus to the study. In addition, this eased the relatively harder task of analyzing qualitative data into themes.

Limitations and Delimitations

One potential limitation is within the responses of my interviewees. Recognizing that many of my potential interviewees were White and that I am African-American could have hindered honest responses. However, being from the district and my experience as a counselor allowed me to gain the trust of the interviewee quickly to allow for meaningful interviews.

Another was the scarcity of time for in-person interaction with school personnel. Since I too work full-time, it was difficult to often find times to conduct interviews. Therefore, I kept interviews limited to a single session and asked for the interviewee's permission to either email or call them with follow-up questions. Additionally, I sent the transcripted interview to each person for member checking before analysis.

A delimitation of this study is that only those working in the Woodview school district are of interest in this study. While this might provide a limitation of generalizability, I believe that many of the lessons learned from this study can be used in districts with similar contexts. Qualitative research is often not generalizable; however, it does "emphasize context…as an essential element of meaning" (Greene, 1998, p. 387). For this reason, delimitations should be viewed positively. The design of the study, measures used, and anticipated constraints all play positive delimitation roles as it provides focus for this study. Additionally, other points of interest might come up through data collection, but the research questions which frame the study assisted in eliminating data not pertaining to the key concepts. All in all, the delimitations provided in the first three chapters convey expectations of the research.

Conclusion

Studies conducted on college access and college choice to better understand the effect of inequitable educational systems on underrepresented and underserved populations are scarce. Analyses of how individual factors impact student achievement are often available; however, studies of educational systems and its effect on student achievement are seldom conducted because they require more time, energy and effort. It is important to understand how an organization's habitus, in this case an educational system, influences the college-going culture for its low-income African American students if progress is to be made within disparate educational systems.

This research provides a unique contribution to the scholarly literature on college-going cultures for low-income African American students as there is a paucity of research examining mid-size cities, which are not urban or rural areas, with high concentrations of low-income families of color. There are several cities just like Woodview (blue-collar, postindustrial cities)

who have experienced similar circumstances. This research provides an opportunity to learn more about Woodview's context and possible recommendations to help influence a college-going culture in Woodview for its low-income African American students. This study potentially contributes specifically to the fields of education, especially P-20 literature, when trying to understand potential barriers for low-income African American students transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the college-going culture of a public school district in a Midwestern community through the perceptions and reflections of school personnel. An examination of their perceptions resulted from the following central research question and four sub-questions:

RQ: What is the college-going culture for low-income African American students in a mid-size, public Midwestern school district?

SQ1: How does the organizational habitus of a mid-size, public Midwestern school district shape the college-going culture for low-income African American students?

SQ2: How does the organizational habitus of a mid-size, public Midwestern school district intersect with the beliefs, expectations, and behaviors of school personnel in promoting a college-going culture for low-income African American students?

SQ3: How is the school district impacted by the larger sociopolitical context in terms of college-going?

Chapter 4 reports the study's main findings. This chapter presents three key themes gathered from sixteen in-depth interviews in addition to collected documents. In Chapter 3, Table 3 showed a summary of self-reported demographic data of the sixteen participants involved in the study. The main perspectives of this study were from four board members, nine administrators, and three high school counselors.

Three major themes and eight corresponding patterns emerged from the coding process. According to Saldana (2013), themes are "outcomes of coding, categorization, or analytic

reflection" (p. 15). As the researcher, I employed an open coding, or initial coding, process in the first cycle (Saldana, 2013). Open coding allows for an initial reflection of the data. I then engaged in focused coding, or pattern coding, to make further sense of the data by discerning specific patterns to help explain the conceptual framework (Saldana, 2013). Coding allows for sense making of the data collected (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2013). Using Miles and Huberman's (1994) idea of creating a provisional list of codes, I developed 13 nodes, using NVivo qualitative software, to help categorize data during the focused coding process—actions and behaviors; college-going culture; beliefs and expectations; college-going in Woodview; college-going model; community efforts; lived experience; low-income African American students; organizational habitus; relationships; role in college-going culture; sociopolitical forces; and systems thinking. Eight patterns resulted from further analysis of these nodes. Those eight patterns led to the development of three key themes:

1) "Window dressing" structures: Unpacking the current college-going culture for low-income African American students of the school district;

2) "Good Enough": Perceptions of low-income African American students and their families in Woodview; and

3) "Our schools are dropout factories": Connecting the school district and sociopolitical context of Woodview.

Details that supported and explained each theme and pattern follow. Selected quotations from interviews provide additional support for themes and/or patterns. Where appropriate, data resulting from document analysis work is also included.

Theme 1: "Window Dressing"

> *These buildings have got to represent the quality of education that goes on in there, can't just be window dressing.* ~Jillian

As Brown (2008) and Cookson (2014) stated, schools are complex structures and are powerful in forming the experiences of those within them. Organizational habitus develops within structures and, if understood, helps to make sense of such experiences (Thomas, 2002). By asking questions to analyze structures, inferences can be made about the organizational habitus in which people operate. In this case study, the school district was a large, complex organization (or structure) and served at the unit of analysis. According to Kezar (2010), structures can be analyzed through their mission, culture, power relationships, and resources. Additionally, Thompson (2003) argued that better awareness of open-system structures, such as a school district, and their association with their environments removes uncertainty. Removing uncertainty "poses major challenges to rationality" and allows for comprehension of "what we have control over or can reliably predict" (Thompson, 2003, p. 4). The exploration of such relationships allows for the deconstruction of structures and a further exploration of their systems to uncover root cause(s). The interviewees brought awareness and connections to the current structure by providing stories about their own experiences. These conversations alluded to their mental models of a college-going culture in the school district for low-income African American students.

Pattern 1.1: "Should All Kids Go to College?" After fifty years of students filtering in and out of dilapidated buildings and athletic facilities, the community of Woodview decided to fund the construction of two brand new high schools. Representing quality education, as Jillian stated above, as well as reversing the current image of the school district were two main reasons

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for the new buildings. Physical resources were important to continuing the reimaging message set by the school district. The reasoning given for the construction of the new buildings implied a commitment to ensure a quality, first-class education for all students. Because the community approved the funding, it also implied that the residents of Woodview supported the school district's re-imaging and future success. The positivity that surrounds these new buildings is infectious. The interviewees smiled when talking about the buildings and what they meant for the community. Even the students themselves responded positively to the new schools. Lena, who has been in the district over 12 years, discussed how her daughter stated that she would getter better grades because of the new school.

Several interviewees reflected on their own education experiences and discussed those who urged them to attend college. Nearly all attended a four-year university following high school at the encouragement of parents, teachers, coaches, and other sources invested in seeing them succeed. It was the expectation of these sources that they would attend college. These expectations were then passed down to their own children. Of the interviewees that sent their children to the district's public schools, the majority felt their children were successful in college due to the quality teaching, Advanced Placement courses, and dual credit courses offered. For instance, Jillian spoke about her children's experiences in the district and how "they could point to a lot of things – even their high school education—that they learned and college didn't even teach them." Conversely, one interviewee noted how her child, an honor roll student and who is African American, did not feel as prepared compared to her college classmates from other parts of the state who had greater exposure to the academic subjects being taught.

There seemed to be consensus with each interviewee that the school district did a great job preparing students to be college ready for, as Jillian states, "those who want to take

advantage of it." Lena saw that school personnel assisted students through "intentional and deliberate" efforts surrounding college-going activities. For instance, Derek's expectation was that his personnel were there "to promote something that would be very important for every students to be successful—college, job training…" Additionally, he expected all students to at least attend community college. Supporting this assertion, Stacy reasoned:

This is my belief. Every single one of my students is going to be college prepared if I can help it. Every single one. If they choose to use it, awesome, they've got it. If they choose not to, okay, they're still going to be ahead of the game. Even if they go to employment right away, they're still going to have that knowledge of a tough curriculum.

However, the message that had been conveyed to them about college differed from what they told their students, or even in some cases, their own children. A major difference in the conversation involved the post-high school expectations of their students and that of their own children. She went on to say:

I don't think all students need to go to college in order to be successful or do - or to contribute to society. There are jobs that - I know that technology has taken them - a lot away - but an example would be carpentry, and it's kind of a lost art but we need carpenters, we need plumbers, we need electricians. Those are things that I don't think a four-year degree is necessary. Do I think there's a need for students who have some kind of experience where they're independent as they are maybe in college? Yeah. But I don't think you necessarily need a four-year institution to do that.

According to a recent school survey, most seniors in one of the local high schools planned to attend the local community college or a four-year university; however, as Maurice pointed out, the data from these self-reported plans are often inaccurate. Maurice went on to

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describe low graduation rates in not only the state but also the local school district. Therefore, realistic plans for students preparing for college and/or the workforce are extremely important and necessary. Supporting this assertion, Renee claimed,

> If high schools could know that these are the jobs or particular field that our kids are most likely to be working in, number one, it's something they can be proud of, a sense of accomplishment, but number two, it's not so overwhelming that they feel they can't reach that goal.

Michelle acknowledged that setting realistic expectations potentially creates a broader definition of student success. She stated,

> We all need these skilled laborers that don't need college so if we say college for everyone and that's the expectation and anything below that is a failure then we're creating a culture where everything that's vital and necessary to our society existing leaves those people feeling like a failure…which is ridiculous.

These conversations that resulted from the interviews seemed to shift when participants were asked if all students should go to college. While there was a consistent message of school personnel encouraging students to obtain additional education post-high school, the message and expectations of college-going shifted when it came to low-income, African American students. Instead, interviewees talked to students about realistic plans concerning college and careers after high school. Michelle, noted that some of her low-income African American students "will be lucky to get through high school." Renee agreed that "college is not for everyone…so you have to put something in place for those students who are not going to be successful." This particular response implies that the expectation is for a student to attend college in order to be labeled a success. Grant acknowledged that the goal of all students attending college "is a noble one…The

reality is are they all gonna get there – probably not, and if they do get there, how long will they

last; a semester, a year?...we need to try to get them in that mindset."

The community's expectations of its students, especially its low-income African

American students, are low. Beth articulated it best when she stated, "So when we're thinking

about what our kids deserve, what our kids need I do think it's limited about what the community

wants and needs and expects." She added,

> I feel like this community expects - puts the bar too low as far as what our educational
>
> system should look like. It was good enough for me; why do we need anything
>
> else?...Now we've just built the two high schools, which was huge for us, we don't have
>
> turf. Everybody around us has turf…we were making choices based on the input from
>
> the community, and so to me that's a shiny example of good enough.

Overall, the college-going expectations of school personnel is minimal for low-income

African American students. Realizing that the college-going rates of this population is low,

school personnel cited a bigger goal of their work: helping students become productive citizens

in the community and society. Grant wanted his students to "Just be productive citizens. If

you're not wired to go on to the next level of education, that's fine...The more honest and realistic

goal is to produce productive citizens, regardless of whether they have a college or a tech

degree." Grant advised that school personnel

> Have to be careful to make sure the students are ready. It's [going to college]
>
> emphasized tremendously, and it's pushed, and it's encouraged, and I believe we have the
>
> appropriate resources in place here to give those kids an opportunity to get at least
>
> enrolled at that next level. Now what they do with that, it's on them, ultimately, once
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> they get there. But I'm a little bit old school, too. Sure, I think everybody should further

their education, go as far as they possibly can, but the reality is also some of those kids aren't wired that way. Some of them maybe need to go into a tech school. They need to go immediately into the workforce at some level. That's fine. Just be productive citizens. If you're not wired to go on to the next level of education, that's fine.

Jillian declared, "I want to see those students go on, I want to see them succeed. I want them to enjoy life, be productive citizens, enjoy things that they really want to enjoy instead of getting involved in drugs and gangs."

It is interesting that the interviewees mentioned above kept using the word "productive" when talking about low-income African American students. Without direct confirmation from the interviewees, it is difficult to interpret what this means. It could imply that their current lens shows unproductivity of former students within Woodview. Instead of promoting college attendance, school personnel shift their focus to citizenry of their students. Additionally, the term "wired" used by Grant is of interest. What does this term imply? Does "wired" mean that low-income African American students are somehow not genetically equipped to succeed in postsecondary education? Or is because of their circumstances? Using a racialized lens, these terms relate to being 'exploited' and 'disposable'. The meaning of phrases incorporating the words "productive" and "wired" need more explanation in reference to setting expectations of college-going for these students and are currently being researched.

Pattern 1.2: Reflection of School Personnel Backgrounds. With very little or no prompting at all, each interviewee discussed the role education played in their own lives. From being low-income, to having little interest in school, to being a first-generation college student, their stories, unknowingly, connected to the lives of their students. Many of the interviewees noted their persistence despite circumstances similar to those of their students. Two perspectives

became notably evident through analysis—those who grew up in Woodview (insiders) and those who grew up elsewhere and now work inside Woodview (outsiders). While insiders have experienced the community's particular culture, outsiders may have not known how to make sense of the culture. Robert noted:

> You gotta understand the culture. If you don't grow up in that kind of—I'm not saying a White person can't understand it, but if you don't 'cause you were never around it—what are you gonna do with the way some kids act.

Many of the outsiders, or those who did not grow up in the community studied, had significant experiences in similarly, if not more, diverse communities. Stacy, Maurice, and Renee all discussed the similarities and differences between the communities they worked in previously and the current school district. However, each spoke of their passion in working in their current district. Stacy reflected on her previous teaching experience in a large, urban school district where she would "find new bullets in her windows" each morning. These experiences, according to Stacy, "shaped my teaching and the type of students I want to work with...completely shaped my passion, love, and life" which is why she chooses to stay in Woodview. Maurice's previous experience in a similar district increased his appreciation for the racially diverse student population in Woodview leading to "healthy interactions" and a more realistic picture for students. Both Renee and Robin discussed their familiarity with environments similar to Woodview. Renee's experiences allowed her to connect with low-income African American students wanting to succeed. Renee acknowledged, "See, when people look at me, they think, 'Oh, wow. She's great. She did a good job.' You would never know that I came from the projects, that there's days where we didn't have food on the table."

The "cultural overlap within poverty" that Lena described allowed her to reflect and better understand her students', and their families' behaviors. Lena connected her experiences growing up in poverty in an all-White town to the predominant African American culture of Woodview noting she "honestly believed her [my] personal background was helpful" in relating to her students. All of these experiences pointed to the importance of relationship building with students. Renee stated,

> So how do you relate your experiences to other kids similar to you? That's how you draw that relationship piece in with the at-risk kids. And that's the piece a lot of our adults are not seeing right now. They forget the hard times in life.

Derek agreed, "I understand the culture, and part of understanding is being able to say, I went through the same thing." Renee acknowledged that sharing similar events allowed school personnel to "use their experiences to help students get past the blocks they had." A sense of obligation to help their students was gathered from a few of the interviewees. Stacy furthered her education as she "wanted to become a better teacher so that [she] could understand and help [her] kids better." Renee felt an obligation to help because of her own experience. She believed in the idea, "Let me help you because the gift was given to me."

These specific experiences connect readily to those of their students. For those who were raised in the community and went to the public schools in the district, there was a sense of pride as they spoke of their high school and familial experiences. All of the interviewees were able to obtain at least a bachelor's degree despite tough circumstances, as some of them were from low-income families or were the first in their families to attend and graduate from college. Grant and Robert discussed how their parents did not pressure them to attend college but also did not discourage them from attending. Furthering education past high school was echoed in Sheila and

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Michelle's homes. As Sheila had heard from her parents, "Get that education…no one can take that from you."

Each of the interviewees from Woodview spoke to this narrative of making the choice to attend college over obtaining work in one of the local factories where jobs and pay were abundant. While the pressure to attend college after high school may have been different between men and women, all chose college citing that the decision was not tough as their parents or another source expected college attendance. However, the interviewees divulged that these choices were often difficult when returning to the community and learning of their pay compared to former classmates. Michelle reflected on how her brother, a welder, was "offered a job right out of high school…he was making more than I was with my Master's degree." Sheila affirmed, "You could make good money with benefits" after graduating from high school in Woodview. These same struggles are present for current high school students as they attempt to navigate their path after high school. Even those who lived outside of Woodview growing up spoke to the tough choices their current students face of entering the workforce or continuing their education upon high school graduation.

Pattern 1.3: Shifting Mental Models of School Personnel. Several of the interviewees weighed in on problems affecting the school district, especially internally. Lena noted, "We have embraced being the 'bad district' and have gotten happy about being unhappy to some degree." Shifting cultures and mindsets, allowing safe spaces for open dialogue, getting the "right people on the bus," and accepting responsibility for actions were discussed as what was needed to reimagine the culture of the school district.

Several interviewees discussed the unconscious beliefs and behaviors of school personnel and their potentially detrimental effects on students. Robin stated,

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We have to be very cautious of our own [unconscious thoughts and perceptions]. We

mean no harm but we only see life through our lenses. So we always have to be very

aware of our lenses, we will damage some people and not know about it. You could be

an African American student sitting right here in front of me. If I only know African

American to work in houses and on welfare or worked at a gas station, that's my only

experience and then you come sit in my office and my chair. What's the first thing I'm

going to think about?

Much of the initial education of school personnel did not focus on self-reflection. Self-reflection

allows for a structured assessment of values, beliefs and behaviors as an individual continues to

learn and grow. Lena realized,

Although people don't intend to be disrespectful, they don't know how to model that.

Teachers aren't trained in how to interact with kids that they've never been around.

Many of our teachers here, they might even live in Woodview and never be around a

black family, never be in a black church because our churches are very segregated. Even

restaurants, to some degree, are pretty segregated.

Thus, modeling appropriate behavior provided necessary training for school personnel not often

received in formal postsecondary settings.

Examining one's unconscious beliefs and behaviors can be hard work. According to

Robin, "It's hard to look at yourself. It's very easy to point a finger." Beth acknowledged that

"Teaching teachers is much more difficult than teaching kids I think, because we're so set in our

ways." This is important work as Lena pointed out that teachers often "think kids are

misbehaving because they're not conforming to what is our norm. And that's hard to teach

without modeling it and helping the teacher be comfortable being uncomfortable." Those

teachable moments, as Lena described, allow school personnel to help modify the beliefs and expectations of school personnel by "mak[ing] connections with what [teachers] experienced and [their] relationships, structures and expectations for students."

One way to begin to shift cultures is encouraging open dialogue among teachers and staff. As Lena pointed out, "conversations are powerful." Robin added that teachers need to be constantly reminded and "be aware of our attitudes and preconceived notions, make sure you keep that in front of you." Grant reflected on his own experience and stated,

I certainly feel like I have done a good enough job but nobody's perfect. You can always do more; I can always do better. Like a coach, you can always learn more, and become a better coach, no matter how much you know or how much success you have; same thing as a teacher.

While this may be deemed important work by the district, Thomas opined that shifting attitudes and beliefs may not be a priority of every teacher:

I think that some teachers, I listened to the thing about the police officers last night about how they needed more diversity training, but one of the police officers was saying 'Well a lot of those guys sit in there and are just doing seat time.' They're not gonna do anything with it. Well that's the same way in public schools. We might have some kind of training. They're [school personnel] just sitting there, and saying 'Okay, it's just another meeting, but I'm not going to learn this because I'm not going to do this.' That police officer, he made a good point about that. When I heard that last night I started to think that's exactly what happens in education sometime with teachers. They listen, but they don't take the information – Well, he says some of them [police officers] actually just don't care.

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Analysis

The beliefs and expectations of school personnel concerning college-going and shifting mental models, along with their own personal reflections and experiences, were key patterns of this theme. School personnel, whether consciously or unconsciously, shape the educational trajectory of their students. Stanton-Salazar's (2011) work validated the relationship between institutional agents (or school personnel) and their students. Institutional agents, who often have status, power, authority and control of resources, are able to grow into empowerment agents via relationship building with students (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Empowerment agents seek and accept responsibility to provide equitable outcomes for their students.

School personnel readily spoke of their own educational experiences. Each story allowed a peek into the initial formation of their belief of college-going. Most interviewees stated that their parents were their biggest influences to their college-going, even though they many had not attended college themselves. Each story had a common challenge that linked to the experiences of their students. If school personnel shared their experiences of climbing the education ladder with their students, or "college talk," closer relationships with students might be formed. These relationships grant empowering agent status to school personnel, thus increasing the expectations of their students. This shifting of expectations disrupts the culturally deficit view of school personnel (discussed in the next theme), thus, initiating change.

School personnel's work to expand their attitudes, beliefs, and expectations regarding their students is necessary to shift cultures. Understanding attitudes and behaviors around a specific subject unlocks one's mental model. Unmasking mental models is central to systemic change (Bolman & Deal, 2011). Senge et al.'s (2012) research on mental models helps explain the complexity involved in exploring one's belief and value system. The exploration of mental

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models requires time to self-reflect. Throughout the study, mental models were on full display when answering the interview questions.

The participants' responses regarding their backgrounds assisted in exploring their educational experiences. At the very least, all of the school personnel earned a bachelor's degree from a college or university while at least half continued their schooling and earned an advanced degree. Thus, this implies the importance that each of the interviewees' place on a college education. Several of the interviewees also discussed expectations for them to attend college. Family members and school personnel were most cited for expressing interest in the education of the interviewees. In fact, many of the interviewees discussed the expectations of their own children attending college. However, responses changed when discussing the expectations of college-going for low-income African American students.

There was a tension between the mental models developed by school personnel of expectations about college-going from their own educational experiences and the expectations of low-income African American students in the school district. Although school personnel were able to articulate a consistent message about college-going, "I think" was a popular phrase used when describing their beliefs about college-going. Without an edict from the school district (or school board) itself, it seemed as though the interviewees were hesitant to generalize a message of college-going. Instead, the phrase "I think" allowed an out, in case, the message was incorrect or inconsistent with the school district. Another potential explanation is that the school personnel did not get to know the student and/or family well enough to be confident in knowing the plan post-high school of their students.

Additionally, there was tension between the beliefs of school personnel about the college-going of low-income African American students and the imposing message of "everyone should

go to college," mainly due to external initiatives focusing on improving student outcomes and promoting completion. Michelle's response ("Everyone's like 'College for everyone?'…First off we need garbage collectors, do they need a college degree?...there's not enough jobs that pay for a college education") spoke to this point. In addition, because of the various populations of students served, a "one size fits all" approach did not seem to work and may have revealed an inconsistency in the message.

It is important to note that the large industrial presence in Woodview provides a source of contention regarding educational needs between businesses and the community. The issue of how best to provide education for African Americans (practical education versus classical curriculum) has been around for decades (Anderson, 1988; Brown II et al., 2004; Gasman, 2008b). This inconsistent message continues to misinform students, again, especially those of whom are African American, of the purpose of an education. This is partially exposed in the above responses. A few interviewees pointed to the goal of becoming productive citizens of society as the primary purpose of their jobs, not just getting kids to continue onto college. Michelle observed that Woodview "students don't have the soft skills needed for education or the workforce." Interestingly, although a major criticism of his work, Wilson (1998) discussed the absence of hard and soft skills as a part of cultural poverty. The exploration of the absence of soft skills of low-income African American students may point to more appropriate root causes. This particular conversation informs Perna's (2006) higher education context. The philosophy of education for African American residents in Woodview was in its low college graduation rates. As to the purpose of education for African Americans in the community, Renee commented "Well, actually, if you look around in the community, the question has been answered." A sub-tension within this particular tension is the paradox resulting from interviewees' comments about

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students seeking a livable wage balanced with not everyone needing a college education. Competing interests between creating a viable workforce and educating students are discussed in Theme 3.

The school district's recent mission statements were simple and easy to remember, but they could be interpreted several ways. Thus, the development of successful practices is irrelevant in the midst of unclear expectations and district mission. Additionally, a few interviewees aware of the work being done in the lower grades addressed articulation, but many were unable to help visualize a bigger picture of how a college-going culture was being designed and promoted in the district.

Overall, there were several efforts to envision a college-going culture in the district. Connecting such efforts would result in a stronger college-going culture, especially for low-income African American students, a focus of Theme 3.

Theme 2: "Good Enough"

> *When we were in the cotton field and were slaves, we weren't educated. How did our forefathers know that we needed an education? So you tell me now that we don't know the importance of an education? We knew it then when we was in them cotton fields so where did they get they need? Where did my grandmother get the need that she needed to go to school when she worked in the back kitchen? She made 25 cents a week. She would take that 25 cents to buy her books and help her get to school. Where did she get that from? How did she know that was important to do? She got it from her mother. Her mother was in the cotton field. So what have we lost?...We've lost our history...We've lost our grandmas.* ~Robin

Previous research indicated that educational systems aid in the social reproduction of educational inequality (Bourdieu, 1977). Cookson (2014) posited "schools are sites of learning, sites of social reproduction, and sites for conscious and unconscious communication" (p. 24). Consequently, educators operating from the deficit paradigm are unable to realize the inequities they perpetuate regarding educational outcomes of their students. School personnel often place

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the blame of the low educational outcomes of students outside of their responsibility and onto student and familial characteristics. By studying the beliefs and behaviors of school personnel concerning students' outcomes, more awareness was gained about how collective beliefs operate in structures and intersect with the race and class of students and families. The interviewees discussed patterns of perception concerning their students' high school plans, parental involvement, and expectations.

Pattern 2.1: "The Cousin Effect." The exploration of college-going within the low-income African American student population in Woodview becomes increasingly important as the make-up of the city changes. Thus, observation of schooling patterns is necessary to conduct. According to Michelle, the school district is over 70% low-income and 50% African American. Without actual data from the school district, it is quite hard to detect a pattern of college-going among its' low-income African American students. State report card data showed that only 20% of the school district's students were deemed college-ready following high school graduation. These low rates, combined with interview data, show that there is low college-going among all students, particularly low-income African American students. Renee stated that most of her low-income African American students plan to work following high school graduation. In contrast, Stacy conferred that 90% of her students are college bound. Adrienne observed that many of her low-income African American students will likely attend the local community college. Grant also observed that a majority of low-income African American student-athletes attend junior colleges and continue in their sport or join the military. Michelle noted that the Navy and Army dominate military recruitment in the district, as the Air Force removed its local recruiter. Overall, there are many options for low-income African American students following high school graduation; however, there is little tracking about where they eventually end up.

There is another potential observation regarding schooling patterns of this population. Dubbed the "cousin effect" by Marie, a few of the interviewees observed schooling patterns within low-income African American families in the district. Lena claimed, "Most students say that are going to college, and unless we monitor and really look into their preparation, most do not attend. Most do what they are familiar with and whatever family members do." Many of the interviewees discussed how these families rely on word of mouth when selecting postsecondary institutions. Lena stated,

Students plan for college when they know someone personally who has gone to college; a family member encouraging them is critical to students really believing it is a possibility. The culture for African American students (based on my experience) is they plan to attend when a family member has attended or they believe an athletic scholarship will get them in college.

Marie, too, noticed, "Where I'd have one grandma, one matriarch, she had 15 grandkids, and Grandma said 'That's where they're going to school,' and that's where they all came to school."

Widespread messages of the benefits of attending college have infiltrated the community in Woodview. Unfortunately, unrealistic expectations often result in a student not moving forward with his/her plans. Renee mentioned that many students claim, "When I get grown, I'm going to get out of here." However, these same students "haven't had anyone show them that life exists outside of Woodview. So even though they say 'Yes, I'm going to do these things,' a lot of kids just end up here." Adrienne addressed her concern with students with a "small town mentality" who think:

That if you're in Woodview, you're really not going to be anyone, that you're going to have these types of jobs and can't achieve great success because of where you're

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from…They don't want to do anything differently. If you get through high school, that's great and that's it. If you go to college that's even better, but you know you have to come back here. You can't go anywhere but here, and that's the majority.

Thomas offered a different take: "I think it's a thing about the hometown. I think some kids that figure if you don't leave your hometown, you're not going to be successful and particularly in a town like Woodview because you are from here." Where once it was okay to graduate from high school, obtain a job at the local factory, and earn a comfortable living all in Woodview, students are now expecting more in terms of work and quality of life. While "cousin effect" is noticed in schooling patterns, it seems that family ties to the area is of less importance. As the decline in jobs and population in Woodview continue, students are seeing the effects of long-term factory work and experiencing the fluctuations of an economy dependent on agriculture and middle-skill work.

The students' work ethic was discussed as a potential factor for unclear and unrealistic plans. Adrienne noted that many teachers "don't feel like it's worth their time to invest in those students because it's not going to benefit them in the long run. 'We can put them in here, but they're not going to do the work.'" Thomas reflected on his experiences with students:

You got some kids that probably think somebody's supposed to give them a job. You're not supposed to work for a job or earn a job. The world doesn't work like that. You have to set yourself up for something, whether that's going to [the local community college or state university] or maybe starting off with a part-time job. You gotta start somewhere. Nobody's gonna tap you on the shoulder say, 'Oh, here's a job.' The kids don't want to work from the bottom to get to the top.

These concerns regarding work ethic were centered on low-income African American students as the work ethic of other students in the district were not discussed.

However, Michelle stated that many of the students, especially the low-income African American students she works with "have no idea what they really want at this point." Thus, according to Lena, students end up "just telling you what they think they should tell you." Thomas acknowledged that "There's opportunities out there for them. I just don't think they look at those opportunities and take advantage of them…you may not always end up where you want to be, but at least you had the opportunity to do it."

The interviewees expressed strong opinions of students in the district. From citing motivated to "stressed" students, the perceptions of low-income African American students in the district differed among interviewees. Renee found that her students were "so sincere. They want the attention. They want the love. They want the honesty and the feedback. And they'll do anything in the world for you, and I would do anything within my powers for them." However, a few of the interviewees noticed students lacking self-esteem. Renee defined this lack of self-esteem as the "Charlie Brown syndrome…I have no friends. Nobody likes me." Sheila affirmed this, saying, "I think we have a society of girls that have low self-esteem. They don't feel they deserve better. If you don't feel you deserve better, you don't try to get better." On the other hand, Sheila recognized that African American males often "downplay and flunk tests on purpose. They're very smart, very street smart, they know how to count money…they have all the logical skills, analytical skills. But when they get in the classroom, they shut down because of peer pressure." The interviewees' responses collectively implied that learned helplessness was a trait of low-income African American students. However, it was the

resilience of these students to continue despite constant dips in their ever-changing circumstances that was of interest.

In order to gain a better awareness of the college-going of low-income African American students, comparisons to high- and middle-income African American students were explored. Michelle noted that working with high-income African American students required less work because:

> I don't have to do anything with those kids, they know what they're doing and they're on it generally…more of the low-income choose the [local] community college or a technical institute whereas the middle- to higher-income African American students are going to more of the state schools.

Robin agreed that students from high-income families "come ready. Their kids have a different perspective on life than Black students who come from low income. So I go back to it again – it's economics." Derek observed this from his own experience moving from a predominantly low-income school district to one where "expectations were there for kids." Grant agreed that:

> 99, if not 100%, of the middle-class African American families, that's still the expectation. You're going to college. You're going to college and get your degree, get your job. So that hasn't changed, it's just that that population has shrank within the public school setting.

Grant emphasized the demographic shift. At one point, the community was approximately 75% middle-income. However, in conjunction with the economic downturn of the community, the middle-class shrank and areas of concentrated poverty grew. Along with that "middle class values, or middle class expectations" also decreased. These comments imply that

low-income African American families do not discuss college or have expectations of their children to attend college. More research is needed to see if this perception is accurate.

Pattern 2.2: "We've Lost our Grandmas." Robin's quote at the beginning of this theme struck at the core value of an education. She acknowledged that this value is often lost through generations, as emphasis is placed on other values. A few outsiders spoke of this "different kind of mentality" of residents in Woodview toward education. When pressed on this question, the respondents talked about more about the value of an education on a person's life. Most of the interviewees agreed that many African American parents, both low- and high-income, have high expectations of their children and want them to continue on to college yet many students do not attend college. Marie stated that the work of the school district in a high-poverty environment is to work with parents and "lead them and just be responsive, meet them where they are, and keep educating them until they see the good in their children, and then [they will] understand there must be value to it." Sheila said,

> But this is the sad thing about it, we've got 15 of the 22 schools that are failing and they're not meeting the standards in math and reading. So what happens is – for a variety of reasons. And I'm not going to say because it's low income and there is a large percentage on free lunch, but I think that the value is not there in the home for education. They don't see the value. And with this election now, they better start seeing the value, because things are going to start changing.

She also acknowledged that the "core values—the importance of education, holding kids accountable—goes back to preschool and first, second grade…can't wait until someone gets into high school. You can't have them for eight hours in school, then go home and get de-programmed."

According to a recent School Improvement Program grant, data revealed that the district experienced high graduation rates among the district's high school students yet low academic achievement. What is the cause for such differences? Many of the interviewees pointed to parental involvement in the schools and at home. As Jillian stated, "A child's first teacher is their parent." Jillian continued to express the importance of parent involvement in the school system:

> I think in an urban setting – and we've got so many children who are coming to the public school doors with issues in home life…How can we overcome these issues - how can we work with the parents? That's one thing I think is necessary. You're not only working with the student but you're working with a parent at home who has that child for a majority of time…. so we've got this new school now in an area of town to hopefully better serve our more impoverished students. But in order to make them successful what else do we need to add to this because you just can't work with the child alone: you've got to do this wraparound service type of thing.

In fact, parental accountability, strong family backgrounds, and two-parent homes were discussed as key pieces for students from low-income African American homes to succeed. In terms of parental accountability, Sheila opined, "I think too many parents expect the schools to do everything or parent, and I think that they're not holding the parents accountable." A root cause in low college attendance is that "the culture in some households does not foster the value of education…leads to the lack of parental accountability and involvement," Sheila commented. Additionally, Michelle argued that the key factor in those students who decide to attend college is a strong family background that "value[s] education, that they strive for something, where they attended college or not. That there's a motivation, that there's support….I have some single

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moms particularly that are wonderful in that they aspire for something and teach their kids to aspire for something." Sheila and Grant discussed the need for students to be supported in two-parent homes. Grant stated,

> You need a mother, and you need a father. They both bring certain things to the table, and you need that support system. If you don't have that, you are behind the eight ball. It doesn't mean you cannot overcome it. Some do, but your odds are stacked against you. They're stacked against you when you don't have that in place, and our society has just taken old fashioned morals and values and thrown them out the window.

> Sheila agreed "kids need two parents. They need that mother to show that nurturing, they need that father too, and it's a balancing act. So I feel like we've lost a lot of the values."

However, Sheila did acknowledge differences in parental involvement in care regarding race and socioeconomic status: "a lot of these [white] mothers, their husbands had good jobs, so they didn't have to work, whereas with the black families, if you had a spouse, it took both of them." Grant agreed, saying,

> It's not the teachers, it's not the curriculum, all that's in place here. It's solid….It's –and here we go - many, if not most, of the low-income black or white students that attend [this high school] don't have the structure…the encouragement…the two parents at home.

A couple of interviewees expressed their belief that encouragement of parental involvement begins with the students' teachers. Lena stated,

> And if you teach kids these other skills, your test scores will go up because guess what, school's going to become more meaningful for them. They're going to be more connected. Their families are going to be more connected. Don't complain to me about

parent involvement. If you want parent involvement, get the kid so passionate that they

won't leave their parent alone. That's all you gotta do. Eventually, my own kids won't

stop talking about something, and I gotta go to whatever it is.

Maurice added that parental involvement is something "You have to constantly work on that.

Make it [interactions] available. Make sure it's important for them [parents] when they do come

in and [that teachers understand] it's an opportunity."

The community's value of education is often reflected in the expectations of its students.

Judy discussed her perception of the value of education in Woodview:

Everybody doesn't have a vested interest in it. Because some of those who recognize that

for the community to grow you have to have a good education system. They work at it a

little bit. They give their time. They don't really want to change their own personal

habits in order to do that. And they get discouraged after two, three years and say, oh,

well, I guess it's not gonna – I can't make a difference with this so they go on to other

things. And there's a lot of it's always easier to blame something else.

She noticed differences in communities that desired more of their students. In a city with close

proximity, Judy noted, "You've got the support of a desire for education from the university

which you don't have here." Unfortunately, the postsecondary educational institutions in town

are:

Not so big that they employ enough people to make a difference…makes a huge

difference. Because there isn't – and I don't know why there isn't the culture of education

in this town that there is in [other surrounding towns], in terms of expectations for kids

within the community.

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More bluntly, Judy noted that she does not see a "true vested interest happening. The people with the money don't have the interest in the Woodview education system. They don't want necessarily that money going to blacks."

As noted in *Pattern 2.1*, despite the high expectations of parents, the aspiration-attainment gap of low-income African American students still remains high. Most interviewees observed that the parents of these students set expectations of going to college and communicate it to their children. Maurice stated, "Very few kids I spoke to are not talking about college…I just don't think there's been planning on the part of the parents." Marie agreed that "for the most part the expectation of our African American parents is their children will go to college. That is the expectation…regardless of what their income level is, or how they get to school, or how they get home." Beth noted that the parents she sees are "like my parents, even though they didn't go to college, they always wanted something better for me than what they had…They just want something better for their kids. They don't want their kids to have that struggle they had." Stacy's experiences in a large urban school district brought some interesting comparisons. She noted that at a previous school district there was a "lack of parent involvement, lack of parent understanding…and a population that did not value education." These same characteristics were not evident in her current job. Maurice's above comment implies that there was no difference between the expectations of low-income versus high-income parents in terms of college-going. Instead, it was the initial planning of going to college that stood out between the two groups.

Pattern 2.3: Hiring Practices. Recruiting qualified teachers and staff is a priority for most school districts as Robin stated "hiring is key." Woodview is no exception. In fact, one interviewee noted the difficulty in securing student teachers from local colleges and universities because of the district's urban image. The interviewee stated that because of the above reason,

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Woodview seems to be a training ground for recent graduates of teacher education programs who leave once more appealing jobs open up in places like the Chicago suburbs.

Fit is extremely important if a district wants to positively affect its student outcomes. As noted earlier, the percentage of White students in the district are decreasing while the African American and low-income student percentages continue to rise (IIRC, 2015). Conversely, over 90% of the teachers in the district are White and 7% are African American (IIRC, 2015). According to the Illinois Report Card (2015), the average teacher experience in the district has been decreasing from 18 years in 2002 to 11.9 in 2012. Average teacher experience has also decreased statewide from 14.2 years in 2002 to 12.9 in 2012.

Several interviewees referenced hiring practices put in place by a previous administrator designed to ensure applicants have the desire and skills to work in Woodview. Reflecting back to an informal conversation with the previous superintendent, such actions were conducted to ensure a good fit of the applicant with the district. This practice was common to similar school districts in urban environments with high-minority, high-poverty student populations. Judy noted that the assessment given to prospective teachers, principals, and administrators "measures how open and receptive you are to other cultures." It is unclear if any other screening assessments are used in the application process as this was the only one mentioned. Interviewees also stated that applicants had to start by filling out an application on AppliTrack, a common portal used by school districts to hire teachers.

One particular situation spoke to this "good enough" theme. Adrienne reflected on a situation she encountered with a colleague who told her "You're doing too much…she told me if I wanted to lost my job, I need to stop doing so much." Instead, her colleague encouraged her to follow her work style "it's an 8 am to 3 pm job…I'm not doing anything extra." As a result,

Adrienne stopped a few activities held after school and on evenings and expressed regret. She knew she could be doing more for her students but also wanted to maintain harmony with her colleagues. "Good enough" in this instance meant working 8 to 3 and not providing anything 'extra.'

Several interviewees noted that many of the teachers in the district actually lived outside the district and perpetuated negative comments about the public educational system. Robin asked "How many really live and work here, send their kids to school here?" Beth noted "because we have people within the district that work here that live outside the city of Woodview that complain about WPS. What we've discovered is we are our own worst nightmare…we need to be a part of the solution." Derek's belief that "every administrator needs to live in the district they work in" was a common solution brought forward by several interviewees.

Analysis

School personnel perceived that familial and community expectations and a shrinking middle class have affected the educational value in the community. A focus on building and maintaining relationships with students, families, and the community was consistent throughout the interviews. Judy stated, "It's still relationships between people that make a difference." Lena agreed and added, "You don't have to be really close friends with every kids and their family, but you better have the respect of that family." Since teachers have the most direct impact on students, developing trust and relationships with students is essential to students meeting set expectations. Derek reflected "As parents got to know me and some of the other school personnel, they were letting us do more to mold and guide their kids. We sort of became parents. And that helped them. They had to rebuild trust." Stacy said, "I must be doing

something right because they keep coming to me." In doing so, respect is reciprocated between teacher and student.

Throughout the interviews, there were contradictory statements about the current college-going of these students. In fact, the actual college-going of students in the school district was not clear from the interviews. What was clear was that most of the interviewees did not know the data (i.e., percentage enrolling in college, top feeder schools, etc.). Only one interviewee actually brought data to the meeting; the other data was anecdotal. Additionally, as discussed in *Patterns 1.1* and *2.1*, the post-high school plans of low-income African American varied and were inconsistent, according to the interviewees of this study. What was clear was the publically available data. As stated in Chapter 3, there are very low rates of college-going among the districts' African American residents. According to the state report card, 20% of the school district is college ready compared to the state (46%) (IIRC, 2015). In terms of college partnerships (McClafferty et al., 2002), most interviewees mentioned relationships developed with the two postsecondary institutions in town over time. These relationships were maintained, while relationships with state schools have weakened. Public state schools were once a heavy recruiter of Woodview students. Personnel have noticed a decline in recruitment from these particular schools. Instead, representatives from technical schools, military branches, and cosmetology programs are much more prevalent.

Noting Robin's quote that "hiring is key," the hiring practices of the district were not discussed by interviewees much. In fact, many of the interviewees were unsure of the process, except through their own hiring experience. After repeated attempts to interview the human resources director, I was not able to reach them. The human resources director position was in flux during data collection, thus, I was not able to interview someone in such a position. I do not

believe this is a common practice among human resource directors in the district. Upon completion of this research, I learned that a veteran teacher has now taken the reins and providing credibility and stability in the position. With a seasoned person in such a leadership role, I would definitely be interested in hearing more about the current hiring process as well as qualities the district looks for in its future personnel.

One particular tension of note is here is the time commitment by school personnel. While Marie wanted to find educators who would work past the normal 8 to 3 pm schedule, Adrienne discussed how her colleague only wanted to work 8 to 3 pm and not any time beyond that. The interviewees' responses do not help tease out this particular issue, however, several discussed the "extra" work they conduct outside of normal hours to help their students be successful. Perhaps through my sampling method, I managed to only interview school personnel who were committed to their students' college-going efforts. I would have liked to understand more about those who were less committed and potential constraints which limited their time beyond 8 to 3.

Lastly, the findings of this study showed that the school district is working to establish structural supports in place to encourage a college-going culture. Knight-Diop's (2010) study necessitated the following three structural supports: an academically rigorous environment, college advisement, and co-curricular/extracurricular activities. From the interviews, it can be inferred that the school district's curricular offerings were intended to be rigorous, with the increase of AP offerings in the school district. Additionally, there were a large number of co-curricular and extracurricular activities available in the district. Recently, the school district was able to access a grant because of its large low-income, first generation student population and obtain a college advisor. However, according to Grant, the "lack of participation in these supports from the student has been detrimental to building such a culture."

In addition, the evaluation of implemented programs, processes, and policies to determine

continuance was listed. Beth, an administrator, stated that "guidance, support, and reallocation

of resources to help buildings meet the needs of their kids and get them on grade level." Often,

the administration sets the expectations of students and teachers, teachers hold students to those

expectations, and counselors support such expectations by giving students access to college

knowledge tools. Each of the interviewees supported these assumptions. The next theme

expands on outer layers of Perna's (2006) model to help make sense of what is happening

regarding college-going in the district.

Theme 3: "Our schools are dropout factories"

> *The fact is the early schools of the county were like angel's visits are said to be, few and far between; and the whole educational system – if system it may be called – of* [Woodview] *County, in common with the state, was almost without order or management. There were good schools taught, but as compared with the present system, and its advantages, there were far inferior...The popular standard of education was low, owing to the peculiar incidents and surroundings of pioneer life. The country was sparsely settled, and the people generally poor; and however anxious they may have been for good educational advantages, it was utterly impossible to obtain them.* (Smith, 1876, p. 233).

Today, Woodview is home to 21 public schools, a charter school, 9 parish schools, a

private university, and a public community college, yet the sentiment (see above quote)

regarding its public education system echoed in the 1800's and in 1980 still rings true. Through

the means of an informal survey, Johnson and Veach (1980) found that the residents of

Woodview thought education to be the weakest of all services offered and a primary cause of

residents leaving the area, especially those more educated. At a recent business development

forum sponsored by the local chamber of commerce, a community organization presented the

results of a similar perception survey. The top five reasons respondents cited for their choice to

live outside of Woodview included (in rank order): 1) Job opportunities; 2) Affordability and

cost of living; 3) Entertainment options; 4) Educational system; and 5) Proximity to family/dining options. The top five reasons respondents stated for choosing to live in Woodview included (in rank order): 1) Proximity to family; 2) Affordability; 3) Proximity to friends; 4) Job opportunities; and 5) Affordable housing.

Still, 130 years later, the educational system and city are not perceived positively. Perceptions, both internal and external, often differ by individual and assist in shaping opinions of, in this case, a school district. Grant described it in this way:

Perception is not reality, for the most part; but there's always an element of truth in perception. There's something that's created the perception. So I don't dismiss it altogether and say, "Oh, those people don't know what they're talking about." Now, their idea of what's real here is usually blown way out of proportion, but there's an element of truth. There's something that's gone on here that has "frightened" people, or sent them in another direction; given them the idea that they can't get a good education here. And I think when they really sit down and think about it, they understand they can get a good education.

The educational system in Woodview has worked to reinvent itself over the years; however, as Jillian suggested "the city's reputation automatically transpires to the school system." In fact, the negative perceptions of the city spill over to the city of Woodview and vice versa. However, there are some that understand the complexity of Woodview but struggle to explain the interconnections. Judy commented that some in the community "recognize that for the community to grow you have to have a good education system."

Pattern 3.1: Perceptions of Woodview School District. When asked about the perception of Woodview's school district, the interviewees responded honestly and thoughtfully.

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The immediate response of several interviewees was the community's negative perception of the school district. Many times, their responses coupled the perception of the school district with perception of the city (see *Pattern 3.2*) making it difficult to tease out.

Lena expressed her concern with comments she heard over the years about the school district from the community, especially the perception that "our schools are dropout factories." The metaphor that Woodview's schools are another type of factory is interesting especially in the context of this particular city. With a large industrial presence, many of the students in the school district find low-skilled jobs in the factories soon after high school graduation, postponing their postsecondary education.

The safety of students and staff is a major concern of residents in Woodview. A few interviewees reported that the local newspaper and media jump on the chance to report safety issues at the public schools which aids in community members' perception of the public schools as unsafe, according to Jillian. Michelle discussed others' observations "that our kids are terrible, that it's nothing but gang bangers and that it's something to be scared of. I don't agree with that at all." Robin talked about calls she has received from parents who were thinking of transferring their children to the district's public schools wondering,

> Are their kids going to be safe? And how's the academics in your school? When I get
>
> calls from parents from Catholic and private schools who are thinking of transferring
>
> their child here, the first thing is safety, the second thing is academics. Those are the two
>
> things they focus on…

Grant acknowledged "There's a perception that, 'Oh, it's not safe.' Well, it is safe, but there is kind of a – I don't know – certain set of cultural behaviors that frighten certain people away."

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Interviewees did not specifically reveal these cultural behaviors. Perhaps by defining these behaviors the school district can address them with appropriate solutions.

Interviewees discussed the unfair and incorrect reputation of the school district, often perpetuated by those with very little or no connection to the school district. Beth stated, "I'm okay with you talking about something if you really have a thorough knowledge, but if you're going to complain about WPS why don't you get in WPS…just get in a school before you complain about it." Judy agreed, saying "There's lots of rumors around Woodview about how bad the school system is and these are people who have never been in [these] schools." Beth and Adrienne agreed that teachers and staff feed into the negative perception of the school and that many of their children do not attend the public schools. Unfortunately, as Jillian noted, "We internally are our own worst enemy…We investigated this in early 2000's. What we discovered is…we internally need to quit complaining about ourselves and be a part of the solution; otherwise we're not going to help that perception." Jillian refuted the negative perception as she did not feel it fit the quality teachers and students in the district. Additionally, Lena felt that Woodview residents who choose to have their student(s) attend the public school experience had high satisfaction.

In order to address the negative perceptions of the school district, work has begun toward reimagining the entire school system. Robert discussed the strategic direction of the campaign:

> We've got a four-year goal…[goal] one, it'll be on academics, what we can do
> academically. Goal number two, it's the culture…the culture of the district has evolved
> so how does the community and students feel about the teachers and the district? In other
> words, when people say, oh, I wouldn't go to Woodview public schools. Well, why?
> Why are you saying that?…So we got a big piece on just the culture and decision-making

process, it has to change to where the people feel better about Woodview and they feel

better about Woodview when they feel better about the schools. And the next piece is

what can we do with the community. How can we make the community feel better?

That's where we're talking about parents. We're also talking about what can we do for the

city of Woodview, what we can do for our kids to get employed…And our fourth one has

to do with all of the efficiencies and all the structures that need to go along in the district,

in the school district, things that need to be able to change, and those are partly the

board's issue.

Beth noted that the reimagine campaign is not "trying to say this is what's wrong, this is what we

need fix. We're just trying to say everything that we've done has gotten us to this point, and

now we need to reimagine to move on."

In addition to the reimagining work of the school district, Grant expressed the need for

"more positive press" of the happenings within the schools to help address perceptions. Marie

expressed that the school district "consciously make an effort to get our positive stories out

there." For instance, press around the school district being "a real asset…in responding to

business needs" would assist in such efforts. Sheila and Thomas agreed that the success stories

of students who have graduated from the district and are doing well need to be passed down to

current students as an additional source of motivation. Additionally, Lena expressed efforts from

community organizations, "companies, leaders of businesses, hospitals and organizations that

support Woodview Public Schools; people want the district's reputation to improve as it impacts

property value and the workforce in Woodview. They just don't know how."

From the interviewees' responses, it seemed that the perceptions of the school district in

Woodview differed depending on the amount of contact the individual had with the district.

Overall, the interviewees displayed relatively positive impressions of the district themselves and talked openly about the negative perceptions they have heard from others. It is a difficult task to continue to express the positive aspects of the district while combating such negative perceptions. However, the interviewees seemed committed to this work. The goals of the district are hefty; however, if the root causes have been correctly identified, progress will be made in shifting perceptions of the school district and perhaps improving college-going.

Pattern 3.2: "A depressed community." Driving through Woodview today, boarded up factories and dilapidated houses sit vacant awaiting revitalization. At each entrance into the city limits a sign denouncing racism stands. The smoke from the factories that survived post-industrialism form the sky. In fact, it is hard to tell the smoke from the sky. Some of the old school buildings that have closed due to a declining population have been transformed to address community needs while others still sit hoping the population swings back up and can be used for education again in the near future. Businesses come and go. In fact, more mom-and-pop shops are taking over the city. The area parks still remain a highlight. This was not the imagined future for Woodview.

Destined to become a hub of intermodal transport, the booming industrialism in Woodview during the early 1900's attracted several businesses and employers. Settlers came to the area in hopes of fertile areas for farming. Businesses, such as iron works, hog rings and ringers, wool mills, carriage and buggy makers, flour mills, beer makers, and animal oil makers were attracted to its central location in the state and close proximity to major cities in surrounding states. Because of its location, railroad companies were also attracted (Smith, 1876). Congress passed an act in 1850 that created a railroad line and designated Woodview as one of its main stations (Smith, 1876). Soon, more tracks were built to other locations making

Woodview vital in the transportation of goods. Factories started popping up in the late 1800's

and early 1900s. With these openings, an abundance of high-paying, physical (and dirty) jobs

became available. Men, with often little education, seized the opportunity to provide for their

families.

For several years, Woodview's population was able to afford its residents a comfortable

living. One interviewee spoke of the job opportunities available for high school graduates at the

time. He stated,

> My first year of teaching [including coaching two sports], I made $1,600. My buddies
>
> that went to work at places here in town were making $13,000. And here I was a college
>
> graduate and they were making so much more money than me.

While Woodview was once filled with dirt roads, its population quickly grew to meet the

industrial needs of the nation. The promise of high wages lured many to Woodview, which, at

its peak, topped 90,000 residents. Now, in 2015, still classified as a small city by the U.S.

Census Bureau (2011), Woodview's population rests under 75,000. A few of the interviewees

discussed that early leaders of the city and their "lack of visioning" may have missed

opportunities that ultimately resulted in long-term losses for Woodview.

With Woodview being known as a place with heavy industrial employers after WWII and

into the 1980s, some manufacturers and other industrial employers relocated to find better jobs

because of plant closings, but some downsized and remained, creating a predominantly blue-

collar and low-income city (Johnson & Veach, 1980). Union strikes in the 1990's took hold all

around the city. Citing costs and the transition to what became known as a knowledge economy,

factories began to close and took some of the city's population with them. Since this first wave

of closings, Woodview has yet to recover in terms of population and business recovery. Sheila stated,

> I think that economically when we look at the population of what Woodview used to be, when I got out of high school, it was booming. I could name all the factories here. You really didn't have to have a high school degree. And then I look at now how you drive around the town…and when I open my reticular, I see all these boarded up buildings, depressed areas, empty lots where there were houses standing, and I just think that we don't have the economy like we used to. So we've had to cut programs, do more with less. I think the economy has a lot to do with it. I feel like if we had more of a base where we could have big industry, high paying jobs and everything like that, I think people would – it would change. But I think even if you look at the population, it's shrinking. So I think that has a lot to do with it. It's just very depressed.

While the 2010 median income for state residents averaged at about $55,222, Woodview residents averaged $38,236 (Adults with college degrees, 2011). Even with the many plant closings, manufacturing still seems to be a primary employer of Woodview and surrounding community residents. Unfortunately, those high-paying low-skilled jobs that were once in great abundance are not as readily available because of the shift in middle- to high-skilled employment. Judy noted that the wage of jobs today "really doesn't provide enough to support a family...There are jobs, but I'm not sure if there are jobs that really people can begin to build a life with."

Racial divides are also present in the community. When the public educational system was created, there was a small population of people of color in the city. By 1918, 1,067 African Americans were recorded in Woodview and worked as unskilled laborers who served as either

servants or day laborers in one of two factories (Long, 1918). In fact, most of the African-American population was situated in one of four areas of Woodview, primarily due to housing segregation but also because one of those areas was close to the factories in which the men worked as chefs or cooks (Long, 1918). It was not until the 1950's that influxes of African American families began moving to Woodview. Their children did not start appearing in local high schools until the late 1960's and early 1970's. Judy, who graduated during this time, noted only five African Americans in her graduating class at the time.

The late 1960's also brought about the desegregation of schools to give, as Judy described, "everyone a fair chance." Remnants of past discrimination can be seen while driving by neighborhoods and their schools. Many in the community acknowledge that the city's churches are some of the most segregated places. Marie spoke about the divide in the educational system:

> I was at my first meeting, where you have all people with at least a master's degree in the room. And the African American women would stand up and say racial things about how their children have been discriminated against in school how their path has been hard, and why. And I was just kind of like "Where am I?" And I just felt there was this huge divide still between the Anglo culture and the African American culture… Now, I feel less that way. [The previous superintendent] recruited heavily to make sure there was a strong African American presence in the leadership ranks.

The aftermath of disciplining seven African American students in the early 2000's resulted in the community taking "a long time to feel trust with one another," said Jillian.

The challenges of this postindustrial community continue to rise as its population becomes increasingly low-income and African American. The decline in population and

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businesses has created an almost dire situation in Woodview. Despite these challenges, several

of the interviewees are very involved in community efforts, as discussed in *Pattern 3.3*.

Pattern 3.3: "Our Kids Deserve Better." Several of the interviewees described

community efforts designed to address the perception of Woodview—its population and

educational system. Similar to urban cities, community agencies in Woodview struggle to

provide services to those who are high-poverty and high-minority, especially with issues of teen

pregnancy, abuse, mental health, and unemployment. However, there have been several events,

especially recently, that the community hopes have a positive effect on the city.

When asked about events that have negatively or positively affected the educational

system, several of the interviewees initially pointed to the community's empowerment in passing

the tax referendum to fund the new high schools. Lena reflected that

> When the sales tax referendum passed, that was like, okay. I don't care what people got
>
> behind it for, but Woodview got behind something that was positive and it happened. It
>
> didn't happen in [the surrounding areas]. It's a loud message. I think primarily we finally
>
> empowered some African Americans to vote…Instead of just griping about what people
>
> don't want for our kids or can't relate to our – well, be a part of the solution.

That vote confirmed the need that "our kids deserve better," Lena stated. She added, "I think

different people feel differently about the school district….I think there's some major events that

have contributed to some positive things happening…I believe the community believes that our

kids deserve better." A potential negative aspect was the school district's history of

experimentation of pilots and other initiatives, such as a School Improvement Grant (SIG),

implemented to support student success as many of these were not institutionalized and did not

materialize into significant student outcomes. Maurice acknowledged, "You've got these flavor

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of the month programs, the shiny rocks…a SIG grant is the mother of all shiny rocks." Derek found that when selecting programs to implement in the district "you have to match the expectations and can you work with your kids to live up to those expectations." Additionally, Michelle noted the upcoming PARCC experimentation in schools. Institutionalization implies direction as well as aligning resources while experimentation implies uncertainty.

Additionally, some interviewees pointed to grassroots efforts by the community to change the perception and reputation of the city. Beth acknowledged,

> If you want businesses and such to move to Woodview then the community needs to be part of the solution now. We have a momentum called Grow Woodview that is helping with that whole issue. Galvanizing the whole – the agencies, the community and the school district to really be part of the solution. So I think the people have recognized it's a huge effort.

Partnerships, especially with the area's major companies, are vital to this effort. Jillian explained, "It's really a community that has to work together. I don't think our public school system can do everything so how can we work with all these other wonderful organizations and yet we're all in this together. We're trying to achieve the same goals." Additionally, Beth said, "We don't get a choice [about which students we accept], we're taking what our community is giving us. So if there are specific problems with the kids in the schools we need help from the community to help solve that."

Similar to the school district, the perception and/or reputation of the city is also very negative. For instance, Robin spoke of her arrival in Woodview when she was looking for a place to live and stated,

Where I developed my image or my thoughts were from the Woodview people itself. When I got here, the realtors would say, don't get an apartment in Woodview, go to Forrest. Don't buy a house in Woodview. Talking to other community members, oh it's bad, they are unsafe…[it's] an urban area. So any negative images I got of Woodview were from the people itself.

Marie said, "I always think Woodview is well, in most communities, portrayed in a negative light." Stacy added that the perception of Woodview by surrounding communities is negative.

Engaging the community of Woodview is extremely important to reverse the school district's image. As stated earlier, the negative perceptions of the school district and city were often intertwined. To fix one, the other needs to be addressed. In order to shift the negative perceptions, Robert noted, "We're working really hard in trying to get the community up and going and try to get ourselves in a position to where people feel good about what we're doing, and then involve as many people as we can, especially the families." Robert pointed to the past strained relationship with the city: "For years there was backlash, especially with the City. The City didn't work with us very well at all for a number of years, I think it's better now." Derek also acknowledged that the "community has to invest" for Woodview to rebound. Renee contended that "until that focus is back on the kids, nothing is going to change." Adrienne agreed that politics were in play in the educational system and that it was the kids who were being left out of the conversation. Still, Adrienne believed, "We are headed in the right direction…If we change the culture [of the district], we change the outlook of the schools."

Progressive, committed, and visionary leaders are vital to this effort and interviewees acknowledged that some of those leaders are currently present in organizations. As Derek stated, these visionary leaders work to get "the right people on the bus"; they are fearless, take risks,

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make tough decisions, and "have high expectations that make everyone follow those expectations." However, as Thomas urged, those leaders need to have an understanding of Woodview itself and what it needs to thrive. This echoes Maurice's earlier point of knowing the culture of the school district and city to be effective.

A few interviewees discussed raising expectations for their students, a point emphasized recently within the school district. The most recent job posting for the current superintendent role emphasized that the person selected needed to set high expectations for students. Additionally, community focus groups convened to provide input on qualities they wanted to see in the next superintendent of the school district. The words "high expectations" also appeared in comments of other administrators, teachers, parents, and community members. Renee acknowledged that as a school district "We don't want okay anymore. We want better than okay." Stacy affirmed, "I want them to be well rounded when they leave. It's not about being in [high school]. It's about being successful after you leave us. That's when it counts."

Analysis

College-going in post-industrial cities has been understudied. Such cities are mired in context and often very complex to study. Thus, it is difficult to tease out the root cause(s) to tackle issues appropriately. Interviewees openly discussed the "depressed community" of Woodview (*Pattern 3.2*) and the school and community context (*Pattern 3.1*). Less discussed was the relationship between the two.

Shifting demographics, job loss and factory closings, and a struggling educational system underlie Woodview's history. While the relationship between these factors is difficult to understand, it is clear that economic and sociological contexts play a role in the city's outcome and need further exploration. Perna's (2006) model helps to conceptualize how the different

contexts interconnect. Additionally, this particular theme shone light on Perna's (2006) social, economic, and policy contextual layer. According to Perna (2006), the social, economic, and policy context affects the higher education context that affects the school and community context and finally affects the habitus, or individual college choice of students. Each of these contexts intersects, and when all of the contexts are struggling, the negative effects are amplified. Jillian and Renee described it as "the domino effect."

Population decline, state politics and the shift from an industrial economy have led to job loss in Woodview and its surrounding towns. As factories and other companies began to close and relocate in the 1990s, the population began to decline. Wilson's (1996) work helped to explain this intricate link between the contexts of community and the world of work. Wilson (1996) found that unemployment in Chicago's inner city neighborhoods interconnected with other societal issues (i.e., crime, family dissolution, welfare, etc.). Thus, the effects of unemployment and those societal issues could not be understood separately. Wilson (1996) posited,

> The problems reported by the residents of poor Chicago neighborhoods are not a
> consequence of poverty alone. Something far more devastating has happened that can
> only be attributed to the emergence of concentrated and persistent joblessness and its
> crippling effects on neighborhoods, families, and individuals. (p. 17)

Since this first wave of factory closings, Woodview has yet to recover in terms of population and business. Jillian posited, "We [Woodview] really never transitioned beyond that to really capture what our potential was after that whole industrial age." Instead, the city rested on its laurels. The majority of jobs available in the area are factory work for which the minimum requirement is a high school diploma or GED. Wilson (1996) found that job loss in

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manufacturing sectors disproportionately affected low-skilled African Americans. Some specialty work (i.e., welding, manufacturing) may require a credential or certificate that can be obtained through company training or through the local community college.

In the current climate, companies are seeking tax breaks and choose to relocate if these are not granted. This has been detrimental to the workforce and population of the area. Currently, the African American population is over 23% and those living below poverty level is also around 23% residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). In fact, the percentage of African American population in Woodview is greater than the percentage of the African American population in the state. Still, it takes time for the policies, programs, and services to catch up to the needs of that prevalent population in the district.

Overall the community recognized the need for a strong educational system to assist in growing the city as discussed in *Pattern 3.3*. Unfortunately, solutions to do so were not as easily recognized. It is clear that the decline in jobs has had a negative effect on Woodview which in turn, has affected the school district. However, the extent of the effect is unclear. The current focus of a local grassroots organization is to halt the large flow of residents and businesses leaving Woodview by addressing imperatives determined by local business leaders and interested community members. Education was the only imperative that was listed first for the different focus groups. It will be interesting to see the solutions provided to assist in bettering the local educational system in concert with promoting economic and workforce development in Woodview.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion, Implications & Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the college-going culture for low-income African American students through perceptions of school personnel regarding in a large, public, Midwestern school district. Chapter 1 provided context for the purpose of this study. Literature that connected the main concepts of the study was presented in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 featured the research methods and conceptual framework that grounded this particular research. Findings and accompanying analysis rounded out Chapter 4. Analyzing the data collected produced three themes: 1) *"Window dressing" structures: Unpacking the current college-going culture for low-income African American students of Woodview*; 2) *"Good Enough:" Perceptions of low-income African American students and their families in Woodview*; and 3) *"Our schools are dropout factories:" Connecting the school district and sociopolitical context of Woodview.*

A summary of the findings, the implications of the study, and recommendations for future research conclude this study. The first section of the chapter discusses the study's findings, answers the research questions, and provides a clear connection to the conceptual framework. The second part of the chapter states implications of the study for large, non-urban, non-rural school districts, researchers, and low-income African American students. Lastly, a list of recommendations provides ideas for future research in this field of study.

Summary of Findings

In this section, a summary of each research question is presented. Relevant literature is added to strengthen the summary. Appendix F shows a tool used to connect this study's research questions, findings and patterns, and conclusions.

RQ: What is the college-going culture for low-income African American students in a mid-size, Midwestern school district?

This first research question attempted to investigate the current college-going culture for low-income African American students attending public schools in Woodview. In particular, Themes 1 and 2 help to answer this particular question. Unpacking the current structure of the college-going culture of the school district removed "window dressing" and instead revealed inconsistency in the message of college-going among school personnel. The findings, in concert with observations, brought awareness to better defining a college-going culture. If left to observations, the data would have positively revealed a community committed to improving education. However, the bigger picture tells a different story.

As a result of a recent tax referendum, the residents of Woodview voted to renovate the two existing district high school buildings, including their athletic facilities. Upon entering the buildings, quotes of famous presidents and war generals greet students, faculty, staff, and visitors. In addition to updating auditoriums, libraries, and offices, school personnel dedicated new spaces to aspiring musicians and singers with studios; they also upgraded the athletic facilities to make them comparable to local schools. Grant acknowledged that the new buildings were overdue and needed to be completed to match the quality instruction being done inside the school. However, Jillian warned that without a true commitment to improving the structure within schools, the new facilities will only serve as 'Potemkin villages.' Supporting this statement, Sheila agreed, "Remodeling the high schools, that's window dressing. We've got to look at these test scores and we've got to look at these kids' graduation rates. They're down." Jillian agreed "These buildings have got to represent the quality of education that goes on in there", can't just be window dressing."

Using McClafferty et al.'s (2002) definition of a college-going culture brought structure to a loosely defined culture and allowed for a fuller presentation of the college-going culture at Woodview. Several interviewees defined college-going culture differently as there was no common language around such a culture. Thus, McClafferty et al.'s (2002) principles—college talk, clear expectations, information and resources, comprehensive counseling model, testing and curriculum, faculty involvement, family involvement, college partnerships, and articulation—served as a key starting place to help deconstruct the current college-going culture.

While expectations of college-going among low-income African American students were apparent from the school personnel interviewed, it is very difficult to interpret the current college-going culture because of variation in their responses. Solely using the responses within *Pattern 1.1* uncovered an inconclusive college-going culture. Fortunately, conceptual frameworks help to identify interconnections between concepts and provide clarity where needed. McClafferty et al.'s (2002) work to define a college-going culture provided the clarity needed for this study. Overall, McClafferty et al.'s (2002) definition of a college-going culture informed Perna's (2006) school and community contextual layer by revealing structural supports and resources available in Woodview's school district. The majority of participants found evidence of seven of the nine principles present—college talk, clear expectations, information and resources, testing and curriculum, faculty involvement, family involvement and college partnerships.

McClafferty et al.'s (2002) nine principles bound what an effective college-going culture includes and does not include. However, the researchers provided no rank order to the principles. A conceptual model of the nine principles is displayed in Figure 3. In this model,

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there is no hierarchy between the nine principles, however, each plays an important role in

produce a college-going culture but one is not more important than the other.

College-Going Culture								
College Talk	Clear Expectations	Information & Resources	Comprehensive Counseling Model	Testing & Curriculum	Faculty Involvement	Family Involvement	College Partnerships	Articulation

Figure 3. Adapted from McClafferty et al. (2002). Nine principles of a college-going culture.

Of the nine principles proposed by McClafferty et al. (2002), three shown by this study's

findings—college talk, clear expectations, and articulation—are more complex in nature, in that

they focus on the awareness, reflection, and shifting of mindsets of the individual personnel.

These principles were more intricate as relationship building with students was primary as

opposed to conducting activities. Expectations, in general, were discussed at length in a majority

of the interviews. However, clear expectations were less apparent. In contrast to Almond's

(2013) findings in which she found practices that supported the school's mission of college-

going coupled with high expectations of teachers toward students, this study found unclear

expectations of students as well as an unclear definition of the school district's mission of

"Education for Success." An earlier mission of the school district, "All Children Can Learn,"

recognized the role of school personnel to "serve and educate ALL children that come to our

doors." The current mission of the school district, "Educating for Success," is simple, yet

unclear (Woodview Public Schools, 2015). Does this mean success in college, success in the

workplace, or success in life? Interviewees' responses suggested that success was defined

through a school personnel's realistic goal of the completion of their K-12 education. According

to Sheila, the mission was

To educate all students for lifelong success. Our vision is that all students will become

responsible, caring and productive citizens of society in a setting where: students,

parents, staff, and community members share responsibility; district leadership motivates

people, policies, and decisions; and all resources are used effectively and efficiently.

After assembling the findings of this study, I assert that two of the principles—college

talk and clear expectations—form the foundation of a college-going culture. Hence, a hierarchy

is created among the principles. The other seven principles are important to creating an effective

college-going culture but are needed to a lesser degree. College talk focuses on the role that

school personnel play in the college preparation process and "requires clear, ongoing

communications with students about what it takes to get to college" (McClafferty et al., 2002, p.

10). Within this principle, school personnel share experiences of their educational background

and unearth hidden assumptions about who should access college. In clear expectations, self-

awareness and reflection clarify the role of school personnel in the college and career readiness

of their students (McClafferty et al.). Both college talk and clear expectations are two of the

hardest to maintain because of the self-awareness and reflection work required by school

personnel; however, in relation to the findings of this study, these two are the most important in

the creation and sustainment of a college-going culture (see Figure 4).

College Talk & Clear Expectations						
Information & Resources	Comprehensive Counseling Model	Testing & Curriculum	Faculty Involvement	Family Involvement	College Partnerships	Articulation

Figure 4. New conceptual model for Proposed College-Going Culture Model.

As discussed above, school personnel play an important role in each of the nine principles. In addition to the nine principles, McClafferty et al. (2002) identified four conditions necessary to realize fully a college-going culture. The four conditions include the following: committed leadership; a consistent message about college-going from all school personnel; counselors' access to college knowledge tools; and partnering opportunities between teachers/counselors, students, and parents. McClafferty et al. (2002) stated that all of these conditions are necessary for such a culture. Through data collection and analysis, I was able to find all four conditions evident in Woodview. However, each condition varied in strength. The interviews provided evidence of committed leadership and that counselors had access to tools to assist students in the college search process. I did find that a consistent message and partnering opportunities between parents and school personnel were a bit lacking as discussed above. Again, McClafferty et al. (2002) did not provide a hierarchy of the conditions. Instead, it was stated that all conditions needed to be present. I, too, might argue that a model could be developed to visually show the conditions in relation to each other.

The findings of this study also support Auwarter and Aruguete's (2010) findings that multiple parts of student backgrounds amplify the effects of teacher expectations. Thus, while their children were expected to attend college, the added effects of being low-income and African American resulted in lower expectations regarding college-going. While McClafferty et al.'s (2002) college-going culture model explored common elements of schools that were successful in effecting a college-going culture with large populations of underrepresented students, I challenge the model's ability to help make sense of the organizational habitus void of the intersections of race, gender and class. In fact, the principles could vary for particular populations dependent on the race, gender, and/or class of the students and the school personnel.

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Overall, I conclude that the current college-going culture for low-income African Americans seems to be supportive of realistic plans made by students. Several interviewees made reference to students' unrealistic plans post-high school of which they were not supportive. Establishing relationships with students allowed school personnel to gain trust in order to truly help the student focus on a path that best fit them.

A couple of assumptions were made when undertaking this study. In the current environment emphasizing student outcomes around completion, I assumed that the school district wanted and promoted a college-going culture. This particular research question implied that there is currently a college-going culture and that the school district has taken steps to get there. However, a college-going culture may not have been the main goal of the district. As the message surrounding college-going was inconsistent, I was unclear of the mission of the school district. Perhaps it might have been more effective to ask the interviewees about their goal for students after high school rather than assuming that the goal was college-going.

SQ1: How does the organizational habitus of a mid-size, public Midwestern school district shape the college-going culture for low-income African American students?

In order to better understand the relationship between the organizational habitus of the school district and the college-going culture for low-income African American students, the organizational habitus needed to be defined. As stated earlier, there is a difference between organizational culture and organizational habitus. The question "Should all kids go to college?" examines organizational culture. However, exploration of the beliefs of school personnel regarding college-going for low-income African American students examines organizational habitus. In this study, organizational habitus intersects beliefs and values of school personnel with race and class of a particular group of students. Almond (2013, personal communication)

defined organizational habitus as "the collective beliefs of people within an organization and how those beliefs lead to actions that successfully put to work the organization's mission." The organizational habitus of this mid-size, public Midwestern school district regarding college-going involves the collective belief that all students, particularly low-income African American students, should have a "meaningful experience post high school." This statement does not imply college but rather some experience that could provide a good wage and a comfortable living for students. As the organizational habitus shapes the college-going culture, it is not surprising then that Woodview lacks a large college-going population among the low-income African American students.

Deconstructing the organizational habitus of the school district in Woodview resulted in school personnel discussing the importance of setting realistic expectations of college-going for low-income African American students. McDonough (1997) posited that to understand organizational habitus, the high school context also needed to be understood. The high school context is powerful in understanding student transitions to postsecondary education. Engberg and Wolniak (2010) affirmed that examination of the high school context is needed to better understand the postsecondary outcomes of its students. The high schools in Woodview are of large importance to its community and aid in the social reproduction, especially regarding the education, of its students.

Engberg and Wolniak's (2010) work on the context of high school in relation to postsecondary outcomes connects to Cookson's (2014) work of collective memory as each high school has its own story, or narrative, of students and their families. Cookson's comparative institutional approach uncovered five organizational narratives of class reproduction in high schools: architectural/ascetic, authority, pedagogic/curriculum, definition of self, and

community. Additionally, Cookson's main finding was that collective memories of high schools differed by the socioeconomic class of their students. Opposed to the upper-class message where students learn "about power, how to acquire it, how to use it, and how to keep it" (Cookson, 2014, p. 55), the collective memories of working-class students "are social blinders that shut out social peripheral vision and condemn many young adults to a life of labor without much hope of upward mobility" (Cookson, 2014, p. 93). The collective memories of under-class students "remind students that their chances of success are limited" (Cookson, 2014, p. 102) and "are powerful. They share a social and economic experience that is white-hot with emotion, frustration and struggle…have a firm grasp of the basic facts of American life today. They know that power is real…" (p. 104).

The narratives of Cookson's (2014) working class and underclass students speak to the perceptions of school personnel regarding the experiences of their students in Woodview. Half of the interviewees were first-generation and six interviewees were raised in the community. These interviewees spoke of their own parents' working class backgrounds and how that played a role in the expectation to attend college. Referencing Bourdieu's (1977) study of habitus, the aspirations and beliefs formed about education resulted from the daily interactions with those in similar classes, while the dominant class—middle- to high-income, educated Whites— forms the values, norms, and structure of Woodview as they have power (formal and informal) and influence. It is no surprise then that the expectation of students were set at just "good enough," especially for those interviewees that went to school in Woodview themselves. That same message might have been passed down to them.

It is the hope that with the new "window dressings," or buildings/renovations, that a new collective memory forms and assists in changing the outcomes for low-income African American

students in Woodview. With one organizational narrative changed, in this case, the

architectural/ascetic narrative, naturally, the other narratives (pedagogic/curriculum, authority,

definition of self, community) will adapt. Perhaps shifting those narratives allows for a new

collective memory to form despite potentially negative contextual influences. Thus, a shift in

perceptions of students and school district by school personnel in Woodview is necessary in

order to change the trajectory of this narrative and ultimately, the organizational habitus.

SQ2: How does the organizational habitus of a mid-size, public Midwestern school district
intersect with the beliefs, expectations, and behaviors of school personnel in promoting a
college-going culture for low-income African American students?

As discussed above, the organizational habitus, or collective belief, of the school district

was that all students, particularly low-income African American students, should have a

"meaningful experience post high school." This definition is important to exploring the

relationship between the organizational habitus of the school district and the beliefs,

expectations, and behaviors of its school personnel. Patterns from Theme 2 helped to address

this question. For this reason, I conclude that school personnel's' "good enough" expectations of

low-income African American students and unfavorable perceptions of their families promote a

culturally deficit view of low-income African American students in the district.

Of the four conditions identified by McClafferty et al. (2002) necessary to realize a

college-going culture, the fourth condition (partnering opportunities between school personnel,

students, and parents) seemed present but most deficient in the Woodview school district. When

asked of their role, most of the interviewees spoke to guiding and supporting students, families,

and school personnel. Michelle, a counselor, discussed "putting information out to students to

assist them in their path" by making college information available in different formats (i.e.,

website, bulletin boards, emails to students and teachers, etc.). Adrienne, another counselor,

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discussed her role as making sure she meets and even exceeds "whatever the expectations are for the district." Unfortunately, the quotes from Adrienne's colleague personified the "good enough" theme. While union issues and other external drivers were cited as primary reasons to not work "extra," Adrienne discussed the activities she provided for students and their families outside regular hours. These activities helped to support a college-going culture but were suspended because of Adrienne's junior staff status. It would be worthy to note other efforts stymied by senior personnel as well as their reasoning for halting such efforts.

Relationship building is extremely important to this work. Several interviewees spoke to the need for such relationships to exist. Many of the school personnel understood their role in setting high expectations, instead of accepting "good enough," for their students and modeling that expectation for others. As school personnel truly began to understand their students' circumstances, and in some cases, related it back to their own experiences, those relationships became important to changing the perceptions of low-income African American students and their families. In fact, school personnel who did so owned responsibility for those pieces under their control that contributed to student learning, instead of blaming students and their families. Conversations and interactions of school personnel with students around their own college experiences, described by Diamond et al. (2014) as micro political context, promotes acceptance of the responsibility for student learning by school personnel.

Intentional wording, especially around college-going, is necessary. McClafferty et al.'s (2002) principles of college talk and articulation spoke to this point; and both of the principles offer an opportunity for improvement for Woodview. Judy affirmed that "Recent studies show that children told to work hard and persist actually do better than if told they're doing a good job. So I've changed the way I talk to kids." There were few examples of how the district articulated

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the message of college from Pre-K through high school. Marie was one of the few interviewees who could point readily to examples of articulation. Most of these examples were activities (i.e., interest inventories, having former students coming back to visit), however, she spoke of many former students who had transitioned to college. The teacher's perspective regarding intentional wording is sorely needed as they have the most direct impact on student. Their perspective would allow for more understanding of the college talk and clear expectations provided to their students. The transcripts from the interviews point out coded language around race. It was often difficult to understand when the interviewee was describing low-income African American students or the student population as a whole. A few interviewees provided direct observations and experience of low-income African American students while I found myself working to unpack coded language around race for others. The "productive" and "wired" tension brought up in *Pattern 1.1* provides evidence of this issue.

In most effective systems, responsibility and accountability are shaped and shared between the parties involved. Inconsistent with Halvorsen, Lee and Andrade's (2009) findings of school districts successful in promoting college-going, Woodview school personnel did not own complete responsibility for their students' learning. Instead, ownership was often placed onto the students, along with their parents and families. Renee noted, "When told a certain subgroup is always low in achievement, when you force the hand so that everybody is equal in the servicing that they get, they find out that it wasn't the students at all, and that's scary." Grant's point regarding a strong curriculum emphasized Renee's point; however, a few of the interviewees contradicted this finding.

Faculty and family involvement are central to a school district's efforts in moving a culture forward. Several interviewees talked about the need for faculty to engage themselves

with their students and their community. Robin and Lena agreed that faculty can engage more if

they are a part of the community, citing a large number of educators who live outside the district

in which they teach. Marie looked for educators that were willing to work past "8 to 3" and truly

connect with the students on a more personal level. One of the goals mentioned by the

interviewees was to increase family involvement. Specifically, Maurice wanted to increase

participation at parent-teacher conferences. He acknowledged that this "tough work" was

imperative and that the school should "make sure it's important for when they do come in and

it's an opportunity."

School personnel spoke to the differential access of low- and high-income students in the

district, especially those of color. This study's findings are consistent with Roderick and

Nagaoka's (2011) findings that low-income students of have differential access to college

resources and support compared to their counterparts. Maurice's statement regarding low-

income African American families' lack of planning to attend college extended the point of

differential access.

Additionally, the patterns previously represented present perceptions of school personnel

on parental involvement as well as of the college choice of low-income African American

students. These patterns help to inform the habitus layer of Perna's (2006) college choice model.

Although these are the perceptions of school personnel, they could affect the college choice for

low-income African American students.

SQ3: How is the school district impacted by the larger sociopolitical context in terms of college-going?

Theme 3 addressed this question directly. After analyzing data, I conclude that the

school district's college-going efforts are intricately linked with the sociopolitical context of

Woodview. In such a tight community, the school district is impacted by its community and

vice-versa. The exploration of the current social, economic and policy contexts of the city were

needed to inform awareness of the current college-going culture. This study helped provide some

evidence of Perna's (2006) proposed conceptual model. To explain what happened in the school

district, the context of the city needed to be included. Thus, potential solutions that address both

contexts are necessary.

Using Perna's (2006) conceptual model of college choice in this case study to understand

the current college-going culture of low-income African American students in Woodview

necessitated the development of a research question. Initially, I had not included the outer layers

seen in Figure 1. Instead, I proposed the initial framework shown in Figure 5.
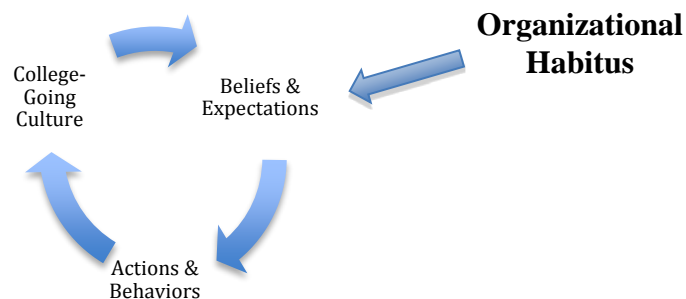

Figure 5. Initial Conceptual Framework Proposed.

With the suggestion of committee members to bind the case study further with the additional

contexts defined in Perna's (2000) model, I was able to develop research questions to better

understand the layers. This was perhaps one of the best additions to the study.

Although Perna (2006) suggested studying one contextual layer at a time, it was difficult

to separate the contextual layers as the interviewees often linked them together in their

responses. I initially attempted to study the school and community layer. However, the

sociopolitical context kept appearing in the interviewees' responses. Merriam (1998) found it

nearly impossible to separate context from issues. Without giving study to this final layer, the responsibility of low college-going would fall to the student's family whereas now low college-going could also be linked to a larger problem in Woodview—pervasive joblessness. Wilson's (1996) work provided evidence needed to link the joblessness and low education levels in Woodview together. This complements Stake's (2010) work in finding importance in studying both the foreground (beliefs and expectations of school personal) and background (Woodview) in concert with each other. Studying each layer separately pieces the story together differently and does not allow for relationships to become apparent.

While Perna's (2006) model helped to understand a macrolevel perspective of college choice of low-income African American students in Woodview, it was connecting this model to my initial proposal of potential factors affecting the college-going culture that provided direction for this study. Unfortunately, solutions to rectify the low college-going rates of low-income African American students in Woodview are complex. Thus, it is of great importance that community efforts focus its attention to studying root causes in order to affect real change. Moreover, recognizing Woodview as a 'place' allows for more extensive research of its structures, practices and norms to really begin to examine the college-going culture provided for its low-income African American students (Dancy, 2010). It is through this process that root causes are discovered to allow progress.

Implications for Practice and Research

The findings of this study have practical implications for three particular groups – school districts, researchers and low-income African American students.

Implications for Low-Income African American Students. First, the findings of this study are important for low-income African American students and their families. Data analysis

revealed "good enough" expectations of school personnel regarding college-going for these students. Additionally, a culturally deficit view of these students and their parents surfaced through the interviews. Students and their families can use this information to address how school personnel perceive their involvement to seek ways for more intentional collaborations. Families can also use this knowledge that school personnel have lower expectations of their children, thus, heightening their expectations at home.

The study revealed little in terms of the college-going patterns of low-income African American students in the blue-collar, postindustrial city of Woodview as well as their major influences. There was also little follow-up on outcomes of low-income African American post high-school graduation. While this study was exploratory, postsecondary schooling patterns are still inconclusive. The findings suggest that the "cousin effect" plays a large role in the postsecondary educational experiences of low-income African American students. However, confirmation from the students themselves might clarify the real effect of family on college-going. Additionally, a better understanding on the role that local factory jobs with high wages play in the college-going of these students is sorely needed. Observations of the current workforce show many low-income African American students opting to work in the local factories instead of continuing their education post-high school graduation. While society has changed, it would be interesting to explore the challenges current juniors and seniors in Woodview face regarding careers and education after high school.

Implications for School Districts. This particular study is important for school districts as they attempt to create and maintain a college-going culture for their students. Those school districts with large concentrations of students of color and who are low-income face additional challenges regarding college-going. This study provided insight into contextual layers not

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usually when working to understand college-going of students. In fact, this study employed systems thinking principles to help find potential root causes to the educational disparities that low-income African American students faced in Woodview. Continued work to hone in on those root causes are invaluable to the school district whose resources (money, time and staff) are short.

In addition, several interviewees discussed the laser focus of the school district on test scores. It is probable that this focus on low test scores was just a symptom, not a root cause. If so, test scores would have risen. Unfortunately, the needle has not moved because the root cause has yet to be discovered. The results of this study should urge school districts to explore other potential root causes to better understand the college-going culture for low-income African American students.

It is also important for school districts to note the findings of this study suggested that low-income African American students receive inconsistent messages about college-going in comparison to their peers. Whether intentional or not, those school districts committed to effecting a college-going culture for all students might find it valuable to explore the message particular groups are receiving from school personnel surrounding college-going. One potential reason for such inconsistency was because of the lack of clarity of the mission in Woodview's school district. Clarification of the school's mission, as well as a clear, consistent message communicated from school personnel to their students is needed.

In concert with school personnel providing a clear, consistent message about college-going, these messages should engender cultural competence and use an asset approach model to combat culturally deficit views referenced throughout the study (Kaplan & Owings, 2014). Doing such recognizes students' strengths and brings them into the conversation as a facilitator

rather than the conventional teacher-student relationship. The cultural asset approach is relatively new in the field of education. Strategies to help school personnel actualize a cultural asset approach is available, however, if the district were committed to this approach, professional development would be needed.

Continual work to connect efforts and align resources is necessary in this current "doing more with less" culture, especially in light of the depressed community in Woodview. Efforts that have partnered organizations with similar goals serve as examples of what can be done. Robert mentioned the alignment of Woodview Public Schools and the local park district as an effective partnership. Each school has a connected park, and, in an effort to align resources, the park district cuts the grass and shares playground resources with the local schools. There is a need to continue similar efforts.

Lastly, I was encouraged by how school personnel openly shared their stories. By opening up, school personnel reflectively responded and, in essence, became more self-aware. It was their stories that connected so well with the experiences of their students and let me as the researcher know their hearts were in the right place. They had a genuine concern and interest in helping students, particularly low-income African Americans students, to succeed, but it was not until they spoke of their own experiences that I was able to experience this too. It would be in the best interest of school districts to provide space and time for self-reflection of school personnel through professional development or some other means. Moreover, space and time for school personnel to address the principles of college talk and clear expectations with students would perhaps prove to be very beneficial to college-going efforts in the district.

Implications for Researchers. As researchers attempt to conduct studies in cities such as Woodview, attention to context is of importance. Perna's (2006) proposed conceptual model

on college-choice provided an excellent framework to include ecological and sociological considerations when exploring a topic such as this. By focusing on one layer, research often gets stopped short of potentially getting at the root cause.

Understanding the different messages relayed to students of differing races and classes was hard to distinguish during the interviewees, however, those messages that school personnel conveyed to their students versus that of their children showed stark differences. This led to the idea of interest convergence, one of the six major tenets of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Myers, 2005). A few of the interviewees no longer have children in the school district as they have aged and moved on to college. I would expect more commitment to seeing the school district in Woodview succeed for those school personnel who have invested in the community and chose for their child[ren] to be educated in the district.

Because of my insider influence, I was able to obtain interviews rather quickly (one interviewee only agreed because of my history with Woodview). Additionally, I was able to understand the language and acronyms used for the most part. This allowed the conversation to continue instead of stopping for explanation, a potential frustration for interviewees. I was not as familiar with K-12 literature so that terminology was a bit foreign at first. However, the interviewees were more than willing to provide a short explanation. Additionally, I was able to obtain further information through the use of my researcher skills. The insider experience allowed opportunities for interviews that I am not sure I would have had otherwise. Thus, I encourage more "insiders" to return to their communities and conduct needed research.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study led to additional questions worth exploring. While this study answered the intended research questions, it also serves as a springboard for continued research.

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First, this study was conducted in a single school district with a high-minority, high-poverty population. The additional context of being a postindustrial community added additional complexity. Thus, there is a need for replication of this study to include multiple case studies in communities with similar populations. Research should be conducted in similar communities to see if the same principles and conditions are present. In addition, a study may need to be conducted in high achieving school districts and/or those with higher income families to explore differences.

Several questions arise regarding the college-going culture framework provided by McClafferty et al. (2002) could inform future research. Who should provide each of the principles of a college-going culture? Should the principles be delivered in a linear order or as a combination? When should each principle be delivered? Answering such questions allows all those involved in creating and sustaining an effective college-going culture to become better aware of their role and potentially have a positive effect on the district's perception. Furthermore, studying the principles and conditions in a variety of contexts helps to situate how race, gender, and/or class plays a role in providing an effective college-going culture for students.

This study focused on the perceptions of school personnel as they set and implement policies. To get a complete picture of what is happening in Woodview, future studies would include the perspectives of parents, teachers, and students. Jillian posited there are

> Three elements to a successful education: First of all, give me a child that is curious and eager to learn; give me a teacher that is willing to deliver the quality education; and give me a parent that is going to support both of them at home and at school.

A better understanding of the role of parents, teachers, and of students would provide triangulation of the data sources and as well as possibly refute findings of this study. In addition, it would help fill out more of Perna's (2006) college choice model.

The value of education became an important aspect of this research. Through this case study, I found that school personnel perceived low-income African American families as having lower expectations of college-going. Additionally, it was perceived that these families place lower values on education. A study on the values of education, as well as on the expectations of college attendance for low-, middle-, and high-income Whites and African Americans would be useful in trying to understand the similarities and differences expressed by interviewees.

Throughout this study, I spoke to several interviewees who ranged from their 30s to 60s. The majority of the interviewees would be considered part of the Baby Boomer generation. Research on generational differences has revealed that each generation embrace different core values and attributes that have been affected by the events. Thus, the consistent message that not all students should attend college may be the message of this group but might differ from that of Generation X and Millennials. Future research might investigate potential differences of the value of education as well as the message given to students about college by generations.

Lastly, a few of the interviewees spoke of those who helped them form a view, often negative, of Woodview. Some were internal (school personnel) who spoke badly of the district and students while others were external to the district (i.e., students do not attend Woodview schools, realtors). More insight into the internal and external groups about their perceptions of the Woodview school district and how they came to have such perceptions would be useful. Such a study would inform those attempting to shift the perception and/or reputation of the school district as well as clear up any misinformation about the district to its critics.

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Closing Thoughts

This case study explored the current college-going culture of a mid-size Midwestern school district. The conceptual framework focused on the beliefs, expectations and actions of school personnel trying to create and sustain a college-going culture. The literature presented various views of higher education of school personnel as it related to the race and socioeconomic status of students and families. The sixteen individuals interviewed for the study stated a consistent message about college-going. That is, all students should have access to a "meaningful experience post-high school." Moreover, this study allowed more insight into what Perecman and Curran (2006) described as the "ruptures between individuals' stated opinions and beliefs…and their actual behaviors." Relationship building between school personnel and students, along with intentional wording are needed to positively impact the college-going culture of this school district. The collective impact of relationship building and intentional wording coupled with activities encouraging college-going beginning in elementary school and high expectations would develop a stronger college-going culture for low-income African American students in Woodview.

The findings, interpretations, and conclusions have been filtered by my own worldview. Had another researcher analyzed the interview data, emphasis on certain themes might be different. As best as possible, I worked hard to stay objective and protect the interviews from my potential biases. I was humbled hearing the stories of the interviewees about their backgrounds. I wished at that moment their students were able to witness such stories and the emotions that followed. Their stories provided instant connection to the stories they told of their students. It truly felt like they cared about the outcomes of their students and as many said, had found their passion. The work of grassroots organizations in Woodview have created a ripple in

the pond. It is the hope that with continued study, that ripple becomes big enough requiring

change throughout the entire city.

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Appendix A

School Personnel Recruitment Email Invite

March 19, 2014

Dear Teachers, Counselors, and Administrators:

Hello! I am Gianina Baker, a doctoral student at the University of Illinois conducting a research study in the Woodview school district. The purpose of this study is to understand more about the effect of administrators, teachers, staff on the college-going culture of low-income African-American students. I am interested in a possible interview with you so that I might learn more about your role in creating and sustaining a college-going culture in Woodview. Your educational experiences, beliefs/values regarding the educational experiences of low-income African-American students, and your role in creating and sustaining a college-going culture in Woodview will be asked during the interview.

In order to complete my research study, I plan to interview former and current teachers, counselors, and administrators who have worked or now work in the district. The interviews will last approximately an hour and will take place at your convenience and at a place of your choosing. If you are interested in participating in this research study, please contact me by email or phone so that we can set up a time and place for your interview.

Thank you for all your help!

Sincerely,

Gianina R. Baker

Demographic Questionnaire

Year of Birth _____

Gender (please check) ___Female   ___Male

Race (please check one)
_____African American/Black
_____Asian American/Pacific Islander
_____Caucasian/White
_____Latino(a)/Chicano(a)/Hispanic
_____Native American/Alaskan Native
_____International/Foreign National
_____Biracial (please add additional information)_____
_____Multiracial (please add additional information)_____
_____Other (please specify) _____

Ethnicity (e.g., Haitian, Italian, Caribbean, Irish, Arab, etc.) _____

Growing up, how would you describe your socioeconomic status?
(please mark one)
 ___Poor ___Working class ___Middle class ___Upper middle class ___Wealthy

How would you describe your current socioeconomic status?
(please mark one)
___Poor ___Working class ___Middle class ___Upper middle class ___Wealthy

Are you a member of a group that you believe are or has been the target of discrimination?
__Yes
 __No

If yes, what group? [Please check all that apply]
__Woman
__Person of Color
__Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual
__Person with a Disability
__Religious Minority (please specify)_____
__Other (please specify) _____

Interview Protocol

Dissertation: Interview Script and Questions

Participant Code: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interview Type: _____

Introduction

I am conducting a research project centered on understand how the current college-going culture of a small Midwestern school district is informed through its contextual layers of school and community.. In this interview, I will ask you background questions, questions pertaining to the institution and context in which you work and education policy implemented within your institutional setting. We will end with final thoughts and any insight you feel you might want to include.

Please remember that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and that any information you provide will be confidential. As a reminder, this conversation is being recorded and following the transcription of our conversation, the digital file will be destroyed. All identifying information will be kept confidential. However, if you choose not to be recorded please be patient as I try my best to take notes of our conversation today. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background

This section is centered on your educational background. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

1. What factors were important in your college aspirations and attendance?

2. Who was most influential in your decision to attend college?
   a.   Mother ___ Father___ Other (please specify) _____

3. What was the impact of teachers/counselors/administrators on your aspirations?

4. What is your highest degree earned?

5. Year Highest Degree Earned
   Institution _____ Major _____

College-going culture

This section is centered on the understanding the current college-going culture of the school district. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

1. What do you understand to be the current college-going culture of students in the school district?
    a. Specifically for African American students?

2. How did you come to understand the college-going culture of Woodview?
    a. Of the school district?

3. What would a "perfect" or "effective" college-going culture look like?

4. Who helped you make sense of the district and its population?
    a. Mentor?

5. Who helped you make sense of the district's organizational habitus?

6. Who helped you make sense of the city?

Organizational habitus/College-going culture

This section is centered on understanding more about the organizational habitus of the school district. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.
1. What did you know about the school district before arriving?

2. What is the current reputation of the school district?

3. In your opinion, how many teachers/school personnel/students exemplify this reputation?

4. What are some environmental factors that affect a college-going culture?
    a. Organization's habitus? School and community context?

5. Who calls you from the local businesses/community?
    a. Purpose of calls?
    b. Interest in school district?

School Personnel Expectations

This section is centered on understanding your role and expectations in providing a college-going culture to your students. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.
1. What do you see as your role in such a college-going culture?
    a. How do you fit into the college-going culture?

2. In your opinion, how do school personnel affect the organization's habitus?
    a. In what ways?

3. What factors were important in your college aspirations and attendance?

4. What was the impact of school personnel on your aspirations?

5. What do you do in your day-to-day practices to help students prepare for college?

6. What other groups do you belong to in the community?

7. How do you work to influence the aspirations of the community?

Sociopolitical Context

This section is centered on understanding more about the role of the community on the school district. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

1. What is about the district and context of a school district that relates to a college-going culture?

2. How has it gotten to this point?
   a. How was it informed by its moral, political, social context?

3. What practices of the school district show a commitment to building and sustaining a college-going culture (i.e., professional development, in-services)?
   a. Specifically for low-income African American students?

4. How does the school and/or community environment impact the way students are encouraged or discouraged to prepare for college?
   a. How does this compare to other communities you have worked in?

5. What are the post-high school plans of students in the district?

   a. Specifically low-income African American students?
   b. How does this compare to other populations of students you have worked with?

6. What are some of the greatest challenges to achieving a college-going culture?

Final Thoughts (Wrap Up)

1. Are there any additional comments or suggestions that you may have?

Informed Consent Form

Scientia est Propentia: **The Role of School Personnel in Empowering a College-Going Culture Among Low-Income African-American Students in Woodview, Illinois**

Hello! My name is Gianina Baker and I am conducting a doctoral study through the Education Policy, Organization & Leadership Department at the University of Illinois under the direction of Dr. Lorenzo Baber.

INFORMATION
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to understand more about the effect of administrators, teachers, staff and programs geared to help low-income students of color attend college. This research will provide a unique contribution to the scholarly literature on the broader topics of the role of administrators, teachers, and staff play in the college readiness and college choice processes of low-income students of color, especially those in small cities.

PARTICIPATION
You were chosen to participate as you were or are currently school personnel in the Woodview school district. The interview will take approximately forty-five minutes to an hour with the researcher. Your educational experiences, beliefs/values regarding the educational experiences of low-income students of color, and your role in creating and sustaining a college-going culture in Woodview will be asked during the interview. In order to make sure statements are correct, the researcher may contact you for a follow-up interview for clarification purposes. A demographic questionnaire will also be given to you to complete before the interview.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may choose to either not respond to questions you prefer not to answer or stop the interview or questionnaire at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be destroyed. Your choice to participate or not will have no effect on your job or relation with the school district. Your response is confidential as I will not be asking for any personally identifying information. For this reason, <u>please do not write your name anywhere on this questionnaire so that your responses will be confidential.</u> All interviews will be audiorecorded, with your permission, for the purposes of transcription. After transcription is completed, all audiorecordings will be kept in a locked drawer for a period of three years after which it will be destroyed.

BENEFITS
Ultimately, I hope this research will provide a unique contribution to the scholarly literature on educational aspiration and educational/career attainment of low-income African American students, as there is a paucity of research examining middle-size cities which are not urban or rural areas, with high concentrations of low-income families of color. There are several cities

just like Woodview   who have experienced similar circumstances of which this study will provide an opportunity to learn more about Woodview's context and possible recommendations to help influence a college-going culture in Woodview among its low-income African American students.

RISKS
Recognizing time commitment, privacy, and reputation of the district are risks of this study, I have put in safeguards to help minimize these risks. You will be told of your time commitment before consent in the study. Your responses will be treated in a confidential manner. In addition, it may be difficult for you to disclose information that can be perceived as negative about yourself or your school/school district; however, I assure you that your participation in this study will in no way affect your relationship with the school/school district. The benefits described above outweigh these potential risks. Overall, I believe this study can provide important information to not only the Woodview community but also to other similar communities. The results of this work could have wide implications for low-income students of color and the districts that serve them in very positive ways.

CONTACT
Please contact me, Gianina Baker, if you have any questions (email: baker44@illinois.edu; mobile: (217) 972-1084) or Dr. Lorenzo Baber (email: ldbaber@illinois.edu; office: (217) 333-1576). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board (217) 333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

Thank you for your participation!

Gianina Baker, B.A., M.A., LPC
baker44@illinois.edumailto:baker44@illinois.edu
217-972-1084 (cell)

SIGNATURES
Your signature on this form consents your participation in the completion of the demographic questionnaire and interview.

_____   _____ _____
 Participant Printed Name   Participant Signed Name   Date
_____ **Check here if you consent to be audiorecorded.**

_____   _____ _____
 Researcher Printed Name   Researcher Signed Name   Date

Appendix E

Checklist of Elements Likely to be Present in an Observation

It is impossible to observe and record everything in a setting, and therefore one must begin somewhere with some type of plan. (p. 97-98)

1. The setting:
What is the physical environment like?
What is the context?
What kinds of behavior does the setting promote or prevent?

2. The participants:
Describe who is in the scene, how many people, and their roles.
What brings these people together?
Who is allowed here?

3. Activities and interactions:
What is going on?
Is there a definable sequence of activities?
How do the people interact with the activity and with one another?
How are people and activities connected or interrelated?

4. Frequency and duration:
When did the situation begin?
How long does it last?
Is it a recurring type of situation or is it unique?
If it recurs, how frequently?
How typical of such situations is the one being observed?

5. Subtle factors:
Less obvious but perhaps as important to the observation are:
- informal and unplanned activities
- symbolic and connotative meaning of words
- nonverbal communication such as dress and physical space
- unobtrusive measures such as physical clues
- what does not happen especially if it ought to have happened.

Checklist by Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. as published in Erlandson, D. A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B. L., & Allen , S. D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Appendix F

Conclusion Development Tool

Research Question	Findings/Patterns	Conclusion
What is the college-going culture for low-income African American students in a mid-size, public Midwestern school district?	***"Window dressing" structures: Unpacking the current college-going culture for low-income African American students of Woodview.*** • *Pattern 1.1: "Should all kids go to college?" – School personnel beliefs and expectations of college-going*	Unpacking the current structure of the college-going culture of the school district removes "window dressing" and instead reveals inconsistency in the message of college-going among school personnel.
How does the organizational habitus of a mid-size, public Midwestern school district shape the college-going culture for low-income African American students?	***"Window dressing" structures: Unpacking the current college-going culture for low-income African American students of Woodview.*** • *Pattern 2.1: "The Cousin Effect" – School personnel perceptions of post-high school plans of low-income African American students* • *Pattern 3.1: Perceptions of Woodview school district*	Deconstructing the organizational habitus of the school district in Woodview resulted in school personnel setting realistic expectations of college-going for low-income African American students
How does the organizational habitus of a mid-size, public Midwestern school district intersect with the beliefs, expectations, and behaviors of school personnel in promoting a college-going culture for low-income African American students?	***"Good Enough:" Perceptions of low-income African American students and their families in Woodview.*** • *Pattern 1.2: Reflection of School Personnel Backgrounds* • *Pattern 1.3: Shifting Mental Models of School Personnel* • *Pattern 2.2: "We've lost our grandmas" – School personnel perceptions of parental involvement and expectations of college-going among low-income African American families* • *Pattern 2.3: Hiring Practices*	School personnel's "good enough" expectations of low-income African American students and unfavorable perceptions of their families promote a culturally deficit view of low-income African American students in the district.

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How is the school district impacted by the larger sociopolitical context in terms of college-going?	***"Our schools are dropout factories:" Connecting the school district and sociopolitical context of Woodview***. • *Pattern 3.2: "A depressed community" – Challenges of a postindustrial city* • *Pattern 3.3: "Our kids deserve better" - Community efforts to better the perception and reputation of Woodview and its school district*	The school district's college-going culture is intricately linked with the sociopolitical context of Woodview.