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FORMING COLLEGE-GOING KNOWLEDGE:
AN ANALYSIS OF PARENTS WITH EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS

by

Joseph J. Anthony

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Major: Higher and Adult Education

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Dedication

My dissertation journey has been filled with trials, challenges, joy, and self-discovery. I would not have been able to complete this process without the consistent support and love of my wife, Geri. Her confidence in me to complete this work never wavered, and she was there to motivate me when I needed it most. She also cared for our daughters, Grace and Hope, who went through the earliest parts of their lives while I pursued this scholarship. I can only hope they saw me doing my homework late into the night and early in the morning as a model to follow in their futures if they need to get hard things done.

My mother, Wendy, has also supported me throughout this process. Her steady presence has helped me feel inspired to go further in my education. My late father, Charlie, always displayed committing to a process and doing your best. Both of my parents' influences have been felt throughout this research. Their seeking out to help others in our community is a fundamental motivation of this piece.

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I would also like to recognize my research partners, those staffed at the research site. Both Heads of School, the Director of Enrollment Management, and both Directors of High School Admissions saw the value in me becoming a better educator, and I am grateful for their support. I am hopeful this scholarship improves our community.

I would also like to thank my in-laws, John and Geri Kolesnik. There have been many class hours and dissertation writing hours done while they supported my wife and family. Their love and support helped make this dissertation possible. And I would also be remiss in not mentioning the support of Dr. Paul Phillips, the ultimate sensei, colleague, and friend.

Abstract

The context surrounding today's college-going youth is different from when their parents pursued higher education in the late 1980s to early 2000s. I sought to understand how these parents, now as adults with children on the doorstep of their own college-going process, form knowledge about 21st century college-going and what sources these parents suspect they will utilize to form knowledge. I created two main research questions around how parents form knowledge about college-going and what sources they suspect they will use. My theoretical framework was transformative learning theory and existing college-going scholarship.

I conducted a qualitative research study using constructivist grounded theory methodology. Ten participants who met the criteria of being parents of 8th graders, as well as parents who were not currently enrolled at the research site were interviewed. The semi-structured interview guide was designed to reveal learning habits, information sources, and assess how closely parents followed transformative learning theory's stages.

My main findings are that parents have an existing college-going schema. There are benefits and limitations to parents holding this existing knowledge. The second main finding is that parents found discontent with their existing knowledge and sought to reframe their child's soon-to-come college-going process. The last main finding is that parents suspect they will leverage their network sources to gather information about college-going.

I conclude by connecting my findings to my theoretical framework and offer a summary theory. Three major implications that address the high school, the higher education field, and the family are shared. I provide seven recommended actions for consideration at the high school level, nine recommended actions for consideration for the higher education industry, and nine recommended actions for families that are influenced by my findings. Four future research

studies to deepen the understanding of parents' formation of college-going knowledge are presented, too.

Keywords: adult learning, transformative learning theory, college-going, parents, high school, technology, community, college admissions, private high school admissions.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As a parent I have often been asked for accurate, reliable information from my children and sometimes I am up to that challenge. When I do not know the answer, I am quick to turn to what I consider reliable resources. My children don't always ask me for information first, but I am fortunate to have spent many hours over the course of their lives being within yelling vicinity for that quick answer or at their side during dinners for long-winded redirections when an answer just isn't coming to me. Considering my children are still rather young their questions do not impact their education's trajectory as deeply as those related to college-going.

Parents of soon-to-be high school students have likely endured many unanswerable questions by the time their children have reached 8th grade. Those questions that demand answers may find their children seeking out other resources which they believe will be more accurate, or in some cases more relevant to their way of thinking. An 8th grade child has the choice to turn to their parent for information, and if given the chance parents need to be up to that challenge.

As life progresses these 8th grade children will soon be a part of a high school community. In the US the two most common high school communities are public schools or private schools (Hanson, 2021; Snyder 1993). I investigated parents who are inquiring about a private high school experience for their child before their child enters the 9th grade and explored how they form knowledge about college-going. Once the 9th grade year commences the parents' choice of secondary school is already impacting college-going for their child (Đurišić & Bunjevac, 2017; Froiland & Davison, 2014; Griffin et al., 2011; Perna, 2006; Tsuei & Hsu, 2019; Wimberly & Noeth, 2004).

I am seeking to understand how parents with 8th grade students inquiring about a private, high school experience for their child understand the college-going process, most directly I am investigating how they form new knowledge or affirm prior knowledge about college-going overall. Because parents, as adults, have formed self-schemas about particular events in their lives it is important to consider both the general knowledge constructed from their own direct interaction with college-going, if they attended college or not, as well as any aspects of themselves they may have deemed important about college-going, if any, if they did or did not attend college (Noureddine & Stein, 2009; Oakes et al., 2002). There is no shortage of popular media that seeks to offer affirming or dissenting information to parents about college-going (Jun & Colyar, 2002). There is no shortage of research about college-going culture in high schools (Knight & Duncheon, 2020; McKillip et al., 2013; Minor & Benner, 2018; Robinson & Roksa, 2016).

What I seek to understand is the act of critically assessing one's assumptions about prior college-going knowledge as a parent as well as a desire to understand how a parent reacts to a disorienting dilemma (Apte, 2009; Mezirow, 2000). Parents are routinely cited as a critical player in shaping and impacting their child's educational plans so it is important to know how they learn this information (Đurišić & Bunjevac, 2017; Froiland & Davison, 2014; Griffin et al., 2011; Tsuei & Hsu, 2019; Wimberly & Noeth, 2004). I interviewed parents and conducted a grounded theory analysis, constructing themes that assessed how these participants form knowledge about college-going.

Background of the Study

The American higher education system has been around since before the U.S. has been an independent country (Thelin, 2019). Throughout the last three centuries the pipeline that brings

prospective undergraduates to colleges and universities has been built off relationships between people and organizations. These relationships had been built off a cyclical admission process that relied on a shared knowledge between educators at secondary and postsecondary institutions (Clemente, 2008; Engberg & Wolniak, 2010; Karabel, 2006; Thelin, 2019; Van Zanten, 2009; Wolniak & Engberg, 2007). Because college-going has changed over time, with enrollment shifts as well as evolved policies and practices, there is a constant need to re-learn or affirm knowledge about college-going. All stakeholders in college-going have to continuously challenge their held assumptions and heuristics that they have grown to rely on.

I examined an under analyzed player in the college-going process, specifically, the parents of soon-to-be high schoolers. The parents selected as participants in this research are narrowly defined as parents of 8th graders inquiring to join one research site's private high school community. It is important to note that these parents may hold their own self-schemas about college-going which could be influencing their decision to inquire about a private high school education (Noureddine & Stein, 2009). Further, parents with more means are increasingly choosing a private school experience for their children (Hanson, 2021; Murnane et al., 2018; Snyder 1993). And with a widening income gap (Liu, 2011) combined with additional means, these children are more likely to engage in college-going, stand out in the college-going process, and enroll in college (Cahalan, 2021; Garg et al., 2007; Hanson, 2021; NATCOM, 2019; Oakes et al., 2002; Perna, 2006). It is important to put a spotlight on this specific parent group, those with 8th graders inquiring to join a private high school.

Statement of the Problem

Because college-going, including the aspects of merit, are socially constructed ideas there is a continuous need to re-evaluate the understood meanings of different symbols and procedures

(Karabel, 1984; Oakes et al, 2002). Further, since participation in college in the US is high, there is a demand that everyone go to college in order to be on a more level playing field in the labor market and in society (Barrett & Cantwell, 2019). With an economic and societal obligation for more and more children to go to college, parents must understand the ins-and-outs of college-going, or at least know where or who to turn to, to find accurate knowledge.

I conducted this study because there is so much information about college-going for parents to learn about, have their knowledge reaffirmed, or have their existing knowledge challenged. Whether that information be the role of more familiar college entrance exams in today's climate (Marcus, 2021), whether a test prep course signals an advantage (Oakes et al., 2002), which application software to even use to submit an application (Taylor, 2019), free tuition programs (Perna et al., 2020), clarifying financial aid and cost projections (Coker & Glynn, 2017; Perna et al., 2019), the act of hiring educational consultants (Cicciarelli, 2021; McDonough et al, 1997), all of the services received for tuition paid (Caskey, 2018), and what key indicators that are displayed to parents that express the different ways to measure any return on investment they may receive (Blagg & Blom, 2018), these pathways to knowledge must be clear. Since parents and families “make college related decisions based on the information they have, regardless of its accuracy” there needs to be research about how these adult stakeholders form knowledge about college-going (Perna et al., 2019, para. 2).

The context surrounding these parents has changed, too. As college-goers entered the new decades of the 21st century, including overcoming the demands imposed on society due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increased use of technology to create knowledge about an institutions' offerings (Albright & Schwanke, 2021; Nyangau & Bado, 2012). In this era, colleges have grown reliant on websites, blogs, email, social media, and now video

conferences in order to maintain the ability to expose college-goers to their distinct experiences. Parents are only recently becoming under the spotlight with these digital tools in mind, as the campus visit was one of the more significant routes in which routine marketing had been most tied to students and parents; the physical campus visit was impossible during COVID-19's campus closures (Secore, 2018; Silverback Strategies, 2021). My research's goals are to explore how consumer behavior, tied to a parents' self-schemas, as well as the trend of children being more apt at picking up new technologies influences how today's parents form college-going knowledge (Cherry et al., 2020; Ekstrom, 2007; Tikka & Oinas-Kukkonen, 2019). I am assessing how this knowledge is formed: what processes will take place and what sources will be utilized. The role of technology and children will be presented.

Purpose Statement

My research is assessing the varying levels of knowledge about college-going in this specific set of parents so that higher education leaders, policymakers, and secondary school officials can better guide parents along the journey of forming knowledge about college-going. Parents may also benefit from my study which in turn can impact the school their child attends, and impact the wider social network of the community these parents are in. Parents, as an audience for this work may be exposed to how others like them are choosing to form knowledge about college-going. Parents of this specific group—those inquiring for their 8th grader to join a new high school community—are an intriguing participant group because I can reveal suspected approaches to knowledge formation about college-going before the parent is exposed to the norms and behaviors set within their eventual high school.

I am employing transformative learning theory to investigate this phenomenon (Mezirow, 2000; 2003; 2009) as the theoretical lens and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) as

the research methodology. My study's purpose is to reveal suspected paths to knowledge about college-going as to better understand where parents may turn for information. I am also assessing these parents' comfort level with retaining their own college-going, challenging held assumptions from their own process, and integrating new knowledge into their actions and behaviors. My study's purpose will diverge from established branches of college-going research by focusing on the phenomenon of parents' knowledge formation about all things college-going. My research is influenced by college-going research on these branches: that of college-going culture in a school and community (Knight & Duncheon, 2020; McKillip et al., 2013; Minor & Benner, 2018; Robinson & Roksa, 2016), that of college-readiness of a student facilitated by a school and community (Brookover et al., 2021; Duncheon, 2021; Mokher & Jacobson, 2021; Oakes et al., 2002), and college choice as impacted by the student and their community (Hossler et al., 1989; 1990; 1991; Hossler & Gallagher 1987; Hossler & Maple, 1993; Hossler & Stage, 1989; 1992; Jackson, 1982; Litten, 1982; Perna, 2006) but the parent and their knowledge formation is my focus.

Research Questions

To research the phenomenon of knowledge formation for parents of 8th graders inquiring to join a private high school about college-going the below research questions will be my guide:

1. How do parents with soon-to-be high school students form knowledge about the college-going process?
 - a. How do parents form knowledge about a specific higher education institution?
2. What information sources do parents with soon-to-be high school students suspect they will access and prioritize in order to form college-going knowledge?

Significance of the Study

My study will contribute to educators', policymakers', and parents' awareness about higher education as well as the application of transformative learning theory for adult learners. My study diverges from current and past scholarship around college-going culture, college readiness, and college choice by researching the phenomenon of knowledge formation in parents around anything college-going. My study will find its significance in informing parents how to approach the act of forming knowledge about college-going, or at least bring readers a path that participants suspect they will take to form this knowledge. There will be a benefit to having a constructed theory describing how parents form knowledge about college-going, including the formation of knowledge around the industry's various institutions, symbols, procedures, and language. My findings can be applied to better inform consumers and practitioners of higher education.

Theoretical Framework

I will employ transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000; 2003; 2009) as well as progressive theoretical scholarship around college-going to guide my study. My study pulls from the various frameworks of transformative learning theory that have been developed through waves of contributions over time (Gunnlaguson, 2008). Pertinent to my study are facets of Mezirow, as well as Cranton (2016), Dirkx et al. (2006), Hogan (2016), and Taylor (2017). These facets include the need to assess one's inner self as well as integrate stimuli from the surrounding outer world in order to influence actions or behaviors. For college-going and parents, parents either hold a self-schema for college-going due to their own experiences going to college, or they have formed their own internal awareness of college-going due to its permeation in our constructed society. My interview guide was built using the stages of

transformative learning, as well as the stages and phases of college-going models. My data collection and analysis use these theories as a beacon for constructing my findings (Apte, 2009; Charmaz, 2006).

The goal of my research is to stand on a transformative learning framework as it is applied to college-going models to see how today's parents operate. I am assessing the influences in the lives of participants, and my findings may be transferable to those who identify as being like the participants, as well as stakeholders who interact with the participants or similar parents (Creswell, 2013; Gasson, 2003). I desire to understand how the central phenomenon, the process of how knowledge is formed about college-going, and to identify the paths to knowledge, as well as the moment knowledge is formed about college-going (Creswell, 2013). Following qualitative procedures in constructivist grounded theory, semi-structured interviews, memos, and coding where the researcher both must know and be close to the content being questioned but also be able to unknow or be distant from potential answers or possible explanations from participants is a part of the design (Charmaz, 2006; Roulston, 2019).

Assumptions

I assumed that parents included as participants in my study have an inclination to support their children as evidenced by their inquiry to have their child join a private high school community. The type of high school being inquired about is a member of a national association known for being college preparatory in nature. The nature of this secondary school creates the assumption that inquiring parents have the desire for their child to attend college, making their pursuit of knowledge formation about college-going something I am able to study. A piece of this research is the understanding that college-going is a wide concept and that different people

will characterize different aspects of this process and society as a part of the social construct of college-going.

Limitations

My study is limited to a specific set of inquiries at one research site. Further, my study is limited to willing participants who must consent to be interviewed and studied after being initially contacted. Parents can choose to ignore my email or reply with a declining message.

Participants must be able to check their email, willingly reply, agree to be interviewed, sign their consent form, and be present at the time of interview. I randomly chose email addresses from this list of inquiries, and had to do so until saturation in my collected data was reached. I am pleased with the demographic make-up of the participants, but I know they do not represent all parents across gender, ethnic, or socio-economic populations. The goal of my study is to achieve saturation, which is found when no new data is being presented by participants (Charmaz, 2006). A limitation of saturation is that a homogenous participant pool, specifically those inquiring to join this expensive independent school, may yield saturated, though narrow results. I argue that the participants are from a broad range of backgrounds, but applying my data collection tools in a different setting may yield different results. I am confident in my transferability to similar groups in this near term (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Further, the research site's inquiry pool changes each year. This refreshed group of adults limits my research findings to this year's cohort, but they may be more widely applied if similarities are found in future inquiry pools. My research is also not resistant to the outside world's changes and the dynamics of the college-going process evolving over time.

Delimitations

My study only describes the experiences of one parent group who is inquiring for one specific private secondary school setting for their current 8th grade child. This study does not include students, faculty, or administrators who are not parents, nor does it include parents who do not have children in the 8th grade. This private secondary school is non-denominational. The research site does have sending schools from multiple U.S. states and countries other than the U.S., but it is predominantly made up of members of its surrounding community.

Definitions of Terms

1. College-going – the act of being a student and becoming a qualified college candidate, searching for, applying to, and then selecting a college or university, if desired.
2. Higher education institution -- a postsecondary educational organization; for this study a typical 4-years college or university in the United States.
3. Parents of soon-to-be high school students -- parents with 8th graders about to transition to high school.
4. Independent school -- a school that operates with its own finances and governance structure.
5. Inquiries -- families that have inquired about enrolling at a specific education institution.

Research Design

I conducted a qualitative research study at one site, an independent school that teaches grades K-12. The unit of analysis will be parents of soon-to-be high school students (Babbie, 2007). I used constructivist grounded theory methodology because of my professional role as a college counselor at a private high school, as well as my experience as a college admission officer. My knowledge is used as the researcher when co-constructing data—my knowledge

shaped the interview guide, the probing questions, the created codes, and the presented findings (Charmaz, 2006). My expertise was used when crafting memos, deepening codes, and presenting my saturated themes (Charmaz, 2017).

My available participants come from the list of inquiries to the research site. The school's enrollment manager shared this year's list of 343 inquiries. I am told the school typically receives approximately 400 inquiries from families for grade 9 admission once the cycle year concludes. I then entered a number next to each parents' email address and utilized a random number generator to identify which prospective participant to message first. I did this identification and sending of recruitment emails in batches of 25-30 parents until I secured saturation at 10 completed interviews.

I interviewed 10 participants either in a nearby library or over Zoom. I conducted semi-structured interviews ranging between 30 to 55 minutes. I created memos in reaction to each interview as well as tracked my observations via field notes. I transcribed each interview and then proceeded to create codes, as guided by grounded theory methodology. My goal of constructing a relevant theory that explains the potential pathways that parents of this age group may utilize to form knowledge about college-going, including identifying sources of information was fulfilled through these methods.

Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study

This chapter introduces the curiosities both from a practical and theoretical standpoint for conducting my study. Parents are an important figure in their child's lives and the components of college-going for these children begins with the start of high school. There has been abundant research about specific aspects as it relates to going to college but there is a lack of analysis as it relates to the central phenomenon of parents forming knowledge about college-going and what

sources they suspect they will turn to. Knowledge is constructed as a part of events and experiences and transformative learning guides research into how adults, or parents with soon-to-be high school students, may approach this phenomena of learning. College-going scholarship scaffolds my knowledge about college-going and frames my analysis and research into information sources.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature around American college-going scholarship: its history, contemporary structure, and the current forces at play which influence parents, children, and secondary schools. Transformative learning theory's components and an analysis of its appropriateness for my study is also introduced. Chapter 3 details constructivist grounded theory, and how I used this qualitative research methodology to secure participants and collect data. Information about sampling, the research site, and trustworthiness is presented. Chapter 4 presents the findings of my study as they are constructed from the data, as framed by the methodology and research questions. Chapter 5 discusses how the findings are relevant to parents, educators, and policymakers. This chapter will also discuss how the results may lead to future research.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

This chapter begins with a review of literature surrounding transformative learning theory and then proceeds with a discussion of American college-going for families with students in private high schools. Because my research questions focus on adult learning and college-going it is important to understand the context that situates today's understanding of transformative learning and the framework around college-going processes and mindsets. My study's desire to assess how parents, as adult learners, learn about college-going, specific colleges, and what sources are utilized means it is critical to understand adult learning's transformative learning theory and how it shapes my study.

I review the learning phases of transformative learning theory to understand the potential avenues for knowledge formation being explored through the methodology of my study. I also present an overview of the theory's evolved components relevant to my study. For college-going, I share past scholars' works that have framed today's mindset by creating models that describe the industry's stakeholders and their influence on college-going, as well as articulate different phenomena, like technology's use and adaptability, that are penetrating secondary schools, higher education, and family life.

Transformative Learning Theory

My study seeks to understand how parents of soon-to-be high school students inquiring about the private secondary school admissions process for their 8th grade child form college-going knowledge. I have identified the adult learning theory of transformative learning theory to guide my study. The theory's emphasis on reflection, critically assessing one's assumptions, and exploring new actions fits my study's purpose. Below I provide a theoretical overview of

transformative learning theory, its history and foundational scholars, as well as discuss key components of the theory relevant to my research about parents with soon-to-be-high school students forming knowledge about college-going.

An Overview of Transformative Learning

Transformative learning was brought to the masses in 1978 when Jack Mezirow published an article in *Adult Education Quarterly* entitled ‘Perspective Transformation’. In transformative learning theory there is a demand for learners to have a variety of experiences and exposure to open information. The reservoir of past experiences, as well as this access to affirming knowledge or dissenting counterpoints allows a learner to reflect back on the occurrences that took place, are occurring in the learner’s current mindset, or may impact the learner in the future (Mezirow, 2009).

Mezirow shares with the world that “frames of reference”, or the ability to filter thoughts through a habit, point of view, or structure, is an important concept to understand when considering transformative learning (Mezirow, 2003, p. 85; Mezirow, 2009, p. 92). It is up to the learner to define and process the “mindsets, habits of mind, [and] meaning perspectives” when beginning to question “assumptions and expectation[s] -- to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, 2009, p. 92). It is in these changes an adult learner evolves.

While it may not be the goal of an adult to learn or evolve, Mezirow shares with us key stages of experience that may spark adult learning. A parent, who may desire to learn more about the college-going process may also find themselves associating their knowledge formation with these stages of transformative learning: a disorienting dilemma, self-examination, a critical assessment of assumptions, recognition of one’s discontent, exploration of new options or

actions, a planning a course of action, acquiring knowledge and/or skills to implement said plan, carrying out the plan, and then reflecting on lessons and experiences of the tried plan or perspective (Apte, 2009; Mezirow, 2000). The progression through each of these stages may be an organic procedure for an adult learner or it may be more formally facilitated by a teacher, coach, mentor, counselor, peer, or media. Whether organic or facilitated, though, the adult must choose to engage in the process—making transformative learning a voluntary reflection (Cranton, 2016).

Contributing Scholars

Though Mezirow shared his theory and refined the above stages over time, other scholars' work helped influence transformative learning theory's development; these scholars' impact must be noted. Mezirow himself shares that “a key proposition of transformative learning theory recognizes the validity of [Jürgen] Habermas's fundamental distinction between instrumental and communicative learning” (Mezirow, 2003, p. 59). Mezirow presents that “instrumental learning centrally involves assessing truth claims--that something is as it is purported to be” (Mezirow, 2003, p. 59). Communicative learning is shared as the “understanding [of] what someone means when they communicate with you” (Mezirow, 2003, p. 59).

Patricia Cranton, a noted transformative learning scholar herself, discusses Mezirow's drawn links with Habermas by introducing Habermas's “technical knowledge” (2016, p. 9). Mezirow adopts the traits of technical knowledge, those shared above, and reframes the term as an evolution towards instrumental learning: “the acquisition of technical knowledge” (Cranton, 2016, p.9). Cranton shares that Mezirow builds on Habermas's philosophies with the progression of Habermas's practical knowledge towards communicative knowledge. For

Habermas, adults not only must be able to understand the world and systems around them, they must be able to discuss and communicate their understandings with others. Without these two concepts, the ability to state that there is a context (instrumental) for transformative learning or the ability to state that there is a means to demonstrate knowledge through discussion (communicative) there would be no need for adults to reflect on one's own thoughts or take stances on issues with which to discuss with peers (Cranton, 2016). With college-going being a social construct, it is important to reflect on these thoughts when considering parents' knowledge formation in their own contexts and how they communicate this information with others.

Contemporaries of Mezirow have taken his presentation of transformative learning theory and not only discussed the connection to past scholars' work, but have built their own offshoots like John Dirkx, who shares the inner, self-work, or "soul work" of transformative learning (Dirkx et al., 2006, p. 125). Dirkx desires to frame transformative learning as an understanding of the integration of experiences from the outer world with experiences from adults' inner worlds. The terms Dirkx brings to mind he himself admits appear "mystical and vague" but when compared to Mezirow's capturing of Habermas's types of knowledge we can parallel an adult's experiences with the outer world as similar to instrumental knowledge and the integration of thinking into an adult's inner world, as being able to communicate the learning to yourself and others, thus communicative learning (Dirkx et al., 2006, p. 126). It is worth mentioning that the two scholars, Mezirow and Dirkx, both acknowledge the contributions of each's perspectives on transformative learning (Dirkx et al., 2006).

As Mezirow continued to refine his presentation of transformative learning over time other scholars were able to squeeze in their interpretations of his concepts in between the areas he looked to clarify, while some took the work of other notable theorists and added

transformative learning to the canon. An example of one scholar who attached transformative learning with the foundational concept of Malcolm Knowles' self-directed learning, is the aforementioned Cranton. While Cranton (2016) discusses adult learning as an individual's process, and further discusses that to learn one must be self-directed, she mimics the ideas of the two scholars mentioned above, Mezirow and Dirkx, by bringing in the personal and social reasons to learn. There is participation that must occur by oneself and the questioning that occurs, the making of meaning, is a key component of transformative learning (Cranton, 2016). My research will delve into how parents make meaning about college-going so that they hold accurate knowledge, how society has shaped their personal schema (inner self), as well as how the social world around them gives them reasons to learn about college-going (outer world).

Cranton stands on her own when it comes to being a foundational scholar of transformative learning. The reason I brought her up in connection to Knowles is not just because she attaches her own thinking of self-directed learning and transformative learning as being "interwoven" (Cranton, 2016, p. 6), but that Cranton's contemporaries present her work as an emphasis on "the individual who transforms" (Taylor & Tisdell, 2017). Connecting back to Knowles, an individual has to have the motivation to transform, but there is a frame of reference within each individual; Cranton and King (2003) lean on Jung's idea of individuation, where we all "come to have a sense of self that differentiates us from others" (p. 33). This differentiation closely aligns with the views on transformative learning of Mezirow's communicative learning and Dirkx's inner self. A second notable aspect of Cranton's impact on transformative learning is placed within Mezirow's instrumental learning and Dirkx' outer world: she discusses authenticity as a concept representative of the individual's judged expression outward to the community (Cranton, 2006; Cranton & Caruesetta, 2004; Cranton & King, 2003).

Distilling Two Key Elements of Transformative Learning

While there are many scholars whose work centers around transformative learning, with Mezirow himself pointing out that after his 1978 piece that “a transformative learning movement...developed in North American adult education, involving...international conferences...300 paper presentations...the publication of many journal articles, over a dozen books and an estimated 150 doctoral dissertations” (Mezirow, 2009, p. 91), for this research specifically we will need to focus on two key aspects of transformative learning which are highlights of Mezirow, Cranton, and Dirkx’s works. In the area of transformative learning pertinent to college-going there is a need to hold experiences and information within oneself—relevant to research question number one. There is also a need to be in an environment surrounding an individual in which to position one’s views and development of knowledge—tied to research question number two.

It is also helpful to note that due to the persistence of transformative learning theory over time, that there are multiple generations of scholars, a first-wave and second-wave of viewpoints, who when analyzed as a field in whole could be seen as talking to each other, building off of each other, or diverging from each other. The broadness of these two key components will be refined below. Do note that when I consider these two key elements, I use scholarship from both first- and second-wave transformative learning scholars (Gunnlaguson, 2008).

The Inner Self. With transformative learning it is critical to have “a deep learning process where multiple dimensions are aligned and new relations are created” (Pisters et al., 2020, p. 395). Further, there has been an increased ability to grasp concepts when an adult learner feels emancipated, compassionate, or creatively drawn to the issue as an

individual. Motivation to be a good parent drives a parents' compassionate reasons to learn about college-going.

There is a need in transformative learning to consider the consciousness of the learner as these internal considerations allow for one to return to "clearing up the clutter, and revising the [previously made] assumptions" (Posters et al., 2020; Newman, 2014, p. 352). It is within this inner self that we can bring into the "transformative process...the unconscious into conscious and develop a dialogue with that aspect of our self" (Cranton, 2016, p. 72). This dialogue sparks a journey towards understanding oneself and formed knowledge. It is difficult to transform, or have a transformative learning experience, without a firm understanding of one's own self as a parent and adult, and there is an assumed motivation in my study, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, to support children through the college-going process.

The inner self must be taught how to have a discussion within its existence in order for that stance to eventually be shared with the world in a community and network. There can certainly be the dominant assertion of others' views onto a learner when they do not hold a firm grasp of their own knowledge, as can be seen when a teacher or peer shares an opinion and then is asked for validation. Other parents and those in a parents' networks also may become dominant sharers of either accurate or inaccurate information.

Validation is an action of confirming or re-framing knowledge as one critically assesses their own views. The role of knowledge interpretation is grand, and in order to best combat coercion or narrow definitions, an adult learner must constantly conduct internal critical reflections to refine their own knowledge and seek out new information (Christie et al., 2015). When looking at this inner self, these parts of an adult learner must transform in order to reflect learning out into the world, "we examine the encounter between the self and the social

and material worlds” (Newman, 2014, p. 352). These social and material worlds turn us to the outer world.

The Outer World. In transformative learning theory there is the description that when a “transformative outcome” occurs there is “an increased integration of one’s inner and outer worlds, a more whole person, [with] greater self-awareness, and greater authenticity” (Hoggan, 2016, p. 61). In my research, the outer world acts as a stimulus in which the parents’ inner self, when progressing through Mezirow’s phases, grasps new knowledge that enriches, emboldens, and empowers the adult learner; in this research to support their child in college-going. This stimulus demands that there be an environment, an outer world, surrounding the adult learner to react to the social construct of college-going. Other community members, whether voluntarily engaged in learning about college-going or not, are a part of a parent’s environment. The system and culture surrounding the adult learner plays a critical role.

In reviewing Hoggan’s (2016) work, if the person, thought of as a subject, is to have a transformative experience then they need to have a shift in how that person reacts to or perceives an object. The object, part of the outer world, is as equally important as the subject, the inner self. The role of others and the contextual systems and norms cannot be understated in providing the triggers for transformative learning as these events create the initiating disorienting dilemma and can inform the new plans to securing new knowledge (Hoggan, 2016; Taylor, 2001). If there is no need for a parent to question the inner self’s reaction, either statement or actual action, to the disorienting dilemma due to the lack of societal push back, an adult learner may never be able to grow beyond their consciousness and immediate surroundings to form new knowledge.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Transformative Learning

It is in the inner self and outer world we begin to see the strengths and weaknesses of transformative learning. While each learning theory bears its own prescriptions, those that include both successful and unsuccessful applications, the literature on transformative learning has revealed some common praises and complaints. Many of these points revolve around making meaning and how that is different for each adult as an individual.

Strengths. Some of the more forward strengths is that each adult has an inner understanding or existence while also being physically present in some form of context. These more obvious statements make the theory applicable to most, if not all adults. This generality allows for parents from all walks of life to approach the theory and understand how each transformative learning phase may have occurred in one of their prior learning events about college-going.

Because there is an approachability for most towards the transformative learning theory it allows for collaboration and dialogue to be an acceptable learning facilitation method (Clark, 1997). As learners compare situations or focus on problem solving out loud there can be a collective progression along the path of inquiry, wherein an individual adult learner can accomplish this reflection internally (Mezirow, 2000). The approachability applies from peer-to-peer (outer world) or within an individual (inner self).

Weaknesses. Mezirow admits that transformative learning is best applied to adult learners, as the reservoir of experience and firmness of assumptions make for a more significant assessment and metamorphosis to occur. Both Mezirow (2000) and Taylor (2017) in their separate works discuss that “meaning perspectives are often acquired uncritically in childhood through acculturation and socialization...and they reflect dominant culture of which [one has]

been socialized into” (Taylor, 2017, p.17). This socialization and context can be so different for each individual parent as it relates to college-going and how they learn.

A prevalent piece of social context is one’s spoken language. One must use “language to articulate our experience to ourselves or to others” (Mezirow, 2000, p.5). Language is a key feature of experiencing or holding a dialogue with the inner self and the outer world, so being able to describe experiences is of paramount concern to a transformative learning scholar. As people’s identities broaden and receive complex labels it will be more challenging for a peer to relate to another peer without a connective dialogue. The lack of common experiences or the dissolution of more uniform viewpoints may better reflect society, but it creates a challenge for learning facilitators to develop empathy across these identities or foster new experiences with the goal of sparking a transformative learning event (Taylor & Cranton, 2013). College-going has its own set of vocabulary to understand.

Michael Newman also presents six key flaws when applying transformative learning in his 2012 work for *Adult Education Quarterly*. Key assertions from Newman’s work that this paper will highlight are mobilization and spirituality. With mobilization in mind, it is too easy for an educator to frame a learner’s actions as an episode of transformative learning simply because the learner took action. Newman (2012) states, “this change in behavior is seen as evidence of a transformation in understanding...when learners mobilize, educators may be tempted to think that their intervention has kindled the desire [for action]...But they may have played an auxiliary role” (p. 46). This assertion is relevant to me since I am curious as to how parents themselves will measure when knowledge is believed to have been formed in their own words and what actions they may take to learn.

Further, for Newman (2012), there is a larger discussion around andragogy and cites Malcom Knowles' ideas on self-directed learning as the more inclusive adult learning approach. The inclusiveness of the broader andragogy versus transformative learning lends well to Newman's discussion about the transformative learning literature that he finds troubling. The outer world can force a psychological analysis of an adult learner's reactions to symbols, like standardized tests and common application software, metaphors, and other interpretations of college-going and that analysis or such learning creates inconsistencies due to the mosaic of human complexity (Newman, 2012). A parent may already be self-directed to learn, and their actions may not be considered as a part of transformative learning.

Applications to Education and My Research

Since Mezirow's original research from 1978 focused on the learning processes of 83 adult learners in higher education, the scope of analyzing transformative learning as it relates to parents' knowledge formation about college-going in my research is fitting (Cranton, 2016; Mezirow, 2009). Further, transformative learning does not rely on a formal setting, including engaging in formal educational activities, that allows for my research to identify either formal or informal learning paths to forming knowledge about college-going (Cranton, 2016). Community-based learning and learner networks can support a parents' exploration of new knowledge as a part of transformative learning (Apte, 2009; Cranton, 2016; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

It is also important to consider that empowered parents with means get to choose which type of secondary school to send their soon-to-be high school student to; they in turn are choosing a community and learner network for their child as well as themselves. My study assesses these choices: potential community features and possible learner networks' impact on

college-going behaviors. These features, networks, and behaviors may grow to challenge held self-schemas about the college-going process. Self-schemas, which are “socially constructed, include generalizations about the self that are derived from past experiences and focused on some aspect of the self viewed,” percolate in the adults’ inner self, the school community, learner network, and the grander societal context to inspire dialogue and actions about the college-going process in the outer world (Noureddine & Stein, 2009, p202). There are symbols that parents may not understand, or have an outdated understanding of, like tests and the application process, and as a part of college-going these parents must approach the disorienting dilemmas presented to them with delicacy to not negatively influence their children’s college-going morale (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Wimberly & Noeth, 2004).

I posed questions to parents through a semi-structured interview, inspiring them to reflect on their own inner self, their actions in the outer world, and how they may be faced with a new or renewed concept—college-going—that may require them to reflect on any suspected disorienting dilemmas in order to challenge previously held assumptions or explore new options. My research seeks to understand how parents with soon-to-be high school students form knowledge about the college-going process and it is in this exploration of new options or identifying tried and true options that my findings may be applied to my practice. I assert that transformative learning is an appropriate adult learning theory to guide this research.

An Overview of the American College-going Process

With this chapter addressing the college-going process and this concept’s relation to parents inquiring to join a private high school it is important to reveal the relationship college-going and this parent group has had throughout American higher education’s history. An understanding of this relationship’s history needs to be presented so my research can be

contextualized. Further, contemporary scholarship has found theoretical models that describe today's college-going for prospective students and their process in general; these wider models are shared for a frame of reference that supports this research delving into the gap in current thinking about college-going: the lack of understanding the relationship today's parents of 8th graders, inquiring to join a private high school, have with knowledge about today's college-going industry. These parents are not prospective students going through a college-going process. They are the parents of soon-to-be college students in the 21st century, not the later parts of the 20th century when they were college-goers, and not the mid-1900s when their parents' parents created their approach to guiding the participants' college-going process.

Early U.S. College-going

Since U.S. institutions of higher learning date back to before our country's establishment it is important to recognize that students have gone to college before America was America; parents have supported this action. As our higher education landscape grew there became a nostalgia for the "self-made man[, usually a father, who] wanted his sons to have the shared campus experience that would position them to associate with young men from established, educated families" (Thelin, 2019, p237). The relationship between parent and U.S. college-going begins.

With the rise of commercialism in the U.S. came the fashionable trend of going to college in the 1890s. Since going to college was becoming trendy it was not only clothing and other symbols that sparked a sense of pride and loyalty in both students and alumni (Clemente, 2008; Thelin, 2019). Many colleges were being fed graduates from the same private secondary schools which scaffolded a lineage of privilege; this lineage reinforced pride and loyalty between parents and colleges (Clemente, 2008; Engberg & Wolniak, 2010; Karabel, 2006; Thelin, 2019; Wolniak

& Engberg, 2007; Van Zanten, 2009). These parents were exposed to college-going because of their own lineage that could guide their child onward to their same alma mater. Parents not in this lineage observed this pipeline from the outside.

Learning about college costs was also not as large a concern for parents of this age considering college-going for their children. Because collegiate enrollment found private boarding schools offering a “a steady flow of ‘paying customers’” whose parents could offer private donations in addition to tuition to America’s colleges there became a tight pipeline from high school to college that did not need to be thought about, let alone learned about (Karavel, 1984, p.5; Oates et al., 2002). The parent-college-going relationship continued to rely on the promotion of the same private high schools’ graduates where there was a bartering process between the high school and college around students’ admission. The parents were not deeply involved in this negotiation; thus, they needed little knowledge about college-going. There was no urgency for these parents to form knowledge about other college options or about college-going more broadly (Clemente, 2008; Engberg & Wolniak, 2010; Karabel, 2006; Thelin, 2019; Wolniak & Engberg, 2007; Van Zanten, 2009).

College-going Goes Big

What jolted colleges away from the feeder mentality was the rise of successful public high school graduates. This ascension paired with *The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944*, or the GI Bill, and the Higher Education Act of 1965 equipped the American public with knowledge and funding to pursue higher education (Thelin, 2019). It is noteworthy that university enrollment during this 1945 to 1980 time period skyrocketed (Hanson, 2021; Snyder, 1993). Parents of these publicly educated, publicly funded students did not need to form deep knowledge about college-going for their children, as the government was teaching necessary

skills to their children and financially supporting their college credit attainment. With colleges more openly enrolling these better funded middle- and low-income customers, college-going had grown, big time (Kowalski, 2016; Thelin, 2019).

The expansion period between 1945 to 2009, when college-going climbed over 20 million enrolled students, did not jolt away society from an awareness of social class, though, and it is in this time period that Murnane et al. (2018) found more high-income families (90th percentile income of \$111,410 in 1975 and \$183,959 in 2013) were making the choice to enroll their child in a private elementary or secondary school at higher rates versus families in other income brackets (Hanson, 2021; Snyder 1993). The share of children from middle-income families (50th percentile of \$56,084 in 1975 and \$68,256 in 2013) enrolling in private schools also declined (Murnane et al, 2018). There also became a widening income gap in society (Liu, 2011).

The combination of all of these variables meant that if families had more means their children were more likely to enroll in college (Cahalan, 2021; Garg et al., 2007; Hanson, 2021; NATCOM, 2019). This statement does not sound different than those above where wealthy families of the early U.S. that sent their sons to private boarding schools with the goal of having their children enroll in college at the sponsoring site of higher learning, but what is happening today is born out of this feeder mentality on a higher number of college-goers, even in the wake of soaring prices for higher education: the reliance on an admission process (Barrett & Cantwell, 2019). This process does allow for resourced private schools to become successful at signaling to colleges their students are more worth admitting, and parents get to decide if their child enrolls at one of these private schools if they have the means. The research site of my study shares many traits with schools described by Van Zanten (2009) as a star school, or school that has the

curriculum, academic focus, and consistent success at enrolling students into colleges. The research site is well resourced and can signal to colleges their students may be more worth admitting.

The Rise of the Process

The shift towards a merit-based admission process above demands further exploration. For higher education institutions it was common to define categories that looked to identify special talents and desired intellects in their applicants (Liu, 2011; Thelin, 2019; Van Zanten, 2009). The controversy is that earning the reward, a seat at a chosen college, found “the criteria for [awarding seats]...unclear. ...More people believe they are eligible for the reward than there are rewards to go around” and that lack of clarity and presumptive behavior identifies my research’s gap: the lack of practical college-going knowledge and a sense of what today’s admissions’ reality is (Hermanowicz, 2019, p. 340). Scholarly works have coined this expected reward, even in the face of ignorance, as “distributive justice” (Lamont & Favor, 1996; Liu, 2011; Hermanowicz, 2019). This sense of justice, or entitlement, is supported by parents whose knowledge of college-going is reliant on the feeder mentality—that of choosing the “right” high school to get into the “right” college—and the shift towards a merit based admission process demands new knowledge about what goes into college-going today. Today’s parents are also alive during a period of collegiate enrollment where they or many of their peers had gone to college, meaning there is a diverse social construction of what college is and how they engaged in college-going. My research seeks to understand how these parents learn or relearn about these varied and potentially new understandings.

The recent “Varsity Blues” scandal is a relevant example of parents understanding enough about college-going combined with the idea of distributive justice. Parents in this case

paid to have their children promoted through a meritorious admission process where their child had not actually displayed those talents presented as their own (Cicciarelli, 2021). These parents used their college-going knowledge and means in order to earn a reward—a seat at their chosen college for their child. The pressure to act illegally may be born out of the concept of having a trophy child, but in many ways “Varsity Blues” highlights the need for a parent to have sure-knowledge when it comes to college-going. Mr. Singer, the broker at the center of the scandal, made the merit process clear for these parents and showed them a sure path that mimicked the feeder mentality (Cicciarelli, 2021). If a parent does this or that like I say, their child will be admitted.

Studying the Process

The college-going process must be studied to grant clearer understanding for the masses and remove the ability for parents to pay for a reward. In the past 40 years scholars have built up various college models which display prospective students’ behaviors, giving observers a map by which they can expect their own college-going process to progress. The participants may have experienced these models with their own college-going, so it is important to understand this scholarship which may frame their future knowledge formation and affirmation.

The Phases and Stages. In 1982, Jackson displayed a three phase model that finds college goers (1) defining preferences, (2) excluding colleges that do not meet these preferences, and (3) evaluating the remaining institutions that fit their criteria. Litten also published a college-going model in 1982, with phases that progressed from forming “college aspirations, [the] decision to start [the] process, information gathering, applications, [and then] enrollment” (p. 388). It is worth noting that Litten also shares with us the work of Kotler, who characterizes “the process of enrolling in college from the student’s perspective as consisting of seven stages:

(1) decision to attend; (2) information seeking and receiving, (3) specific college inquiries, (4) application(s), (5) admission(s), (6) college choice, (7) registration” (1976, as cited in Litten, 1982, p. 386). Kotler’s work focuses on colleges marketing their offerings to prospective students; students’ behavior as a consumer is a focus of past and current research, too (Litten, 1982; Nicolescu, 2009; Stephenson et al., 2016). The idea of marketing introduces a new tone to college: business, and parents are a target for this marketing side of higher education, too (Chapman, 1979; Curtis et al., 2009). I seek to understand not what influences these students, but instead focus on adult learning and the paths to knowledge parents may take to support their own learning about college-going. Higher education administrators and secondary school officials may also benefit from this specific focus on parents’ knowledge formation, not on the actual students as consumers.

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) built on Jackson, Litten, and Chapman to introduce an evolved three-phase college choice model: a predisposition phase, a search phase, and then the choice phase. Hossler teams up with many scholars: Braxton and Coopersmith (1989), Vesper and Schmit (1990), Schmit and Bouse (1991), Stage (1989, 1992) and Maple (1993) to test different populations and variables as college-goers progress through this three-phase model. The impact of parental educational levels and parental encouragement were included and it was found that positive parent interactions with their children increased the likelihood of college attendance (Hossler & Maple, 1993). My research will be guided by these phases but have the narrow focus of parents forming knowledge about college-going in today’s world, not a progression of a student through these phases directly, nor is my research focusing on a parent’s use of their knowledge to encourage their child to attend college.

Perna (2006) updates Hossler and his various teams' works, as well as literature reviewed by Paulsen (1990), by presenting an "economics model of human capital investment as well as the sociological concepts of habitus, cultural and social capital, and organizational context" (p. 116) as it relates to student college choice. These concepts frame four distinct layers that Perna (2006) suggests impact college choice: "1) the individual's habitus; (2) school and community context; (3) the higher education context; and (4) the broader social, economic, and policy context" (p. 116). Using these models, the next stream of research tested decision making, applying contextual layers, around ideas of access and opportunity for students as it relates to college choice. My research is influenced by Perna and this stream of scholarship, but parents' knowledge formation about college-going differs from variables that impact a student's college choice.

Where Is the Learning? I have found that there is a lack of research that focuses purely on adult learning around college-going, and specifically those adults who are parents of soon-to-be high school students. I have shared how today's independent school parents likely combines the wealth found at private schools in the late 20th century; the idea of distributive justice, or notion that everyone deserves their desired reward; the feeder mentality of historical college admission; and the scholarship on student choice as a part of an admission process. These parents expect college of their children, and they know college-going has changed.

There is so much information for parents to learn about: whether that be the role of more familiar college entrance exams in today's climate (Marcus, 2021), whether a test prep course signals an advantage (Oakes et al., 2002), which application software to even use to apply (Taylor, 2019), free tuition programs (Perna et al., 2020), clarifying financial aid and cost projections (Coker & Glynn, 2017; Perna et al., 2019), the act of hiring educational consultants

(Cicciarelli, 2021; McDonough et al, 1997), all of the services received for tuition paid (Caskey, 2018), and what key indicators that are displayed to parents that express the different ways to measure any return on investment they may receive (Blagg & Blom, 2018). Parents and families “make college related decisions based on the information they have, regardless of its accuracy” (Perna et al, 2019, para. 2). With so much to learn about in order to cement accurate knowledge, even for parents with access to resources, there needs to be research about how these adult stakeholders learn about college-going.

Parents, the School, and Technology

What needs to be framed next is how this key player in the college-going process, the parent, learns and behaves. Parents are influenced by the history of higher education and its systematic processes whether or not they realize it. Their learning and behaviors are framed by this context. With an awareness from the literature about the history of the parent-college-going relationship as well as the models crafted about the college-going process, let me discuss this key player, how they learn, how they are susceptible to both a “keeping up with the Joneses” as well as a “keeping up with the children” who are growing more tech savvy effect, and their relationship with their school and family (Ekstrom, 2007).

To start, “if asked about their learning, adults first picture classrooms with ‘students’ and ‘teachers’” (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020, p. 52). Parents, as adults, likely have this same visualization. This visualization anchors parents’ mindsets to a formal educational setting like a school when speaking about their children’s path to college. This visualization suggests a deeper structural schema that reinforce schools as an important formal institutions in the parents’ minds. Parents rely on schools to create positive outcomes for their children (Froiland &

Davison, 2014). My research sees if parents will also rely on resources from this formal institution, the secondary school, for their own learning about college-going.

Parents' Experiences

Garg, Melanson, and Levin present knowledge structures as a part of one's academic self-schema (2007). Since self-schemas are “socially constructed, include generalizations about the self that are derived from past experiences and focused on some aspect of the self-viewed by an individual as important, as well as representations of the self in specific situations and events” their use in grounding a knowledge base a parent holds for the college-going process is helpful (Nouredine & Stein, 2009, p. 202). Parents either have formal exposure to the college-going process from their own past or they do not. Either way a self-schema around this social event is created.

Because American higher education has moved away from a pure feeder mentality to a marketing forward business, parents must recognize how their past consumer behavior can be used to persuade or influence their thinking and actions, which may impact their child (Ekstrom, 2007; Tikka & Oinas-Kukkonen, 2019; Cherry et al., 2020). They must be willing to form new knowledge if they want to best support their child as a resource for accurate college-going knowledge. Transformative learning theory builds nicely on self-schemas to challenge past “mindsets, habits of mind, [and] meaning perspectives” when beginning to question “assumptions and expectation[s]” (Mezirow, 2009, p. 92). The reservoir of parents' past experiences, as well as access to affirming knowledge or dissenting counterpoints allows a caregiver to reflect back on the occurrences that took place in their lives, and how those experiences are impacting their learning and in turn, their behavior (Mezirow, 2009).

The School

Transformative learning does not rely on a formal setting, in fact, “going ‘back to school,’ especially engaging in formal educational activities, is anxiety provoking for adults” (Cranton, 2016, p. 5). This anxiety stoked by a formal educational activity reveals the need for informal learning support for parents that enhances students’ achievement (Jun & Colyar, 2002). Community-based learning and learner networks can support a parents’ exploration of new knowledge as a part of transformative learning (Apte, 2009; Cranton, 2016; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Because empowered parents with means get to choose which type of secondary school they send their children to, they in turn are choosing a community and learner network for their child as well as themselves. My study assesses how these school choices may or may not be relevant as they are related to potential community features as well as possible learner networks’ impact on college-going behaviors.

Since parents play a large role in their child’s education and their involvement in this school community can enhance or detract from student success it is important to understand the reality of where parents exist today (Wimberly & Noeth, 2004; Griffin et al., 2011; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Tsuei & Hsu, 2019). The reality of today’s parents is that they are less stressed if they believe their kids are supported at school (Lau et al., 2021). Further research has identified that children are not just blank slates for adults to inscribe lessons and concrete facts on, and instead are active agents constructing their own knowledge together (Mallan et al., 2010). These last two statements reveal a conflict, a perception that parents rely on school to be where teachers impart wisdom to children, but in critical pedagogy, schools are where “theory is formulated through action and further refined and developed in a continuous loop” with the student (Kincheloe et al., 2017, p. 238). If parents rely on schools, then they must trust the

knowledge forming journey charted by their children in partnership with the school. Parents may reject the school's role in forming college-going knowledge, they may be unaware of a school's role in forming college-going knowledge, or they may be actively choosing to pursue a school that develops college-going knowledge for their children and themselves. That unknown is difficult to measure and is a centerpiece of my study. My research aims to reveal what approach a parent may take to affirm or reject this trust in the school to build knowledge about college-going, as well as identify how the school may be a liaison to other knowledge sources.

Technology

Another challenge for today's parents is the increasing savvy of their children in the world of technology (Ekstrom, 2007). One independent school leader shares that "students are increasingly conditioned to take in information at a rapid rate, and their online connections mean there's more opportunity to share their work far and wide" (Maclean's, 2021, para. 6). Another independent school leader states that students are "so fearless with technology and pushing the limits to what tech as a tool can do for them" (Maclean's, 2021, para. 15). "All those frustrated Zoom hours have given kids superior tech skills" (Maclean's, 2021, para. 14) and this industry testimony is echoed by academic literature where "new media technologies now form a central part of many young people's lives both in and away from school...[there is an] increased use of information communication technologies as part of the leisure lifestyles and school-based experiences of many young people" (Mallan et al, 2010, p. 255). There is also a compressed, globally connected network that can be utilized by tech-savvy youth as frequently as desired to communicate with peers and adults alike (Mallan, 2010) This connectedness paired with instantaneous information accessibility reveals that children can consume ideas "at a rate much faster than that of their elders" (Kstrom, 2007, p204). A part of my research is to analyze how

parents either trust technology or rely on their children to use it on their behalf, and how that habit may create anxiety in this parent group.

Remember, too, that technology can be used to persuade and we do not have a clear idea of how parents integrate technology into home learning when asked to by a school (Tikka & Oinas-Kukkonen, 2019; Tsuei & Hsu, 2019). We also do not know how much trust parents place in college-going tools delivered by technology like BigFuture, College Board's search tool (Marcus, 2021), the College Scorecard, a tool from the U.S. Government (Mabel et al., 2020), and in-school tools like Naviance or Scoir (Mulhern, 2021). Parents are well-served by technologies that provide them information about their children in school, and if parents turn to their child's school for knowledge, using the bridge of technology may be an effective means on which to influence their accurate knowledge formation about college-going (Bergman & Chan, 2021). There is also a curiosity in my study to see if social media influences college-going knowledge and behaviors (Jacobsen & Barnes, 2020; Peruta & Shields, 2018; Turner, 2017). These technologies were likely not around during the parents' own schema development around college-going.

Chapter Summary

It is less known how parents, as adult learners, form knowledge about college-going unless they hold their own self-schema about their own college-going experiences. Even then, the history of college-going and the evolution of an admissions process over time creates a familiar but different enough understanding of today's college-going in parents in which knowledge formation and affirmation needs to be continuously studied. There are new factors like technology at play. There are more parents with means choosing private schools for their

children. There are more children attending college. And there are more expectations by society that a college degree is a requirement for success.

With college-going being a social construct, including common language and uniform symbols, and there being a need for a parent to reflect upon any disorienting dilemma or previously held assumptions that may arise in their child's college-going, transformative learning theory was examined as my study's guiding theory. The parent's inner self holds knowledge; with constant changes to college-going in the outer world, there is a need to adapt to any new stimuli this outer world presents. Since many new tools have been created by the college-going industry and many people claim to be experts, higher education administrators, secondary school officials, policymakers, and parents will be well served by having an applicable theory to identify common paths parents believe they will take to form knowledge about college-going. Parents, as a prime audience of this research, cannot rely on biased heuristics or reacting in the moment, as their role has a direct impact on the perceptions of a place (either secondary or postsecondary option), their child's worth, as well as direct impact on the number of admission applications submitted (Holland, 2019). Parents need a process by which they gain knowledge about college-going, and we as scholars need to research what paths to new knowledge and available tools are common as well as useful to shape that understanding.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter I provide an overview of the methodology used for my study. My research seeks to understand how knowledge is formed about the college-going process in parents with soon-to-be high school students. It is in this search we are reminded that knowledge is constructed, and how adults must check their construction against new information as a part of an ever-changing world (Bada & Olusegun, 2015; Glesne, 2016). My research assesses the attitudes and beliefs of parents about college-going as they are captured today. I conducted this research in order to capture the various paths that parents could take to reinforce prior knowledge or form new knowledge over time about college-going.

Guiding Research Questions

These research questions guide my study:

1. How do parents with soon-to-be high school students form knowledge about the college-going process?
 - a. How do parents form knowledge about a specific higher education institution?
2. What information sources do parents with soon-to-be high school students suspect they will access and prioritize in order to form college-going knowledge?

Guiding Framework

My study relied on the adult learning theory of transformative learning theory discussed in Chapter 2, as well as the scholarship around college-going. My study also leaned on constructivism, which tells us that individuals construct meaning and understanding that is reliant on their experiences (Bada & Olusegun, 2015; Pnevmatikos et al., 2016; Savin-Baden & Howell, 2013). My study researched the phenomena of knowledge formation in parents,

utilizing their individual construction of experiences and knowledge. Transformative learning theory is an accepted adult learning theory and constructivism is used when researchers seek to understand a phenomenon as it relates to individuals' constructs (Bada & Olusegun, 2015; Glesne, 2016; Pnevmatikos et al., 2016). My ability as the researcher and co-creator of the data to synthesize and reference college-going theory is also important. Overall, these three guides are appropriate.

I approached researching the phenomenon of knowledge formation in parents about college-going by using constructivist grounded theory methodology. Charmaz states constructivist grounded theory methodology fits well with constructivist views (Morse et al., 2021). My interaction with the participants influences the collected data, and my creating of themes follows constructivist grounded theory methodology. I am a member of the college-going field, guiding, contributing to, and shaping the collected, created, and analyzed data (Charmaz, 2006; 2017; Morse et al., 2021; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Research Approach

I conducted semi-structured interviews, utilized transcriptions, field notes, and memos, to create codes that captured parents' views that are held within themselves. These codes also display the outer stimuli that spark transformative learning. I systematically collected data, analyzed it, and interpreted my results through constant comparison and triangulation, and present relevant, constructed understandings (Charmaz, 2006).

The Early History of Grounded Theory

Formative scholars of grounded theory include Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss; these two scholars first described this approach in their 1967 work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Charmaz, 2000; Heath & Cowley, 2004; Morse et al., 2021). Strauss and Glaser formed this

qualitative methodology through the establishment of a systematic approach to collecting data from social interactions and context, and proceeds to guide the researcher through a continuous comparative analysis once saturation is reached on the way to a discussed theory. Early grounded theory believed that an emergent theory was there within the collected data waiting to be discovered by the researcher if a systematic analysis occurred. The illustrated guidelines of how to do research through grounded theory methodology allowed for qualitative researchers to have a method that could present a theory. The logical and systematic approach through a grounded theory research process allowed for this claimed theory to be considered (Charmaz, 2000; Morse et al., 2021).

Strauss, Glaser, and Strauss' later partner Juliet Corbin, continued to advance grounded theory methodology, but Glaser and Strauss began to find their beliefs about the methodology diverging (Charmaz, 2000; Kelle 2005). The systematic approach to grounded theory, some argued, allowed for a researcher to impose their views into a study because of the systematic and procedural structure controlled by the researcher. The researcher began to be in the spotlight if they practiced grounded theory, and the methodology's foundational scholars shared their differences about how they believed the researcher could contrive data and analysis and then claim that a finding had emerged. It is here we see succeeding scholars, through a traceable lineage, begin to treat the researcher differently (Charmaz, 2000, Morse et al, 2009, Savin-Baden & Howell, 2013).

Constructivist Grounded Theory

With my study's reliance on the constructivist philosophical branch of grounded theory methodology, which considers the researcher's influence on the procedures and participants in contribution to the data collected, analyzed, and the stated findings, it is important for me to

share the impact of sociologist Kathy Charmaz on grounded theory overall (Qureshi & Ünlü, 2020). For Charmaz, who builds off the work of Glaser, Strauss, and Corbin, in establishing constructivist grounded theory, the researcher-participant relationship, positioning of the study, and meaning behind the data collected are a part of the constructed results. Theories are no longer discovered, they are constructed. Charmaz also felt traditional grounded theory was “prescriptive and rule-bound” (Charmaz, 2000; Morse et al., 2021, p155). Research is constructed. I as the researcher am a situated piece of the collected data and had the flexibility to adapt my procedures as my research was being conducted.

This assertion moves away from traditional grounded theory to discuss the interactions of participants and their data with the researcher because the researcher is a part of generating the constructed theory. Researchers employing constructivist grounded theory must “go beyond the surface in seeking meaning in the data, searching for and questioning tacit meanings about values, beliefs, and ideologies” which brings in the researcher’s influence when creating codes and characterizing findings (Mills et al., 2006, p. 31). The researcher is a part of the researcher-participant-context-data collection and analysis loop and is the presenter of constructed results.

My research questions are inspired by a constructed reality influenced by societal contexts that align well with Perna’s (2006) four-layered conceptual model of *student* college choice shared in Chapter 2. My interview guide elicited rich data from parents with each of Perna’s layers in mind, my field notes captured observations about their behaviors and actions, I built on this analysis by coding each parents’ responses to my questions as I saw them fitting within their and my understanding of college-going and information sources. My direct field knowledge influenced the data collection, analysis, and interpretation when stating the constructed theory, solidifying my methodology as constructivist grounded theory.

Further, the phenomenon of knowledge formation in parents with soon-to-be high schoolers is built off the assumption that reality is constructed by humans who hold beliefs that are “rooted in the context of communities” (McWilliams, 2016, p. 8). Since grounded theory looks to systematically research social contexts, like communities, and I as the researcher am a part of the community, the participants and myself cross paths as a part of conducting my research. My presence was a part of the research. The community was a part of the research.

Similarly, humans—either the researcher or participants—are active in their process of knowledge formation and are informed by their prior schema. Communities influence the individually held schemas which are a part of the adult learner, and the community as a part of how it exists in the participants’ minds and my own mind, was examined and critically assessed. Constructivist grounded theory relies on the historical and situational conditions surrounding the research. With the availability of different knowledge forming paths through Perna’s layers, as well as the progression of each adult through the typical phases of Mezirow’s transformative learning, the constructivist grounded theory methodology allows my study to explore relevant themes that seek to understand parents’ potential views and possible actions taken to form knowledge about college-going as characterized by me, a member of the college-going industry (Charmaz, 2006; McWilliams, 2016; Morse et al., 2021).

Research Site and Participants

The participants are parents with soon-to-be high school aged children. The goal of my research was to explore the phenomenon of these parents’ knowledge formation about college-going and identify their suspected paths and sources to knowledge formation. These participants all have a child in the traditional transition from middle school to high school grade levels, 8th

grade. Participants began the data collection process with their child in the 8th grade over the winter break of 2022. The study concluded in the spring of 2023.

My study is interested in parents with children in this age group because they are actively making the choice of where their middle school aged child will attend high school, revealing factors they may consider important in selecting a formal schooling community and sources used to form that knowledge. The social process of choosing a high school reveals paths to knowledge and learning habits. It was suspected that these paths may be used when these parents more deeply engage in college-going. It is important to note that the participants' 8th graders are currently not enrolled at the research site which makes their secondary school choice a relevant component of my research process. These parents are choosing a school community which will provide a formal and informal learning environment for themselves as well as their children. The research site has an established culture.

My employment has granted me access to an available participant pool at one research site. This research site allowed for a specific set of purposeful participants of interest to be studied and for data to be collected for analysis. My access to this site and my knowledge of its inner workings allowed me to identify partners at the site who agreed to support my research. I was provided with a list of emails of potential participants who purposefully fit my participant criteria—that of being parents of 8th graders who are not enrolled at the research site.

Qualitative research demands purposeful participant and site selections in order to best examine the phenomenon in question (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glesne, 2016; Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Research Site

The research site is one private, independent, coeducational kindergarten through twelfth grade school with two campuses. The grades K-8 campus is located 5 miles from an urban city

center and the grades 9-12 campus is located 12 miles from the city center. The bicampus nature of this research site allows for a greater emphasis on the transition to high school being studied as participants with soon-to-be high school students who inquire about joining this community will be exclusively pursuing a high school community, making this research site different than a single campus K-12 school. The high school aged students being on their own campus allows for the potential for wider transferability of my findings across secondary schools with similar or shared parent communities (Carminati, 2018; Leung, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants will purely be pursuing a secondary school campus for their transitioning child.

The research site is a member of the National Association of Independent Schools, and its affiliate, the Southern Association of Independent Schools. It was founded in the 1950s with the addition of the second campus in the early 2000s. There are routinely 460-475 students in the high school division of interest and to join the research site's grade 9 those already enrolled in the K-8 divisions do not have to file an admission application. My study will focus on those families with 8th grade children who are external inquiries, or families not currently enrolled at the research site's lower campus. I am curious what reasoning these external families may find as a part of inquiring about the research site that they believe may impact their and their child's knowledge formation about college-going.

It is important to state that the participants are labeled as inquiries, that is they have inquired about joining the high school research site. Inquiries may or may not apply for admission to the research site. My employment at the research site has no impact on their admission application to the research site if they decide to apply. I have reiterated to the participants that their participation in my research is voluntarily and will have no impact on any

admissions decision to the research site. My research partners at the site also shared this information if asked.

Participants

I first confirmed approval from the Head of School to do research at this site. I then sought out the Director of Enrollment Management and Director of High School Admissions to see if they believed my findings to be of interest. They agreed to support my study and I was provided with the names and email addresses for over 300 inquiries who had inquired to have their child join the research site's 9th grade the following year. The Head of School, Director of Enrollment Management, and the Director of High School Admissions acted as my study's gatekeeper (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

I received the prospective student's name and gender, their admissions candidate status, their prospective entering year, and the names and email addresses for the parents—the prospective participants—from the research site in a spreadsheet. I then moved the parents' contact information to a new sheet and assigned each email address a random number. I then turned to an online random number generator to identify random participants as I did not want to skew my study to only participants whose last names began with letters at the start of the alphabet. I proceeded to call up 30 numbers at random in order to identify prospective participants to email. Once I received replies, commitments, and signed consent forms, I began the interview process. I continued this cyclical process until saturation in my data collection was achieved at 10 participants (Charmaz, 2006; Guest et al., 2006; Malterud et al, 2016; Polit & Beck, 2020). I anticipated needing 8-10 participants.

Seven participants were female. Three were male. Two participants were Black while the remaining eight were White. All participants were college-educated. For employment there

were nurses, lawyers, a finance professional, an entrepreneur, a marketing and communications professional, an engineer, and a stay at home mom.

I used one research site which limited the pool of participants. This limitation allowed my sampling to be purposive and build towards theory construction. Further, my theory's transferability, a concept that suggests my findings can be applied to similar settings or groups, is supported due to the participants having familiar backgrounds both in the U.S. and abroad (Daniel, 2019). This participant pool allows for my findings to be more transferable across independent high schools which the participants may also be inquiring to join, or others that share a parent population of similar make-up.

I also anchored the participants to a specific timeframe in their child's life which can be replicated across parents by choosing a group of parents with 8th graders. My assumption that these parents are motivated to have their children go to college is supported by my research site being college preparatory. And lastly, since the participants are inquiring to join a high school community for their external 8th grader they have already engaged their knowledge forming schema about a new environment for their child—just like what will be exercised when pondering college-going.

Ethics, Risks, and Benefits

I targeted parents in my research as they are at the age of consent and can be made fully aware of their participants' rights, while also understanding that participation in my study is voluntary and has no impact on their child's secondary school or college admissions' decisions. This understanding minimizes the possible influence my employment at the research site has on nominees agreeing to participate for personal gain. The anonymity of the participants was maintained throughout the study by their selection and my use of a pseudonym throughout

the interview, analysis, and presentation of findings in Chapter 4. This anonymity allowed participants to be thoughtful and forward with their thinking and behaviors when communicating with me.

Risk and Benefits

There were no foreseeable risks associated with this study. Selected participants were interviewed, and the collected data points were used to better understand how parents with soon-to-be high school aged children suspect they will form knowledge about college-going. The creation of my summary theory of knowledge formation and the identification of suspected sources of college-going knowledge are the primary benefits of this study. My goal is that these findings are applicable to as many parents entering the college-going process with their children, as well as inform secondary school officials and higher education professionals about the ways in which they can support parents in finding and creating accurate knowledge about their field. Currently there is a limited amount of research as to how parents approach the phenomena of forming knowledge about college-going and I have found no direct statements that address how parents will approach and utilize different sources of information to form this knowledge.

Risk was mitigated by maintaining participant anonymity by using pseudonyms. Participants choose their own pseudonyms for tracking purposes. Recordings and documents kept digitally were password protected. The physical items I collected: fieldnotes, consent forms, and other observations were kept locked and only accessible by me. All protocols were approved by the IRB at the University of Memphis.

Data Collection

Following Charmaz (2006), I collected data in the form of fieldnotes, interviews, and memos. My research interest and guiding research questions demanded that as much

information as possible be collected from the participants for analysis. The phenomenon in question, exploring how parents form knowledge about the college-going process, is quite nuanced, which makes using multiple data collection tools important.

My primary data collection tool was semi-structured intensive interviews with participants. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask the same set of questions to each participant while also allowing for probing questions that were off script with the intent of creating richer data, deepening my constructed themes (Charmaz, 2006). Fieldnotes and memos were used to enhance the constant comparison analysis and triangulation (Birt et al., 2016; Charmaz, 2006; Qureshi & Ünlü, 2020; Torrance, 2012

I interviewed ten participants and had the ability to add more participants if more data better achieved saturation and would have informed my constructed theory (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I noticed as I interviewed my later participants that my data was not supporting the construction of new themes or sorting procedures, as much as I was deepening my created codes. Research by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) present that metathemes in research start being prevalent at six interviews, that more than the majority of utilized themes are found around the sixth interview, the codes used more frequently were created in early data collection, and these high frequency codes remained prevalent during analysis, even as the number of interviews was added to their work.

Reinforcing my sample size, Charmaz (2006) shares that grounded theory is intended to use limited data to develop categories that directly bring about relations between comparative categories. My research targeted a narrow population from a relatively homogeneous pool. My research targeted a narrow aspect of these participants' lives—assessing their own college-going schema and how they suspect they will refresh or affirm their knowledge for their rising high

schooler. I completed 10 interviews and found that each later participant was coded with the same phrases and concepts.

I recorded the intensive interviews on a digital recorder and took hand-written notes to capture context. The interview site was an agreed upon local library but for those who preferred, or were more able to volunteer through this medium, a Zoom video conference interview was conducted. Zoom meetings were observed as being in a bedroom, home office, or closet. Zoom meetings were accessed both by computer and phone.

Interviews lasted between 30-55 minutes and covered all the interview guide's questions' sentiments. I asked off-script questions when I felt it would deepen my understanding of a participants' views or make an upcoming questions' supposed answer more salient (Charmaz, 2006). I crafted memos after my interviews, which acted as a point of reflection, sorting, and continuous thematic construction. Hand-written and digital notes supported these memos' utility.

My research methods allowed for the participant to be interviewed a second time, but I did not identify the need to reapproach one of the participants in this manner that outweighed the risk of them altering their initial reactions. Ultimately, the intent of my study is to analyze a parents' immediate beliefs or suspected actions when presented the disorienting dilemma of any part of the college-going process. A second interview, conducted later, would allow the participants to research into areas of their knowledge they felt were lacking during our first interview. My goal is to understand the initial trajectory along the stages of transformative learning theory and the ability for a participant to reframe their statements in a second interview would detract from my original findings and constructed theory's statements around motivation.

I assert that a second, and even third interview, of these participants is a proposal for future research discussed in Chapter 5.

I transcribed the interviews incorporating my fieldnotes regarding nonverbal sounds and observations that I created during and after the recorded interview. Seidman (2013) states that records of both verbal and nonverbal communication can inform analysis if significant time has passed since the interview. These nonverbal sounds, nonverbal communication notes, as well as my observations combined to construct relevant data as a part of constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2009b). As a part of interviewing, I was active in constructing the understanding of the phenomenon being investigated, and both the influence of my presence and questions asked are included as a part of the collected data (Charmaz, 2009a; Willig 2008).

My position as an employee at the research site, as well as my profession being in the field of college counseling made my expertise and language a part of the collected data and constructed theory. I review my theoretical influences in Chapter 2 and know that my understandings of college-going are a part of the data. As Charmaz and Bryant (2011) discuss, each researcher's study can bring to bear new, different conclusions. I know my role in constructivist grounded theory as a situated researcher is critical. New participants, a different researcher, and different research sites can reveal a never-before-seen combination of shared experiences. Adding research sites or changing the age of participants' children along the college-going trajectory are discussed in Chapter 5 as potential areas for future research.

Data Analysis and Representation

In grounded theory, once a study begins, analysis occurs while data collection continues (Charmaz, 2006; Willig, 2008). I began my data collection and analysis with an initial draft of my research actions in an integrating memo (Charmaz, 2006). As my research progressed

sorting memos and theoretical memos articulated why I made certain choices around research actions, like adjusted questions and defined selected codes. These memos acted as both a data collection tool and point of analysis. Coded transcripts and initial memos allowed for advanced memos and focused findings to be presented (Charmaz, 2006). My data analysis utilized the created paper documents, memos, notes, and I utilized digital software to assist my organization of categories into relevant themes.

I went through an initial round of coding to identify pointed ideas in each transcript. I went line-by-line through each transcript, labeling ideas in the margins as they came to me when reviewing the data. Initially my codes started as phrases but quickly evolved into shorthand as repeated ideas appeared throughout the transcripts. I kept a key of these codes in a notepad. I evolved some of these short codes as I reviewed new transcripts, but for the most part I found many initial codes were used on each transcript. These initial codes allowed for deeper connections to be analyzed through my progression to axial coding (Charmaz, 2006).

Axial coding is when larger connections across initial codes can be identified and categorized. I took my initial codes and listed them on a notepad as they occurred in my transcripts. I attached an enriching comment to my initial codes that spoke to the conditions, actions, and consequences the code captured in this process to carryover a deeper meaning. I then turned to reviewing my attached comments in order to restructure my data into connected categories and subcategories. I utilized memos and additional notes to frame my decision-making and label these connective concepts. New codes were created and reused codes were given elevated, connective meaning across my data. I then reassigned my enriching comment to my axial codes on the way to selective coding (Charmaz, 2006).

Selective coding builds on the categories developed from initial and axial coding, integrating ideas on the way to constructing theory (Amesteus, 2014). I transferred all my axial codes and their supportive comments to a spreadsheet and organized them by code. I analyzed how each supportive comment integrated my codes together. I labeled the specific relationships and progressions from one axial code to another and began theorizing. I again used memos and additional notes to frame my decision-making (Charmaz, 2006). Upon returning to my integrating selective codes I was able to construct a descriptive theory as to how parents with 8th graders suspect they will form knowledge about college-going, as well as what sources they suspect they will utilize for information. My role as the researcher influenced this analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

Trustworthiness

The pursuit of quality qualitative research demands that scholars be sound in process and objective. Accepted criteria for evaluating trustworthiness in qualitative research are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Cope, 2014; Morse et al., 2002; Polit & Beck, 2020). I present my research methods and findings while considering these ideas below.

Credibility

Credibility refers to truth in the data, or the participants' views, and my interpretation and presentation of these views (Cope, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2020). Credibility also demands sufficient and relevant data, as well as a systematic process (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). To increase my credibility, I have stated my methods above and followed them. I established a partnership with the research site and was grateful they shared the contact information for my potential participants. Email addresses were shared on this list and I crafted and utilized a recruitment message to secure participants. Signed consent forms informed the participants as to

what to expect and how their interviews would be used. I then met with each participant, recorded our interview, transcribed the audio into text, created field notes, crafted memos, and proceeded to analysis (Flick, 2004; Stahl & King, 2020). My codes and presentation of findings are relatable to human experience and were shared with the participants for their review (Decino & Waalkes, 2018). I also continued my interview process until saturation had been achieved (Birt et al., 2016; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020; Maxwell, 2008; Sikolia et al., 2013).

Dependability

Polit and Beck (2020) assert that credibility cannot be attained without dependability. Dependability is when study conditions, tools, and processes are stable over time. I utilized the same interview guide across my data collection and consistently interviewed the participants in a similar fashion. I engaged with each participant in a routine way, sending the same recruitment email, using the same calendar sign-up tools, and confirming with the participants that they were able to share their thoughts freely. I am confident that this research study could be conducted at a different research site with similar participants.

Confirmability

Cope (2014) shares that confirmability refers to my ability to demonstrate that my research represents the participants and not my opinions. I enhanced my confirmability by adding rich quotes from the participants that were member checked for intent and voice (Decino & Waalkes, 2018). I demonstrate that my categories and conclusions were derived from the data by using the participants' direct voice, combining testimony where appropriate into paraphrased presentations.

Transferability

Stahl and King (2020) state that transferability is when patterns and descriptions from the context of one study can be applied in another setting. Thick descriptions of process, the research site, participants, and findings support transferability. I increase my transferability by sharing information about the research site, revealing information about the participants and how they were purposefully selected, expressing my influence as a professional in the field being studied, state the timing of my study, share the timeframe in which data was collected and analyzed, and state what data collection tools I used. My clear research process allows for others to identify similarities in their context that may allow my findings to transfer to their experience. Other researchers or readers may find a fit with my study if they find an association.

Subjectivity Statement

Conducting this research as a former college admission officer at two different higher education institutions as well as working in secondary school college counseling reveals some of the many reasons why I have created and am pursuing this scholarship using constructivist grounded theory methodology. Parents play a pivotal role in influencing children's college-going and I have witnessed inaccurate information or the lack of understanding damage the relationship dynamics within a family. I have a desire to support these families, which is why I am using constructivist grounded theory methodology.

It is important to recognize that I am an employee at the research site where these inquiring parents may one day apply for their child to be admitted. My position as an employee at the school at which these families may become applicants may create the perception that if the participants do not engage in my research that their prospective application may be damaged. I stated and reassured participants throughout our relationship that being a part of my research has

no bearing on their admission application if they choose to apply. I do not sit on the admission committee and in using pseudonyms I will not divulge to the enrollment manager who has agreed to be a part of my study. My questions and constructed theory solely seek to understand a parents' mindset about higher education and their knowledge formation along the path to higher education for their child. My research is not a gatekeeper to secondary school or a gatekeeper to college.

Further, as a doctoral student I have engaged in the college-going process multiple times personally, and have had the blessing of being raised by educators—both of whom completed college—and was surrounded by two siblings who successfully pursued and completed higher education as well. These personal exposures create assumptions as do my professional commitments that make me a relevant piece of the collected data using constructivist grounded theory methodology. My experiences will contribute to data collection and analysis, and by using a thorough coding process and member checks I have ensured that my findings stick close to the data and participants' views.

As a White male I also understand that my physical presence either in person or over a virtual tool projects the dominant norms of our current society to participants. When I engaged in dialogue, I stuck to my previously created interview guide and only asked probing questions relevant to the research at hand. I also made sure other forms of communication were procedural or clerical as to make sure participants viewed our time as comfortable and open for them to share their views.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discusses the appropriateness of constructivist grounded theory as the methodology that drives my study. Knowing that constructivist grounded theory allows for

participants and the researcher to be active in the formation of knowledge and their reality, this approach allows for parents' views to be best captured as they actively seek to form knowledge. The data collection procedure of conducting interviews, combined with the researcher's observations and notes, allowed for layers of coding and analysis to occur. These codes informed the categories developed on the way to describing an explanatory theory that aims to capture how parents form knowledge about the college-going process, and what sources they suspect they will turn to to secure such knowledge. Chapter 4 details the results of the study.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter reports the results of my study. The primary purpose of my study was to investigate how parents with soon-to-be high school students form knowledge about college-going, and discuss what sources of college-going information they suspect they may turn to. I conducted a qualitative research study following constructivist grounded theory methodology.

First, I utilized semi-structured interviews with participants in a neutral environment, either at a local library or over Zoom. These interviews allowed me to identify deeper meanings and common, shared experiences across this parent group. Two primary research questions framed my data collection and analysis:

1. How do parents with soon-to-be high school students form knowledge about the college-going process?
 - a. How do parents form knowledge about a specific higher education institution?
2. What information sources do parents with soon-to-be high school students suspect they will access and prioritize in order to form college-going knowledge?

Participants

I state in Chapter 3 how identifying a research site and narrowing my sampling pool allowed me to identify purposeful participants. My criteria for selecting this sample were as follows:

- Have inquired about joining the research site's high school division for their 8th grader.
- Not have their 8th grader currently enrolled at the research site.
- Have an interest in discussing college-going and the research at hand.

Table 1 introduces the 10 participants:

Table 1

Participants

Participant Pseudonym	Current Profession	Observed Gender	Observed Race/Ethnicity	Highest College Degree
Ada	Homemaker	Female	Black	Masters
Allison	Nurse Practitioner	Female	White	Masters
Gary	Entrepreneur/Business Owner	Male	White	Masters
Hendon	Finance	Female	White	Bachelors
John Doe	Lawyer	Male	White	Law
Lisa	Lawyer	Female	White	Law
Millie	Lawyer	Female	White	Law
Pablo	Engineer	Male	White	Bachelors
Paige	Communications Professional	Female	White	Bachelors
The Mother of All Things (MOAT)	Midwife	Female	Black	Masters

Thematic Findings

In order to construct thematic findings, I first created data by outlining how I would be approaching participants and attempting to answer my research questions. I then conducted each semi-structured interview and noted thoughts of interest to enhance future data collection. As I collected data, I read through what was presented and began coding. I coded all data and began dividing results into major themes. Subthemes were created to enhance my understanding of these major themes. I then interpreted this analysis to develop descriptive, connective, thematic constructions.

In this chapter I present these three major themes around adults with 8th graders and their suspected behaviors around forming knowledge about college-going. These themes are:

1. The benefits and limitations of parents' existing college-going knowledge
2. Parents' motivation to reframe their child's college-going

3. How parents leverage their networks to form new college-going knowledge

I explain how my collected data saturates these three themes by presenting my analysis and participants' stories. Direct quotes are used where appropriate. Participants' stories were paraphrased where appropriate.

Theme 1: The Benefits and Limitations of Parents' Existing College-going Knowledge

Chapter 2 details the inner self and the outer world which are features of transformative learning theory. For an adult learner to have a transformative event, they must first hold a schema about the topic at hand. In college-going, all the participants had attended college, and seven of them also held advanced degrees. This assertion means they hold a pre-existing knowledge about college-going. Most participants admitted they know more about the college-going process than their 8th grader to-date, but that their own college-going experience felt distant, making it a schema to question.

The Evolution of Technology

An interesting finding as it relates to college-going and the participants, is their use of technology in their own college-going process. All participants went to college and seven hold advanced degrees, revealing they went to college multiple times. These procedural processes have been updated. Below I provide an overview of their technology.

Paper Applications, The Telephone, Mail, Pamphlets, Books, and Magazines. All participants applied to their college using a paper application. Participants had to call a college to have an application mailed to them or collect a physical application through other means. They would then turn around and mail the application back: "I mean, back then we had to mail our stuff off," said Ada. Pablo expressed anxiety in our interview when he admitted that he has not seen a college application since his process. Gary, a collegiate student-athlete, talked about

how he would use his telephone to call coaches, and how he and his classmates “were getting those pamphlets [in the mail] and studying, you know the college brochure, [thumbed through imaginary pages].” Gary’s testimony reveals how his college-going process went; it relied on paper documents.

Eight participants discussed their use of paper in the form of books as a part of their knowledge construction. Hendon, talked about going to bookstores to build her knowledge. Pablo and Paige expressed how they always used the library for learning. Pablo asked me if that big book of all the colleges in the country still existed as that is how he recalled doing his college search. The benefit of revealing this learning habit as it relates to college-going is that these books do still exist, but a question arose as to their value in today’s digital world. Paige captured this sentiment well:

We bought that [Fiske College Guide] book for my oldest and I was like, holy cow. This is, I did not need to buy this, you know? I mean, I'm glad I did. Because what I like best is the if you like this, look at this too. Those kinds of pieces of information are really helpful. But other than that, I'm like, that was kind of not needed.

The Fiske brand was first associated with college ratings in 1982 when Edward Fiske, then education editor at *The New York Times*, first published a guide to 265 institutions in an essay format. At the time, there was said to be a heated competition amongst college guidebooks—those thick books with all of the colleges in it—with *Education Week* sharing that there were “guides published by Barron, Lovejoy, and Peterson, and some smaller specialized directories issued by a variety of trade and professional associations” (McQuaid, 1982).

Further, Ada, Millie, John Doe, and Hendon felt that they would turn to the rankings curated by *U.S. News & World Report* to form today’s college-going knowledge. These rankings

were first published in 1983, with a standalone college guidebook being published in 1987 (Boyington, 2014). Lisa shared that she was applying to her undergraduate colleges in that 1987-1988 school year with no computer. Gary, who was a high school graduate in the class of 1998 shared: "we used to buy the big book, you know, I was class of '98. So we had the big old list of colleges books." Participants initial college-going schema relied on books, guides, rankings, and handbooks to form their knowledge. Participants' outer world was formed by this technology, and technology evolved.

The Internet, Google, and Email. New stimuli for sparking a disorienting dilemma exists in today's outer world surrounding college-going. Two participants stated they had a personal computer during their college-going. Paige mentioned having dial-up internet in her home. Gary received his first email address on his first day of college. All participants not only faced the emergence of the internet, email, and Google they now must wield these tools to affirm or form new college-going knowledge. Like Paige said above, that recent Fiske Guide purchase was not needed for her oldest daughter's college-going process.

A benefit of having an existing college-going schema is that parents know what types of phrases to search for, and in today's world they shared a go-to starting source: Google. Participants shared that they would use Google to visit specific colleges' official websites. College websites are where they expect to get basic, authentic information. Millie captured the idea of searching for colleges and wanting to go beyond their marketing, but shared how the amount of information available can be overwhelming:

I feel like there are a lot of options out there that I know nothing about. And that's a little overwhelming. Like I think the piece that I feel less comfortable with right now is how

do we get from, however, 10s of many 10s of 1000s of colleges that there are, down to a reasonable set that would actually, potentially be a good fit for [my son].

Ada, Millie, and Hendon agreed that looking beyond a college website was necessary to form appropriate knowledge. They shared they would read information from the familiar U.S. News and World Report's college rankings which are now online. Hendon, whose oldest child is a senior, stated that she also turned to blogs where information about a college, or about the process as a whole, were posts that she would click on in a Google search results' list. Paige suspected she would read "review websites." A benefit of having an existing college-schema with new technology is that participants can inquire about a college over the web, instead of having to call them. The limitation of this simple outreach was quickly felt by Paige:

But thinking about how much information [colleges] start to inundate you with, when all of a sudden, you're like, 'hey, I'm interested in what you have going on there' [by signing up for a visit online.] And all of a sudden, you have 5000 emails...And then you're like, 'What in the world?'

The ability for technology to communicate to mass amounts of families at a very lost cost is felt in today's college-going. This presentation shows that participants are trying to use these new knowledge forming tools but feel a lack of control.

When it comes to applying to college, The MOAT talked about her understanding of today's digital application process saying that there "is a whole system where you just dump all your information in, and you just choose the schools that you want to see your information." She continued, "that process is totally, totally different... We had to send each application to a school." Today's technology allows for students to easily replicate their data and send it to many colleges with just a few clicks of a computer mouse.

The Smartphone and Beyond. The outer world continues to change, and participants admit their children are better at these new knowledge creating tools than they are. Whether it is social media, Zoom, YouTube, or actually handling the hardware, parents know their children are wielding these tools more skillfully than they are. Millie shared, “I call [my 8th grader] my IT assistant all the time, because I don't know how he knows to do that. But if I am about to tackle something technology related, I usually just hand it off to him because it's a lot more efficient.” John Doe shared this sentiment. Lisa connected this vulnerability to college-going, “you know, you have to have these [sports’ recruitment] videos out [online]... this is how you get on college radars. Like, [my 8th grader is], already learning that process. Whereas you know, I said to my husband, like, you need to learn that, too. Because if he's figuring it out, like we need to, like, catch up.”

I pressed participants to see if they felt comfortable with their child using technology to become knowledgeable about today’s college-going, and all parents admitted that their child is already more an expert in some things or many things, as compared to them, because of their access to technology anyway. Parents were proud of these distinctive qualities in their children and this pride added evidence to my suspicion that parents see their child as a key knowledge source. The MOAT shared, “I'm comfortable with that [expertise] because of the fact that he is becoming an adult.” Participants hope their 8th grade children engage in college-going and use the technological tools they know to form their own understandings. It was expected that the 8th graders would then use their established knowledge to evolve the parents’ understanding of today’s college-going. Participants expect to engage their children in dialogue in order to build on their existing college-going schema and reshape it to be more current and in-line with what their child wants.

A Family's Influence

Parents' existing college-going schemas are also influenced by their family. I focused this theme around the development of a college-going schema from participants' youth. I highlight participants' spouses, siblings, and their parents.

Partners. Participants' partners were often referenced as a trusted source or ally in any knowledge seeking endeavor. Nine referenced their partner's college-going experience in forming their own understanding of college-going overall as they went to different colleges and universities. With nine participants expressing the importance of their spouse's experience, it is a benefit to having partners' exposure to college-going as a part of the family unit. Participants shared how each partners' college-going experiences were shared, compared, and contrasted.

Siblings. Participants also referenced their own siblings' college-going process when speaking with me. Participants stated that they either went where their siblings did, or followed the expectations that were outlined by their parents for their siblings. Lisa expressed that her family shaped her search because it was not an expanded process:

I actually I picked the school that my sister went to and that not a lot but some folks in my high school went to. It was less than four hours away and it was a good school and that's where I went. And I mean, it shocks me that there was such little thought process.

This testimony supports the benefit of having siblings who go through the college-going process first, but this relationship can create a limiting factor if an anchor bias is established.

Parents. The family unit of participants' youth also covered their own parents' expectations around college-going. Participants' parents set the expectation of college-going being desired for their children or not. Paige illustrated this point, "And in my family growing

up, it was never, that was not an option, you're going to college.” The MOAT also relied on family in creating her existing college-going schema because her mother was a school counselor.

Millie connected the supportive role her parents took while also introducing the idea of a family’s finances influencing a college-going schema:

The approach that my parents took, I mean, they took more of a supportive role than a driving role in me, choosing where I would go to college. For my family finances were more of a factor than I think it will be for my son. And so more of [my parents and my past] conversations were around some of those limitations or choices that we would have to make.

Finances were an influencing piece of participants’ own college-going decisions. Two participants shared that they took out student loans that they either are still paying back or had to pay off over time. Lisa said, “And as someone who you know, has carried student loan debt for, you know, decades, I think that's a huge driving force of wanting our kid to finish college without debt.” And Pablo echoed, “I took student loans. I had to. I don't even know where they're at these days. I think they got forgiven. I don't know.”

These memories and decisions are a part of the family’s influence on participants’ existing college-going schema. It is a benefit to having been parented through a college-going process, even if participants’ processes had limiting factors. Participants also shared how they reacted to some of these limiting factors in their own search, like college finances, and how they want their children to have a more expanded process.

Being the Parent. Participants spoke about wanting their children to do better than they did in their own college-going: have a more thoughtful college process, be more successful, and have more fulfillment in life. This sentiment is captured by Allison, “I think we all kind of want

our kids to do better than we did. You know, I mean, whatever that means it doesn't really mean monetarily. But we just want them to have more success and more happiness and more fulfillment than we have.” And Paige, “I think they should be, they should be smarter, just like I hope my generation was, you know, I hope that I knew more about certain things than my parents did. I think it's part of the progression of humanity.” Participants’ exposure not only to how they went through college-going, but observing how their family influenced their college-going is a benefit to them today as a parent.

Time is Scarce

How participants used their time in creating their existing college-going schema was heavily discussed. There was time spent actively seeking out college-going knowledge, or actively researching college-going information, time spent passively digesting college-going knowledge, or when college-going information was served to them, and there was time spent simply living at a college which formed the participants’ college-going views. The more time spent actively learning something, thinking about something, or being somewhere allows for there to be more opportunity for transformative learning theory’s stages of forming knowledge to occur.

Actively Seeking College-going Knowledge. Seven participants shared that they did not use their time well when considering their own college-going process. Less time spent questioning future goals and possible college options led to a pigeonholing effect for Pablo and John Doe, meaning they were guided by others based on observed strengths. Both participants reference how their high schools’ guidance counselors looked at their grades and test scores in their later high school years and told them what major to study or where to go to college. Lisa expressed how she wants her 8th grader to actively spend more time developing his college-going

thoughts to combat what she also described as pigeonholing, or being told what to do because of an observed pattern. Active time spent forming college-going knowledge is needed for an expanded search and a deeper awareness of desired future goals.

Further, participants referenced not giving their own college search and application process much active research time in their youth, with late in their high school lives' actions driving their eventual enrollment decisions. Paige and Lisa, chose only to visit a few campuses, only applying to a few colleges, and stated that there was little thought put into their undergraduate enrollment considering this decision's later importance. Pablo mentioned he got to visit some campuses in his youth. Allison talked about how she did not realize her high school grades were important until it was too late, sharing that she watched her own peers attending more selective institutions for college and that she was just as smart as they were.

Gary stood out as an active agent in his college-going. He expressed how he went to a college preparatory independent school. He felt the culture pressured students on to college. Gary, as a prospective collegiate student-athlete, shared college-going actions he took of calling potential coaches and trying to learn more about the different teams' and universities' dynamics. His school facilitated his use of time. Gary, in inquiring to have his daughter join the research site, is hopeful a similar environment will support his daughter's college-going.

Passively Digesting College-going Knowledge. Even if there was less of an active college-going process for seven participants there were still identified moments of creating an existing college-going schema that were not actively sought out. Gary mentioned that his wife's college professors still send Christmas cards, "And I do not get Christmas cards from my teachers." He did not ask for these cards to arrive in the mail, but they created an understanding

of his wife's college: the people, the environment, and the relationship his wife formed with her college, as compared to his own relationship with his alma mater.

Millie talked about simply reading the news in general when she found colleges moving to test-optional admissions' policies during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. She did not seek out this information, but it found her. Subscribing to podcasts, news applications, and other infotainment sources are ways Ada and Paige discussed receiving college-going knowledge. The MOAT talked about listening to talk radio while in the car. Social media posts also are presented to participants as they scroll through their apps. These sources of information present passive learning as a form of entertainment. When entertainment is needed to pass the time, participants can turn to digesting information passively.

Paige contrasted these two realms—active versus passive college-going knowledge consumption—when she talked about one of her favorite hobbies, reading:

I wouldn't read a whole book about Sewanee [for college-going research]... I'm not gonna read a whole book about Sewanee. You know, maybe I would if my kid went there and I'm like, 'Oh, I love this place. I want to know more about you know, the land it's on or you know,' but, I think it's interest led based on where we are in our lives.

Paige shares how she enjoys reading for entertainment but would not commit so much time to reading whole books about specific colleges as a part of active college-going knowledge seeking.

The Alma Mater. All participants mentioned that spending time at their college formed an impression of what college-going is. This time investment is hard to ignore when creating a college-going schema since participants were on campus, forming college-going experiences. Further, six participants referenced their own college when speaking about their child's future

college-going because they would be able to compare their time of attendance to today's presented experience.

A college campus visit for their children would likely start at an alma mater of either the participant or their partner, simply due to going to football games or other alumni based events, as Allison stated, "we'll obviously take her to the ones that are easy like [state flagship university] where my husband went, and we go to, go to games there, and then we'll get her, to get her there easily, we'll take her to where we went to grad school or wherever [my husband] went to law school." A benefit of existing college-going knowledge is that there is already a time investment, even if limited, in learning the basics of the college-going process. There is a benefit to parents also having spent time at their colleges already. However, a parents' narrow circumstances can again create a bias since it is likely they will start their child's college-going comparing new thoughts to their past experiences. This assertion reveals this section's theme, that there is both a benefit and limitation to having an existing college-going schema.

Work Shapes Parents' Lives

Lastly, the existing college-going schema is influenced by participants' employment. Participants expressed how their college-going was supposed to prepare them for their profession, but it was shared that they had to learn even more about their specific work while on the job. I associate participants' work and college-going in two ways: that of knowing where participants' coworkers went to college and how that can assist them, and also how work motivated participants to return to college for advanced degrees. Returning to college means a renewed and evolved understanding of college-going.

Knowing Coworkers' College-going. Hendon shared the value of coworkers' college-going when she shared a story with me about her early working years in finance. Hendon

expressed that her university grossly underprepared her for her first years on-the-job and sought out a mentor in her office that she asked to teach her binomial trees and derivatives, "...I'm serious. We would go sit at a pizza restaurant, we would have a legal pad, and he would teach me binomial trees." Hendon ties this to her existing college-going schema by sharing that this coworker went to an Ivy League business school while she had only attended a state flagship university. She presented this college-going divide in her response to me, and continued this theme by expressing later that she is a public university graduate who operates in a world of Ivy League graduates.

Continued College-going. Gary also sought out additional learning that relied on his college-going schema. Gary's story of continued college-going actually combines all of these subthemes: technology, family, time, and the profession. Gary was hired to work at his father's natural gas business and in his phrasing, he was the only one in that office who knew how to attach documents to emails. "And so they needed me and I needed them. And so he hired me. And I started doing business school, night school, at [a nearby private university]," he said.

As a part of Gary's continued studies, he admitted that his education was an attempt to not look stupid or bad for the next day's meetings. His continued education supported his then profession:

My job was anything my dad didn't want to do; was my job. And so he wanted to change over his accounting stuff so I took like two or three accounting classes. You know and I changed it over, it was the greatest business degree ever. And then we got into another lawsuit. So I took two-three business law classes. You know, contract, law and things and we're in the, we're fighting all day in the lawsuit and then at night, I'm learning it.

Gary's next profession continued to build on his existing college-going schema and his motivation to not look bad while on the job. He would turn to massive open online courses to firm up his knowledge on home goods, a new business he acquired:

I took a little [craftsmanship] class at [state university] online. You know, to try to learn [my new trade]... And I mean those Courseras are fantastic... Did some of those, you know, and that's just trying to not look stupid for the next day's meeting.

Like Gary, all but three of the participants continued their college-going by holding advanced degrees. They cited this continued college-going as supporting their current or past work because their professions demand their advanced degrees and continuing education credits. It is a benefit to having such deep existing college-going knowledge not just about four-year degrees, but also advanced college-going if a parents' goals are to support their 8th grader's higher learning.

Theme 2: Parents' Motivation to Reframe Their Child's College-going

The participants' motivation to reframe their child's college-going centered on the future goals of their children. These parents were motivated to identify the future goals of their children so they could justify multiple college-going decisions. Most of these decisions focused on money and time.

Future Goals and College-going Value

All participants understood college costs have risen since their college-going days. When considering the costs of today's higher education and the before mentioned lack of time spent on parents' own college-going, parents felt it was important to gain clarity as to what exactly their children want to do in college. Gary, Hendon, and Allison captured these sentiments. Gary started by talking about his college-going and then moves to today:

They even said, it doesn't matter what you study, [it] just matters where you go and [you] study what you like. I think that's starting to be different now. What you learn matters. I think I, you know, I don't think you can go and study underwater basket weaving and think everything's gonna be really easy. You need, you need hard skills.

Gary then connected the future goals with today's high cost, and how a degree at a luxury cost from an unknown college can be worthless in his view:

I'm looking at the cost of that college a lot because, you know, like a nephew went to a \$70,000 dollar, 'your college I had never heard of,' and he's working, you know, at [a local fast food joint] now, you know, underwater basket weaving, \$70,000 a year, and it's useless.

The dollar amount his nephew spent on getting educated only translated to him being hired by a fast food restaurant. Further, Gary continued his useless future goal in underwater basket weaving theme but framed it at a well-known luxury college, Harvard:

The last thing I want is an underwater basket weaving major applying to my business from Harvard. I will not hire that person. If you can't do [the job I'm hiring you for] then I do not want you in here either. Well now if they went to Harvard, I might be able to teach you faster because obviously you jumped through some hoops and showed up on time and you were around pretty smart people to learn your underwater basket weaving. However, I don't want the sense of entitlement. I'd love that kid, from Tennessee Tech who actually knows how to do what I want them to do.

Hendon continued comparing college to a luxury good:

And I think there is also with the college scenario, is there's a cost aspect at this point.

That is, we have to look at, even as very affluent parents, there's a...it's like I told him, I

don't mind paying for a Mercedes if I'm gonna get a Mercedes, but I am not paying for Mercedes and getting a Ford.

Hendon was only going to pay for what she perceived to be the right value for the cost. Hendon then stated that to find that value she needed to know what her oldest, a 16 year old at the time, wanted to do in his future so they knew what colleges to even go visit and learn about:

What do you want to major in? Do you want to apply to the School of Engineering or the School of Arts and Sciences? And I'm looking, you know, this discussion was having to occur with our son when he was about 16 years old, because it mattered what schools to go show him. He couldn't make toast. I mean, think of what I'm trying to ask him, do you want to go into biomedical engineering or neural engineering?

Future plans help drive a college-going process, especially when cost is an extreme consideration. Gary summarized, "Can you do [what you want] for less, like, like, are we paying \$70k when we could kind of get something pretty close for \$30k? That's a real thing."

If families are used to consuming luxury goods and do not assess the value of what they are paying for like Gary states above, then paying too much for college is possible. Lisa echoed that if parents have accurate college-going knowledge, they can better understand the actual cost of perceived luxury when it comes to college brands:

I remember just a couple years ago, reading an article about... families will choose state schools... won't even have their kids apply to a private school because the private school costs, you know, \$65,000 a year and the, the state school costs \$30k. But you don't realize the kid that goes to Stanford, it's, you know, \$65,000, or whatever, but they're really paying only \$14,000. But you never apply. And again, like I realize, like, there's a select few that go to Stanford, but it's just like, whatever the, you know, whatever the

example [college] is, just knowledge like that. You know, there's the price tag, and then there's what folks actually pay. It's like, 'oh, that's helpful information to have,' then we won't necessarily cross off the list just by a quick search of 'Oh, the school costs 80,000 a year, he's not applying.'

If a future goal was not identified by the child, then there was less of an interest in paying for a higher cost college—particularly for Gary, Hendon, The MOAT, and Allison. Lisa shared how she can reframe her child's process simply by looking at college outcomes and talking to alumni. She said, "...even talking to alumni, I mean, kind of literally the things that I learned about after my school process, like you can call someone who went to the school and ask about their experience". Having this information allowed parents to see the value of that college's experience.

There were some parents that trusted their children to identify and share with them their future goals. If this trust was there, meaning the child was responsible and often spoke with their parents, there was less motivation to question the information being shared with the participants from their children. They trusted their children to be the absorbers of this college-going knowledge and then in turn the child would teach the parent the important factors for them specifically. Gary said, "I'm going to listen hard there [to my daughter]. And then I'm gonna write the check". The child can be the most key source of college-going information for their parent. If the parent trusts their child more value was placed in their input to justify the costs of college.

Parents Are Making Time to Form College-going Knowledge by Starting Earlier

The need for more time spent forming college-going knowledge was another finding that is motivating parents to reframe their child's process. It takes time to reach out to others who

may be more knowledgeable. It takes time to use technology to access information. It takes time to physically get to a college to complete a prospective student visit. Parents want their 8th grade child's college process to be more thought out, so they must start the process earlier.

Most of the participants said college-going thinking starts for today's children in middle school to 9th grade. Ada and John Doe were outliers, but they were outliers to an even earlier starting point. Ada stated, "I think it honestly starts for some kids, including mine, like as young as elementary school, that there's always just an [expectation] of thinking about college and knowing you're going to go to college". John Doe spoke about how his family always talked about the ideals of going to college even in his 8th grade child's early youth, because his family did not want to present not going to college as an option to even consider in his future.

Parents are motivated to start college-going thinking this soon so that they can test their existing schema around college-going earlier, as well as give their children ample time to create an expanded college-going schema. Parents are creating a longer runway so that any identified learning can be completed before it is too late. As I heard these answers, I called to mind the parents' motivation to not look uninformed—like when starting a new business, starting a new job, or taking on a new role. Millie shared:

I'm in a new role in my current job since May of last year. And the scope of my new role, about half of it, I consider myself an expert in and the other half, I've had virtually no exposure to at all. And so I am every day having a question raised to me that I don't know the answer to and I not unusually, don't even know where to start.

Participants are motivated to be knowledgeable guides for their child's college-going, or at least know who to turn to for trusted knowledge. Millie continued the above thinking but connected it to college-going, saying that parents are "still offering guidance, because they're still really

young, and they don't have a clue on some things.” Gary shared a similar sentiment, “And yeah they're gonna listen to my advice” about colleges. If parents are going to be guides for their children, and at the least, not look stupid about college-going in front of their children, they are motivated to start the college-going process earlier than they did, so that more time can be spent forming new knowledge for themselves and for their children.

Theme 3: Parents Leverage Their Networks to Form New College-going Knowledge

I have provided benefits and limitations of parents’ existing college-going knowledge and highlighted how parents believe their college-going could have benefitted from expanded thinking about their future, as well as more time invested in their process. I have presented how the participants believe college-going thinking starts before grade 9, creating a timeline of at least three years to learn or reaffirm what they know about college-going. Since the participants believe today’s college-going is different from when they applied, they must learn what is different. The participants do so by leveraging their networks: their outside network, employed network, and their personal network.

So many types of people were mentioned in my interviews that fit into multiple categories within this theme. I used trust and distance as dividing factors in creating these categories, but it was interesting to analyze how a participant’s developed trust could move a person from an outer network into a more intimate personal contact. I also found it interesting that people with the same role or title could be found in different network categories.

Leveraging The Outside Network

The outside network is the group of people that are furthest away from the participants, meaning they are unknown people. I began developing this subtheme when one participant, Pablo, mentioned that he engages with learning specialists to support his daughter’s schooling.

Hendon shared that she also approached an outside psychiatrist to explore one of her children's in-school learning. These outside sources had to be identified as having some kind of special skillset that was foreign to them and not in their routine orbit. These outside sources reveal that parents will use outside sources who they do not know.

Paige further supports this assertion about the outside network subtheme when she shared a medical story with me. Paige's daughter grew ill in her earlier youth and was funneled through many tests and consultations with different medical doctors who were specialists. Each of these specialists was a professional in an area foreign to Paige, revealing that there are times parents need to turn to someone they truly do not know who has a specialty they do not understand. I develop how this learning habit relates to college-going below.

The Local Outside Network and College-going. The local outside network captures unknown specialists who live near the participants. Pablo was the first to connect this local outside network to college-going by mentioning independent college-going consultants. A college-going consultant is a person that runs their own business and exclusively works to support families on their college-going journey. I found that many of these consultants work with an association called the Independent Educational Consultants Association (IECA). There are 2100+ members nationwide in this association and their span shows that other parents may use their college-going specialty (IECA, 2023).

A second participant, Millie, was aware of independent college consultants in her local outside network. Her son's high school admissions process found that landing at a public high school was a potential outcome for next year. Millie drew a stark difference in expected college-going support if her son were to enroll at a private high school or a public high school and stated that she would expect college-going support from the private school as a part of tuition. In

drawing these distinctions, Millie expressed that she felt confident in her own time and motivation to learn about college-going as the process was underway if her son enrolled in a public high school and did not suspect she would need to use a consultant from the outside network:

I mean, I know they're people that you can consult and pay to help you through the [college-going] process. I'm probably not really inclined to do that. I think I can get far enough down the road of knowledge to feel pretty comfortable that we've vetted the choice.

I present that Millie, confident in her own schema and abilities, knew she could leverage the local outside network for college-going knowledge if she needed to.

The Far-reaching Outside Network and College-going. So far, the outside network has been people that are locally accessible, participants just may not know them. Technology allows parents to reach out to many specialists, other parents, and other kids by simply logging on to the internet. Technology can be used to extend from the personal network into the outside network, too. Lisa stated:

I mean, it would probably be not that hard, even that kind of six degrees of separation of like any [college] that I wanted to find that someone went to, I mean, clearly, there's like, so many [colleges], but like, a lot of [colleges], like, it wouldn't be hard to get connected. Even through someone who knows someone.

Hendon is a participant that leveraged the six degrees of separation idea to leverage the outside network in learning more about specific colleges.

Hendon shared how her oldest child was already engaged in the later stages of a college-going process and the colleges he was most strongly considering were unknown to her. She is in

Nashville and these colleges are in Boston. In building a relationship with her contractor, a local outside source that blended into a trusted personal network source over time, he told her that his brother lived in Boston. The contractor called his brother, a doctor, to see if he would be a source of college-going knowledge for Hendon whose son was looking at medically tilted majors, and he agreed. Hendon then emailed this distant outside source with her questions and in her words, received quality feedback on which she could form college-going knowledge, especially about value. A mix of old technology—calling—and new technology—email—was used to access this distant member of the outside network. And in revealing a continuation of learning habits for Hendon—recall she learned binomial trees and derivatives in a pizza joint from a mentor—she shared, “I’m always reaching out to other people who are smarter. My goal is always to find somebody who knows more than I do and is smarter than I am.” This learning habit has carried through to forming knowledge about college-going and may be replicated by other parents.

Further, participants shared that leveraging the distant outside network with technology to learn about college-going can be as simple as logging on to a favorite news website or favorite social media account. Online networks of unknown people in a more distant orbit from the participants may have helpful college-going perspectives, knowledge, opinions, or rumors. These parents are not afraid to leverage these networks. Hendon shared how she leveraged these online sources from members of the distant, outside network on the internet, by simply getting new information to criticize, but still consider:

The sources online, I don't know that I ever really know. It's just information I have in my head. I don't know that can ever validate what I've seen on Facebook...or Reddit or Instagram. But it's just another piece of the puzzle I have in the back of my head.

Hendon was the first to introduce me to the many Facebook Groups that have thousands of other parents who are either going through the college-going process with their child currently, recently completed their child's college-going process, or simply want to be a resource to those thinking about college-going.

Facebook Groups. Facebook Groups focused on college-going were described as having thousands of members. Participants who are members of these groups, Ada, Hendon, and Millie, said they were invited to join by someone in their personal network, or stumbled upon them due to their own motivated search. These groups are used to publish more anonymous queries and to get quick responses from those outsiders who feel knowledgeable enough about a question to reply. A prime example of this knowledge seeking came from Hendon, who mentioned seeing others post questions to a Facebook group, "somebody, they'll throw up there, 'what do you think of this school?', and you'll get some really interesting opinions that are outside the box, because you're pulling from maybe 40,000 moms that are pretty similar to myself." Parents can leverage the outside network with a Facebook group, asking members for their opinions about an unknown place, and get alerts from others answering their questions quickly to form college-going knowledge.

I pressed participants to express how much fact checking they would do when leveraging these outside groups, and Ada and Millie stated that they were not motivated to fact check information just yet. They expressed that when their 8th grader was closer to attending college that they may scrutinize answers and posts more closely. Millie shared, "When I'm farther in the process I definitely would fact check all of that [information posted to Facebook Groups]". Hendon, via the story above about her contractor's brother living in Boston, fact checked information about the Boston based colleges that she gathered from a Facebook Group. Hendon

used transformative learning's stage of carrying out the plan that other parents who are not yet in her shoes suspect they will also carry out.

Overall, I found these Facebook Groups fascinating, as they may or may not be sources of accurate knowledge. They are being used by thousands upon thousands of parents who see collective knowledge as something that is helpful when forming their own knowledge. It is important to say that Millie shared that she is also in separate Facebook Group with other parents that are more in proximity to her but still a part of the outside network—she is a part of countywide Facebook Group of like-minded parents she does not know. Millie stated she suspects she would leverage this group for local recommendations and resources to learn more about college-going in her area.

Other Social Media. Websites like LinkedIn, Pablo said, can be used to leverage people in his outside network, as well as his employed network and personal network; he can ask these people for guidance around college-going or match job titles to alma maters. Reddit, from Hendon, allows for parents to search specific pages about a topic they are curious about—college or other—and see what is trending. Participants' children use Instagram and YouTube to watch tutorials, teaching them how to do different tasks; some are already related to college-going. TikTok, from Lisa, brought to light different types of music trends that were grabbing participants' teens. Lisa shared that when her son states “‘this is what I saw on TikTok’, or ‘this is who I follow on TikTok’ that gives me information [about him] that he doesn't know that necessarily he's sharing, or maybe he's trying to share about himself without just a narrative form.”

I was interested to learn how parents were aware that their children can now follow these distant members of the outside network as it relates to college-going: current college students,

professors, coaches, as well as entities at the colleges themselves, to learn about a specific college's environment. Gary stated, "...you can get online and you can get on Instagram and look, you know, and follow the kids that play on that [college] team and see what they're saying and probably get to know those kids, you know, in some respects." These non-celebrity, distant, outside network influencers are simply other kids or people who can play a role in forming college knowledge for a soon to be parent of a 9th grader. Paige did ground parents back into a need to criticize these distant outside sources, though:

I mean, you start to see these personalities [when you log on to social media] and you're like, but is that really what this place is? Because I mean, even you see a facade of something, you know, you see what's most prominent doesn't necessarily mean that's the entire population. One extreme or the other, you know, partying, Greek life or, you know, crunchy, sitting in the woods writing kids. It's not all... every university is going to have a wide range.

To get to a clearer picture, parents must leverage a different piece of the outside network.

Visiting a College. Eight participants viewed visiting a college as an attempt to convert members of a distant, outside network into a more intimate personal connection. Participants suspected they would use their time and money in order to experience the disorienting dilemma of being in an unfamiliar place so that their children could meet the professors, prospective peers, and eat the food on these prospective campuses. Participants suspected that their children would assess if the people they find at a college on a visit were a good fit with who they are. Further, I expressed in the future goals' section that parents want their children to have an expanded process, but also want to focus leveraging this piece of the outside network in as narrow a direction as possible to use time wisely. Parents suspected they would take their

children to their list of preferred colleges, not those that had just posted they have enrolled the cutest student or most influential new TikTok star. Allison furthered this sentiment, “In this day and age, I can't imagine sending my kid to school and committing the financial aspect to it without seeing it and feeling like we were invested.” It is difficult to envision justifying the cost of a college that is so extremely a part of an outside network. Participants want their children to get to know who their prospective teachers and classmates could be.

Hendon, who is currently in a college-going process with her oldest son, expressed how she too felt visiting a college would be a necessary step to leverage the outside network, but:

The schools put on this, this show for you that's like a rush party. You can't validate anything other than positives and what they want you to see. And it's ‘yay, rah, go, State!’ So no, I can't say I really validated anything by my visits in any way, shape or form. I would almost say the visits were not worth the time other than to demonstrate interest at the schools.

Demonstrating interest is a formal tracking of prospective applicants to colleges; if prospective students visit, they can receive additional favor in their admissions outcome.

Even with Hendon’s outlier, on a formal visit participants suspected that their children could meet other kids at the college, meet the professors, eat the food, and get an overall experience as to what life could be like for them at that college. The MOAT shared this thought about her 8th grade son:

He's already experienced, you know, dorm life [through a summer program] and being on a college campus and being independent. I think that's very important for students who are interested in a college life, to already have some type of reference point, or a familiarity to that type of life.

The MOAT is confident her son is building a college-going schema she can rely on when it needs to convert an outside place into his ultimate college-going destination.

Leveraging The Professional Network

I created this subcategory once I heard Gary's answers to my interview questions. Gary really brought leveraging the professional network into being when he shared how a connection at HCA Healthcare, a national healthcare company based in Nashville, would be asked about his daughter's college-going process. He spoke about how this connection is "looking at resumes all day" and "hiring tons and tons of teams" that are under her supervision. When I pressed him how he would leverage this knowledge he said:

She's gonna be asked: have you been seeing these degrees? And what have you seen from it? Oh, she will definitely get asked and, and there's several people like that, that I know that are always building teams, leading teams, interviewing, hiring, and especially when they're [hiring college graduates]. They're not hiring a four-year-old. They're hiring the 25-year-olds.

These sources can tell Gary where the degree patterns are coming from. A degree's hireability is an important component in Gary's desired college-going knowledge for his daughter's process. He is not afraid to leverage his professional network to find this knowledge.

These at-work connections also are sources of college-going information for Millie. She said:

Two of my very closest friends are former law partners of mine. And they are a number of years older than me. So one has a first-year law student, and one has a college senior and a college freshman. So I've learned a lot of [college-going] things just by observing the process that they've gone through.

And Hendon:

There's a situation where we're applying to colleges right now. I'm in so over my head. And just yesterday, I emailed again, back to a peer I worked with, when I first, first started working, and I'm like, I need an education on this, I'm in over my head. I don't even understand what we're doing here.

Others also shared how they are very aware of where their coworkers went to college and would also not be afraid to ask for college-going information.

The breadth of the professional network is as wide as the participants' current employer, past employer, clients, those met at trainings, national conferences, and those accessible via free online tools like LinkedIn. All my working participants spoke about the size and teaching power of their professional network, even from one participant who's first job was working at Target. Working with someone allows for there to be a shared language, an awareness of how learning resources like databases and journals in their field influence colleagues' world view, and the time spent with these professional peers creates a close relationship. All these familiarities make tackling college-going for all their children a more communal task.

Leveraging The Personal Network

The personal network came together with a lot of nuances in how people in it influence learning about today's college-going. I have broken down this section into four deeper categories to help discuss how parents leverage these nuances. These categories are leveraging contacts at a known college, from the parents' family, from their neighborhood, and from their kid's school.

A Known College. Leveraging the personal network as it relates to people at a known college leans heavily on evidence coded in the existing college-going schema category. Gary's

wife still receiving Christmas cards from her college professors is an example of how known people at a known college's relationships can be a relationships to aspire towards for parents' children in their own college-going. John Doe also shared a specific example of how these sources can be leveraged:

I had a very good psychology professor at my university, who was one of my mentors and really helped me along. I would probably pick up the phone, call him and say, 'What do you know about the school? Is it something that you would recommend for my kid knowing what you know about our family?'

Further, going to visit an alma mater for football games and events, as Allison's family does, maintains a crowd of people in the personal network from a well-known college. Ada frames how known colleges and their people are influencing her college-going thinking to-date:

I guess we do need to start thinking about [college-going]. I don't know. My husband went to a small college; he went to [a local HBCU]. I went to [a large public university], which is like the opposite end. And actually seeing [my oldest] at a smaller school like [where he's enrolled now]. I mean, it probably has definitely leaned us towards looking at smaller colleges where you have more of a community feel.

Known colleges become anchors for what participants' reference when creating their schema for today's college-going, and leveraging the information gathered from those sources present at these colleges have an influence.

The Impact of the Extended Family. Pablo greatly suspects he will leverage the knowledge his two older sisters have formed about today's college-going since they recently navigated the process with their children. "Both my sisters," who Pablo described as being overachievers who did not need help with their own college process, "have older kids who have

gone through [college-going]”. Pablo shared that each sister has performed well in life by his description—with one running a school and the other running a law firm. He trusts their input and will use it to support his 8th grade daughter’s college-going. Gary also mentioned his nephew’s process framing the way he thinks about his daughter’s college-going.

The Impact of the Nuclear Family. Paige finds comfort in her husband sharing in the opinion that traditional college may not be for everyone in today’s world, “people in my generation, my husband and I both are like, you know, my husband says I could have done my job without a degree.” Paige reveals how this close contact in her network influences her college-going knowledge formation.

Further, Paige discussed how her oldest child is nearing the college application process and how her process is one she is stumbling through to learn. I took Paige’s description of these stumbles as encountering disorienting dilemmas that challenged Paige as the parent to question her held beliefs and assumptions, thus exploring new options or actions. For Paige’s 8th grader, Paige’s leveraging of the personal network for her older sister’s process is only helping her eventual college-going.

Allison and Hendon also have older children in their nuclear family who are either in the admissions process now, or one year away. Hendon’s trials of learning about unknown colleges are well documented above, but in this section, I will repeat that she is more motivated to learn the ins-and-outs of today’s college-going process because of its emergent need for her family. An area she felt her son was less prepared for was identifying which branch of his academic interests he wanted to apply for at these different universities. This assertion notes how much leveraging the knowledge of the family drives college-going decisions. Hendon shared questions she asked of her oldest son:

What do you want to major in? Do you want to apply to the School of Engineering or the School of Arts and Sciences? And I'm looking, you know, this discussion was having to occur with our son when he was about 16 years old, because it mattered what schools to go show him. He couldn't make toast. I mean, think of what I'm trying to ask him, do you want to go into biomedical engineering or neural engineering?

Hendon now knows for her second child how she needs to help leverage her network to develop clarity around future goals. Allison echoed similar thoughts about her eldest's experiences teaching her about college-going today:

I see the other side of it, which is that my kid, my perfectionist, first kid is freaking out, like, I don't know what I want to do with my life, I don't know where I want to go. And the how should I know these things? And I just think that kind of getting them thinking about it early. It just makes it not so daunting.

Ada, whose oldest child is a sophomore, spoke about how the motivation to learn about college-going is building; she admitted they need to start thinking about it because the application process for her family is on the horizon. My theme about reframing the college-going process for the participants' children to start earlier, plus utilizing the nuclear family to spur college-going knowledge are reinforced by this section.

The Eighth Grader. Allison, Ada, Paige, and Hendon foreshadow the most suspected source for college-going knowledge in the personal network, the actual college-going eighth grader. Allison, Paige, Ada, and Hendon reveal the time and motivation to learn factors when discussing their older children; they are in the process now and they need to learn now. Since we have revealed that all of the participants believe college-going thinking starts in middle school to 9th grade, parents are starting to leverage this knowledge source earlier in order to recognize how

much learning they must do. Parents must assess whether they trust their child to engage in today's college-going process. If the child engages, the parent can leverage them as a source for knowledge. If they do not engage, parents will have to turn somewhere else.

Parents shared with me that there are areas where they already see their children as experts; there was a hope that college-going would become one of these areas. Lisa shared that her 8th grader is more an expert in baseball, sports, math, and specific subgenres of hip hop music than her. Allison discussed her 8th grader's ease at which she masters the world around her, "So this one, she just, I think it's the effortlessness with which she is able to succeed". Beyond academics, one of Allison's specific examples about her child's expertise is cooking, "that was another thing, she picked up cooking. Like, she's just been cooking all this stuff. And I'm like, 'who are you?' because I don't cook. And I think it's great." Paige also shared a cooking example from her 8th grader's expertise:

And same with cooking, she loves to cook. And so she knows all these things, and ins-and-outs of how to do certain things with certain foods, and I'm blown away every time.

So there's a lot of learning. I feel like she teaches me a lot in that regard.

Paige's daughter is also an expert in applying artistic make-up. Hendon draws a distinction between her older son in the process now, to her 8th grade daughter to-date, saying she is a social expert that knows what she wants and needs:

That child I completely trust to know what is right for her...She has... I mean, my pediatrician calls her the flower best left unwatered. Oh, I completely trust that kid to make decisions. She's, just, self, very self-aware, very self-focused. She'll do great. I don't need that kid... I don't even steer.

Ada continues to build on this theme that the 8th grade child is becoming an expert in areas beyond the parents' knowledge, "I feel like they're picking all types of knowledge up on YouTube that I didn't know about". The MOAT believes that her child becoming more of an expert in areas of interest is money well spent:

I was watching a Benjamin, Benjamin Franklin documentary. And they had a correspondent and they flashed her name. And he says, 'Oh, Mom, we're reading a book about her. No, we're reading. We're reading a book that she wrote.' I'm like, Oh, really? 'Yeah, that's such and such.' I'm like, Oh, okay!

Pablo shares his daughter is more of an expert at Pinterest and the violon. Gary ties this learning all together well, as other parents did, too, by saying that parents are with their kid, spending time with them, and they are going to learn things from them:

That's starting to happen [the expertise separation]. You know, especially like now with like volleyball. I don't know the rules of volleyball and she's getting to be a pretty skilled volleyball player. So I love learning from her and her to tell me what they're doing and why they're rotating and why she's playing this position, you know, and I'm a coach in another sport, but I totally appreciate that and I'll kind of mostly learn it from her... I'm dying to ask [her] Coach, but, but, [her] Coach's not riding back with me from Birmingham next to me, you know, four hours, and so it's [my daughter]. You're learning from her.

All of my parents were able to identify areas at which their child is more knowledgeable than them.

Turning this concept to college-going, is when participants find aspirational hope that their 8th child will choose to engage in college-going processes, allowing the parent to trust their child's thinking. Allison shared:

I think with [my 8th grader] I really feel like we're going to be, you know, engaging her in conversations about what she's looking for, what she wants, you know, helping her make lists of what she wants to see, what she wants to do, taking her to the school she wants to see.

Gary talks about how he trusts his kids to be engaged in a college-going process as a part of a school's culture:

Yeah, my kids are, are not the ones that you'll [points at me], that you'll have to go find.

You know, they'll know you, you know, you know, it's the quiet kid that you get nervous about, you know, that, that falls under your radar that you have to go seek out and my kids are not that.

Ada shared that even if her children are not the most open about their thoughts, that they need to express their thinking about college-going to her because the parents are paying. Millie shared that sometimes it is not the forthright verbal observations where she learns about her child, as much as she learns about his moods by interacting with him. Millie continued that the high school admissions process and moving from a private school to a public middle school when they came to Middle Tennessee, has given her son a larger sense of ownership in his education that she believes will serve him well when evaluating colleges options. Lisa felt it was important to share her goal of having expansive conversations with her 8th grade child to make sure they were equipped to perform a successful college-going process:

I think we've already had very open conversations about [college-going], what do you like? What are you interested in, instead of kind of the pigeonholing of, you need to go to college, and you need to have a four-year degree or you need to be thinking about what's next. Are you going to go to law school? Are you gonna go to medical school? I think having the more expansive conversations about what are you really interested in. And do you know how many varied opportunities there are if you have that kind of interest? So, so more expansive, until you find what you want, versus I felt like I had two options, kind of thing.

Paige shared two items that first deepen this theme and then sum it up. First about learning about her child when time is a limiting factor, when learning from her high school junior:

And then I had my daughter make a list of every college she's visited, she has to answer the same seven questions: How did you feel when you first got there? How do you feel about this? What do you think of this? And, and then dialogue.

And then, from Paige discussing her role with her 8th grader and college-going, "Well, you just talk less and less the older they get (laughter). It's true, you just talk less and less and listen more and more, which I think I've done a lot with them anyway." Parents must be motivated and have the time to leverage their family to learn from them, especially when relying on kids.

The Neighborhood. The neighborhood is another collection of people who are at one point in the outside network, but because of activities or proximity they grow into more intimate contacts. There is a lot of overlap between other parents that are accessible via a local Facebook Group, or friends and parents participants have a baseball club group chat with, stable with, church with, are in scouts with, or the primary care provider whom is trusted, but this theme

found its own development due to it being a repeated, leveraged source for college-going knowledge.

Neighborhood Kids. To build past previously stated groups, other kids are a key source of unexpected information about the participants' children. These other kids could be area friends, they could be competitors, and they could be others that participants interact with as a parent dropping their child off at an outside school activity. Millie captured this sentiment:

When we moved here [Middle Tennessee], we bought a house and moved into an area where we're not in a neighborhood. And in retrospect, I think that's been hard for him [the 8th grader] just in this age group, because he doesn't have a group of friends that are so close, where he is kind of developing some of those organic relationships.

Having these relationships helps the child form an identity and gives the parent a resource in which they can learn about their child. These children can be an important source for understanding their child, which will help support their understanding of potential college-going goals. Gary summarized this notion by saying, "their friends are amazing" when it comes to receiving unexpected information about his child. Gary also shared that these friends in his neighborhood can spark college-going thoughts in his child:

But you really start thinking about [college-going] when your friend's older brother, you know, when the siblings [start]. You know, the next thing you know you're dating somebody is a little older and they're going through it, and you know. Then it's you.

Neighborhood Adults. Coaches that are a part of teams that are not school-based, also form a trusted bond with the eight participants whose children are into a variety of sports. Other parents that are not associated with the participants' children's schools, but who are in their

neighborhood can also influence a parents' impression of their child. The MOAT discussed learning about her child simply by sitting in the stands at his games.

Pivoting to college-going behaviors, Gary speaks about parents in his neighborhood, "I think every other parent's crazy [when it comes to college-going] you know. It's, it's funny to see how emotional these parents are. Um, and of course, nobody thinks they're crazy." He continued by telling me the story of one mother who contacted him about her son not getting into his first-choice college, and that parent being in tears. Gary stated that this woman is a trial lawyer who deals with hardcore litigation day in and day out, but the deferral of her son from his Early Decision school snapped her. Gary unknowingly is leveraging his neighborhood peers for college-going knowledge by listening to stories like this one. He also knows his daughter is building a college-going schema because of this story, "[my 8th grade daughter], she's heard all about this boy not getting into [his highly selective college]."

Gary further develops this neighborhood contact's educational influence by stating his point of view about the high school admissions process is less focused on where his daughter goes. He knows his daughter will be fine wherever she goes; he carries this mindset forward into college-going:

You can pivot, and where you go your freshman year of college does not determine the remainder of your life and you can sure screw up if you go to Harvard and you can sure do great if you go to Nashville State.

John Doe, an American living overseas, took the neighborhood network to a whole new meaning when describing the college-going behaviors of his neighbors:

Here, in [this country], there, there is a large contingent of students who are driven by their parents on academics. The only outside interest that they're really allowed to have is

a lot of them will play a musical instrument. So they will go to school in the morning, they'll finish school, they'll go to tutors, they finish tutors, and they go to violin or piano practice, they come home, they do their homework, and they fall into bed, go to sleep... They really get pushed by their parents for you know, results... now I understand why they have to do it here. Or why some people choose to do it here. Because at age 12, at least in the local schools, the kids take a test. And the results of that test dictate whether they're going to vocational school or university at age 12! And so the, the pressure that's piled upon these students and their families to to to succeed academically is astronomical. John Doe is consciously choosing to not parent his children about college-going in the fashion of those in his neighborhood orbit.

Lastly, Gary shared with me one of my more surprising findings when crafting the neighborhood theme:

We have a pastor, he says every other week, like, your identity is not where you went to school, or where your children, go to school. That is not your identity. That is not what God thinks about you. He does not see your value in where you go to school. And our kids have grown up learning, hearing that too. And hearing me, repeat that and so, that's super important to me.

I had not considered people at church as being college-going knowledge influencers, but this important community in the neighborhood theme shapes the lives of many.

The School. My research is about learning about schools, and it is targeting parents who are in an admissions process for their 8th grader looking to identify, a school. To leverage the kid's school when it comes to college-going knowledge formation, my parents first must assess how they are evaluating the schools' resources. The participants shared resources that are a part

of the kid's school: teachers, coaches, counselors, nurses, administrators, other kids, and other parents. Because my parents are going through a high school admissions process for their 8th grade child, it is important to share what they expect to rely on from the school when it comes to college-going.

Learning About a New High School. The participants shared different features and structures of the ideal high school for their 8th grader with me. They then discussed what steps they took to learn more about the various high schools they were considering. All participants expressed similar steps to what they suspect they will do to learn about a college when learning about a high school: visit the school, take a tour, read about the school online, talk to people they know, and have their child visit campus for a day. These participants are attempting to convert the outside network at the high school into a personal contact by having their children meet the teachers and prospective peers as well as see how the school is viewed in their networks. I found these participants are assessing if they trust this new school for their 8th grader. Parents are identifying what resources are available at the prospective high school and assessing how well they can rely on their kids' school to know their child and support their educational journey.

Knowing the Kid is Supported at School. What I respected about the participants is that they all understood that it is their kid going to college, not them. Participants wanted to trust that their children would engage with their eventual high school and be fully integrated into the community. With an integrated kid, parents can rely on taking routine actions to learn about their child, like talking to teachers, talking to coaches, and most participants expressed how the kids' counselor, or college counselor, would know their child, too. Millie stated this about college-going information coming from the school:

That is something else that I think has been really appealing to both of us, as we have looked at schools, noticing those that seem to have a better structured mechanism for helping students with that [college-going] process pretty much from the first day.

Future Goals and College-going. If the participants trust in the school community to know their child, they felt they can learn about the future goals of their child from either their child—who has gone through some sort of structured college-going process—or by communicating with the people that are a part of said structure. Knowing future goals, as I outlined above, is an important piece of parents’ college-going knowledge that justifies the higher costs of higher education for their children and the school supports these goals’ development. These other people are still school-based, and participants suspect they will lean on these resources heavily. Millie shared: “I’m just being very deferential to the training and expertise of school people. I definitely would intend to rely on that expertise as we got closer to that [college-going] phase of life.” Gary continued, “You know you listen closely to their teachers for sure. You listen closely to their coaches. All those are valuable folks, too” when understanding who his child is and who she may become.

Teachers. I could write about teachers sharing information with parents at length as participants shared they learn a lot about their children from their teachers. To be direct as it relates to my dissertation topic, leveraging teachers to form college-going knowledge, teachers help parents by being resources that identify talents and cultivate students’ future goals. Grades were a discussed part of the college-going process and teachers are a part of that report card which identifies talents and presses students. From Pablo:

I would hope that the teachers see talent and say, hey, you know, I'm gonna push her. If there is not just, not just to let them fall back and get all A's because it's too easy. No, I'd rather them get all C's and be challenged.

Teachers were seen as a partner when considering behaviors, too, with making sure students are not messing around in class, are acting fulfilled while at school, and working towards finding an interest. Also from Pablo, from the point of view of the teacher:

You know, this is what I saw, you know, in and out of the classroom. [Your daughter] really seems to be enjoying this, you know, and the grades and the likes and dislikes. I would love to see that in high school. You know, one on one, like an hour meeting with the teachers.

John Doe said his current school requires parent-teacher meetings. Guidance from teachers around college-going was expected by Ada. Gary stated he will listen closely to the teachers. Hendon put forward how she would rather leverage the deep trust placed in teachers about college-going versus a standardized test score:

I have trusted teachers, after being at the school we're at now for nine years with this child. And the if you add the other one on maybe we've been there 12 or 13 years, there are certain teachers who I know, are good sources and nonjudgmental, unbiased opinions... I look much more to trusted teachers who have seen 20 years of teenagers.

My research found clear trust in the child's teachers, and a motivation to find time to learn from their kids' schools' teachers to leverage this network source.

Coaches. School-based coaches are a natural extension of teachers. Ada expressed how coaches are a large part of their choosing a high school community for her sons. Millie talked about the numerous coach figures in her son's life and how she learns about him as part of these

relationships. The MOAT stated a similar sentiment, saying she gets a lot of feedback about her son through his extracurricular sports from coaches. John Doe spoke to learning about his son's leadership traits from his track coach. Gary, whose daughter is pursuing college athletics shared, "I think I'd lean on the coaches, what it takes to get into the preferred colleges." Lisa echoed in a similar fashion regarding her sporty son and how she would learn about unknown colleges, "And then I think, also talking to coaches". If there was motivation to learn about their child, and if a future goal included sports, the coach would be a prime source of college-going knowledge to leverage.

Other Parents. The kid's school also brings other parents into the participants' orbits; these other parents are a part of the school community, which can be more intimate than the neighborhood and employed network, but it also doesn't become more intimate than the family portions of the personal network. These other parents share a similar network in the neighborhood and at the school, so their knowledge about what is going on in the school and about the participant's children was shared as a valuable source of information to leverage. From there, trusted parents whose children are older than the participants will go through the college-going process first.

Allison shared those other parents at her kid's school surprise her with feedback about her 8th grader:

A parent texted me a while back, my daughter had gone to her daughter's birthday party. And she was like, 'I don't know what you're doing with her but she's amazing. Like, I wish my daughter was more like her. She's so poised,' and this and this. And I was like, whoa, you know, like, wow, you just saw her at a birthday party today. And this is a new family to our school. So they had very little interaction with her [before].

Receiving a disorienting dilemma from someone that is more loosely in a parent's network creates warmth and positivity, building trust in what was a distant relationship. Allison continued, "then [that parent] was like, 'we'd love to get the girls together. Let's do something after the holiday'". With more established trust it is easier to leverage this person's input in a different setting when desired. The MOAT shared a similar sentiment:

I think the [other] parents [surprise me] just because most oftentimes, they don't know my child. And this is their first time, you know, seeing him play [his sport]. And, you know, they may say something significant, about, you know, how he plays or what type of player he is. So, to me, those comments are most influential to me, based on the fact that, you know, they have no type of...context, or allegiance to him.

Ada referenced other parents as a place she gets unexpected information about her child because he is not the best sharer of his thoughts. These comments from other parents typically invoked pride and were used to form an understanding of the participants' children which is useful information.

Hendon captured how she thinks other parents influence the whole college-going process: I think it's still driven by parents pushing really hard to get their kids into the best school possible, regardless of whether or not it fits the child. The, the ego of the parents is still a heavy driver of what school the child should apply to, regardless of whether or not it fits.

And she uses these parents as a resource from which she can learn:

And then [I] got on a phone call with another mom, I'm like, help me out. What do you know, I'm always reaching out to other people who are smarter. My goal is always to find somebody who knows more than I do and is smarter than I am.

These mentors are a part of Hendon's exploration of new options or actions phase of transformative learning:

They bring me out of the frustration because they care. But I'm always a little bit on the outside world. Because they went to Vanderbilt and Duke and they understand [highly selective admissions]. And they they've learned it since you know, they were 10 years old.

I asked Hendon if there was a sense of vulnerability when approaching another parent from such a close network for advice, and she shared:

For me, personally, not too much [vulnerability]. I'm super confident. For my husband a ton [of vulnerability]. If that helps. I don't really care what you think of me or my kids, okay. So I'm here to just, I am a hardcore mom, like they are my pack, you know, I don't really give a sh*t. So I'm going to go to those mom's. If you judge me, you judge me. I don't really care. I'm much more interested in figuring out what's going on.

Lisa mentioned she would also talk to other parents whose children had just gone through the college-going process for information. Millie expressed how she has formed relationships with her child's friends' parents. Ada mentioned how parents inquiring to join the research site are likely already thinking about college:

And obviously, most parents whose kids come [to the research site are] probably are already turning, thinking about the college process... [and] talking to other people whose kids are, maybe a couple years older, is also helpful to get firsthand [college-going] knowledge from other parents.

Allison asks that other parents at her 8th grader's future school try to be realistic in their college-going views so that her process, when it is their turn, can be less tormenting:

I think some parents can have these, these inflated views of what's available or what's not available [for their kids' college-going]. I think being realistic with the parents is really important. Because as I'm hearing from other parents whose kids are just not seniors, or who previously graduated, it's, it's a really, really rough [college-going] world out there.

All these adult connections are with parents who are a part of the personal network and it is clear that the participants leverage and place more trust in their synopses.

Other Kids. Much like other parents at the school are a source of information, other kids at the school are people in the personal network that can influence college-going knowledge formation. Two parents, Millie and Gary, expressed how suspected love interests of their children can influence college-going behaviors. Millie stated, when pondering about why an unknown college may be her child's eventual preference, "I would want to know more about why, why that choice rose to the top. Like, if it's because of a girl, I probably roll my eyes and still go look at their website, but I'd research it." Gary framed it similarly, "like, this friend is going here. This friend is going there. This cute boy's here (laughter), you know".

Millie shared a disorienting dilemma she experienced which was sparked by another kid:

I mean, there are so many colleges, I just met in fact, we came and observed baseball practice this week. And I spoke with a student who graduated from [the research site] last year. And he was at a [college] that I've never heard of and, and that was so interesting to me.

Millie would not have heard of this college if not for this other child's college-going choice.

It is fascinating that with the knowledge gained about other kids' processes parents can better frame how they want to parent their own child through the college-going process. I find

this parenting incentive, to use details about other kids' college processes, counter to what most professional advice in the college counseling field states, that of letting each family unit have their own process because everyone has different life circumstances.

Even with this professional guidance, Pablo knows that his daughter will turn to other kids at the high school as a resource for college-going knowledge. Ada knows that her family will turn to kids who have just graduated high school for college-going information. Lisa expressed how she knows other kids who are juniors—three years ahead of her child—that are already visiting colleges. That visiting behavior has influenced her schema around today's college-going. And when it comes to other kids at her kid's school, she expressed how simply being aware that all children at his school are going through a school-based college counseling program creates a foundation on which to begin a dialogue with her child, and even a dialogue with the school's other children and parents alike. It creates a common language.

College Counseling. Lisa's point about having a structure around college-going rooted in the school brings in my profession, that of being a school-based college counselor. It was very expected by the participants that the college counselor be a source of college-going information and knowledge. Some were more willing to have the counselor be a director of where to look for knowledge, and others, in these earlier years of their own child's college-going, expected the college counselor to be the source of information. Again, time and motivation played a role here, because if participants had enough time to do the research, they were more comfortable being directed to where to learn. With participants who were shorter on time, they were motivated to get the answers to their queries quickly. It was interesting that the participants had been exposed to not just their own personal schema of a school-based counselor from their own

college-going process, but also how they had grown to identify the different models of college-going support in their own child's high school admissions process, too.

The college counselors would be a repeated source participants would leverage for college-going knowledge. Allison shared that having a deeply rooted process with college counselors is a part of the premium paid as a parent to be at a school like the research site:

I feel like a lot of kids do not know their options or at schools, where there are, there's maybe one college counselor with 1000 kids or something like that, I feel like, you know, it's, it's, well, unfortunately, it's part of a premium, we pay for our children to go to certain places and be certain places.

Millie presented a similar sentiment, in that her child is pursuing private high schools, but could be enrolling at a public school where the volume of college-ready students surpasses the ability for the district to support every parent with a professional counselor:

I do expect [college-going support from a private school], particularly because I think I'm coming to appreciate more and more, that the process is really different than it was when I applied for college, or at least I perceive that to be the case. And so I would rely on the expertise of professionals that are helping students with this every year to know what the options are to know how best to approach the process.

When I pressed John Doe about where else he may turn for college-going knowledge from the resources in his orbit, he turned the question around on me and said, "Well, I mean, you're not counting the, the people at the high school who would be assisting us with this process, or you are already counting them?" He was very much expecting the college counselor to assist him and his family. John Doe continued, "I think in conjunction with the people at the school whose

job it is to, to be on top of these [college-going] things, I think we feel like we're going to do okay, we feel like we'll have the tools we need for [our son] to make a good [college] decision."

Paige brought up a very qualitative perspective as to the role she suspects the college counselor at her kids' school to fill:

And in high school my conversation needs to be with my child, and my child's conversation needs to be with their college counselor, their whatever that department is that's supporting them in school, and then they bring home the information. I feel like that'd be triangulation...Now, if there's something I'm curious about, I think I'd love to be able to have access to somebody to say, 'Hey, have you heard of this? Do you know anything about this school?'

Pablo was initially hesitant about the role of the college counselor, citing his personal schema and his own guidance counselor:

I am not going to let my kids listen to, solely listen to their guidance counselor. That's what happened to me. You're good at math. You're going to an engineering school. Kind of regret it. But that's the way it was back then. I don't want that to happen with my kids. As Pablo and my interview continued, however, he began to express he personally doesn't have enough time to establish fresh college-going knowledge. He realized as we talked that he was not up-to-date on today's process and that he simply did not have time:

I mean, [I do] 12 hour days of work. Sometimes weekends. I mean, that would just put me over the edge. Yeah, I... we would need, I need help. You know, like a good guidance counselor or consultant. Something like that.

It is here that we see the introduction of someone that is an expert in an area that is more foreign to the participant, and it was revealing to me that he realized he may have to rely on his kids'

school's counselor when he initially did not want that source to be the sole guide. It is also interesting to me that he added the word "good" later on in his answers, to add quality and trust to his label. Hendon also wanted trusted information from her kids' school's counselor, by outlining how at her older son's school he got assigned to a college counselor:

I go sit down in meetings with three different college counselors and then I direct and say, 'Okay, that's the one I think is the fit and who knows what's going on.' I'm gonna steer [my son] a little bit there. And we've got several college counselors, one is excellent and one I don't think is so great. So I steered him toward the one that I thought was very good...And then I stepped out of the process. I think the mentor...you know, I kind of helped pick the mentor and then I got out.

Hendon sought out that "good", trusted, college-going mentor based at her kid's school.

Ada, Gary, Paige, and Allison all knew of my professional role in parallel with my research study. They all referenced programs that we do in my office as being paramount to helping parents and children form college-going knowledge. Programs put on by college counseling that the participants shared are group parent events, one-on-one meetings, a walkthrough of relevant college-going technology, and simply being available to chat. My professional role and my colleagues' roles were either directly stated as being influential by name, by an action they took for an older child, or by simply pointing their finger at me while talking and saying—I would use "you" to learn about college-going. People, and accessible people at the school, matter.

Other School-based Resources. Participants were also aware that the high school can offer dedicated resources beyond teachers, coaches, counselors, other parents and other students to support their children wholistically and as it relates to college-going. The nurse, school

counselor, and academic support teams were all stated as sources of information housed in the school network. These specialists are a part of the personal network being built into the school community.

Participants shared online tools the school can give access to for students to have more relevant college-going searches that goes beyond just giving access to the school people who may assist parents in forming college-going knowledge. One specific participant, Allison, was able to name a website by which a high school does this information sharing: Scoir.com. Scoir is a college search tool that houses a specific high school's admissions outcomes at certain colleges. It is also a networking tool between students, counselors and colleges. Parents can use this tool, as well as other competitors of Scoir, for a more tailored college-going knowledge forming source because the high school is willing to share this information with families.

Participants also recalled that grades and teacher relationships are a part of college-going. My study found that parents are now receiving this information through digital portals like Blackbaud, Veracross, or COMPASS. Motivated parents with time can access their child's grades and use these portals to contact teachers beyond email if needed. Parents simply need to know, want to take these actions, or be told these actions are a part of the schools' structure.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presented the results of my study. I constructed and presented three major themes around adults with 8th graders and analyzed their suspected behaviors around forming knowledge about college-going. This analysis includes discussing the benefits and limitations of parents' existing college-going knowledge, the parents' motivation to reframe their child's college-going, and how parents leverage their networks to form knowledge about today's

college-going. Each of these presented themes included subcategories which were supported by collected data from the participants.

My results mirrored the literature well as it relates to transformative learning theory and the college-going scholarship. I discuss how my results connect to these theories in Chapter 5. Chapter 5 also discusses how my results can be put into practice, through actions and policies that may support parents, students, secondary school officials, higher education professionals, and the college-going industry at large. I also share ideas for future research.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusions

In this chapter I discuss my study's themes, state implications, and present conclusions. Each of the participants held a college-going schema from their past that is impacting the way they suspect they will engage their child in postsecondary pursuits. Their engagement with me created three overarching themes and nine subthemes. Data was analyzed to construct these themes and the proposed summary theory shared in this chapter represents the connection of the participants' experiences. This theory and my stated implications can aid parents, secondary school officials, college officials, and the scholarship around adult learning and college-going. I conclude this chapter by presenting opportunities for future research.

Two primary research questions framed my data collection and analysis:

1. How do parents with soon-to-be high school students form knowledge about the college-going process?
 - a. How do parents form knowledge about a specific higher education institution?
2. What information sources do parents with soon-to-be high school students suspect they will access and prioritize in order to form college-going knowledge?

The reviewed literature discussed transformative learning theory as an adult learning theory, and it shared the scholarship around college-going. My first research question found that parents, as adults, have formed a schema around college-going. Participants then encounter disorienting dilemmas and are motivated to examine their beliefs, assess their understanding, recognize what they do not know, explore new options, and then create a new plan to acquire knowledge in an attempt to reframe their child's college-going process. Chapter 4's themes demonstrate that these staged steps are a part of my findings. My second research question found parents leverage

their networks to form college-going knowledge. There were layers of comfort, trust, and familiarity across the outside, professional, and personal networks of the participants. I was able to identify areas where each network was an information source for the participants. In synthesizing these themes and subthemes I present a summary theory, discuss implications for practice, share future research paths, and conclude.

Discussion

I used data collected from interviews, observations, and memos in this study to construct the themes shared in Chapter 4. All of these findings tie together and are informed by each of my 10 participants' input. Table 2 presents a summary of my thematic findings.

Table 2

Participants' Engagement with College-going

<p>Experienced College-going for Themselves</p>	<p><u>Time Elapsed ~20-35 years</u></p> <p>→</p>	<p>Reframing College-going for Their Children</p>
<p><i>Active Knowledge Seeking and Passive Knowledge Digestion</i></p>	<p><i>Passive Knowledge Digestion</i></p>	<p><i>Active Knowledge Seeking and Passive Knowledge Digestion</i></p>
<p>Technology Paper Admission Application Analog and Paper Communication Mail, Telephone Printed Research and Marketing Books, Pamphlets, Magazines</p> <p>Family Parents' Expectations and Support Siblings' Influence Finances Limited by Technology</p> <p>High School Limited Support Limited Time Limited by Technology Other Kids' Processes Utilized One Year</p> <p>Outside Network Limited by Technology</p> <p>Personal Network Limited by Technology Limited by Proximity to Others Limited by Mobility</p>	<p>Parents Went to College → Graduate School → Started Professional Work → Became a Parent → Chose Home Neighborhood →</p> <p>College-going Rise in Cost → Rise in Application #s → Adapted to Technology → Globalization → COVID-19 → Rise of Zoom → Test-Optional Admission →</p>	<p>Technology Digital Admission Application Digital Communication Zoom, Email, Smartphones, SMS Digital Research and Marketing Internet, Smartphones</p> <p>Family Formed Expectations for Child Older Children Siblings' Influence Finances</p> <p>Identifying New High School Robust Support Know Child Know Process Other Kids' Processes Utilize Four Years Accessible by Technology</p> <p>Outside Network Accessible by Technology</p> <p>Employed Network Colleagues' Children's Processes Accessible by Technology</p> <p>Personal Network Accessible by Technology</p>

Benefits and Limitations of Parents' Existing College-going Knowledge

Parents of eighth graders have a self-schema about college-going which began with their initial college-going process. This initial college-going was influenced by their family, high school, and was facilitated by the available technology of the time. Having this knowledge is of benefit to their child's process as it acts as a reservoir of pertinent knowledge. However, I found that parents believe the college-going process has changed since their youth to today in the ways that technology, time, family, costs, and networks' influence the whole process.

Because the world around these parents has changed, they progress through the stages of transformative learning theory to reflect on this past schema and assess whether their old knowledge is relevant in the new college-going, or if it needs to be refreshed. If parents felt their knowledge was antiquated, they suspected they would rely on people in their personal and professional network, and explore further knowledge from resources accessible to them in the outside network. The rise of technology also plays a role in this existing schema, because much of today's college-going utilizes today's technology. Technology also creates free access to the outside network. Parents admit that their children are more of an expert in this area than they are. They know they have to catch-up to their children's proficiencies and understandings.

Parents' Motivation to Reframe Their Child's College-going

Prior college-going schemas were stated as being limited due to a poor use of time, a lacking high school environment, and/or family's finances being restrictive variables. The parents I met with are observed as being more affluent and they are inquiring to have their 8th grader join the most expensive secondary school in their city. Because they have the means or ability to pay for a private high school now there was a desired reframing of college-going for their child.

College-going is now seen as needing to be focused on their children's future goals. With these future goals clearly defined there is more ability to explore new knowledge in these areas. With these future goals clearly defined, parents can better assess a college's value and its return on their investment. I assert these finances being reframed because there was a desire to not have their children graduate with debt as well as have their children graduate with a degree that gives them the most return on their experience.

Further, parents stated that college-going thinking starts in 9th grade for today's college-going student, if not earlier. I assert this earlier start is parents' efforts to reframe their child's college-going process, giving them more time to assess their options, both these options' value and match, with their child. Since college application deadlines are in the senior year, parents are making this time to learn about the various colleges as well as their child's desires by starting earlier.

Parents Leverage Their Networks to Form New College-going Knowledge

Parents understand that in today's world it is incredibly easy to leverage the six-degrees-of-separation idea due to social media and smartphones. Being able to identify someone that has valuable information about a college or a piece of the college-going process can be as simple as logging into a favorite social media account, pulling up a Google search, or browsing through their company's directory. The world is now flatter and information is more widely accessible; nearly all of this information is free to them. Some of this information is free to everyone.

Because millions of students go to college each year, there is an abundance of caregivers who are in the position that the participants will soon find themselves in, supporting their child's college-going process. Other parents' knowledge can be accessed by joining a free Facebook

Group with either thousands of members or only a few hundred, posting on Reddit, calling someone, sending out a group text message, or by simply going to events at their kids' schools.

My research identified some unexpected people in the participants' local network who were mentioned as potential sources of information. I did not expect church and church leaders to be mentioned. I did not consider stable mates to be potential points of reference for college-going thoughts. And I did not consider other activities like scouts. Some expected sources were their child's school, independent educational consultants, and of course, the participants' families.

The lengths at which the participants suspected they would leverage these networks was mixed. Hendon's story of reaching out to her contractor's brother is a prime example of leveraging multiple networks to get new college-going knowledge. My other participants with older children had also established a more expanded blueprint for how they suspect they can leverage their contacts or pursue outside help. With my research focusing on a college preparatory independent school, it is worth repeating Ada's comments that families seeking out this setting are already going to be expecting college-going assistance from the high school, too. As Allison said, this expectation placed on the school is a part of the premium she pays for private school.

All of these networks and sources of information can be used by parents to triangulate not just who their kid is today, but these resources can also be tapped into throughout the next few years to gain clarity as to who their kid is becoming. This triangulation can also leverage these networks and resources to identify clear and focused future goals for their children. The participants desiring that these goals be created by their children. Lastly, when it comes time to investigate specific, named colleges, participants shared that they want as much information as

possible to review. It is up to them to take the next steps to validate and fact check what they find. Some parents may not take this extra step and lean on or spread misinformation.

Connection to Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

In this section I discuss how transformative learning theory and the college-going models have shaped these findings and connect to my research questions. Recall that the participants are adults, as parents of 8th grade children. The participants are also assumed to be participating in college-going behaviors by engaging in the search for a private high school, the research site, for their 8th grader. Due to their own statements, they are at the forefront of their children's college-going journey.

Transformative Learning Theory and Research Question 1

Below I outline how these results align with transformative learning theory by assigning Mezirow's stages to my summary table. The constructed thematic categories built off of the stages presented in Mezirow's original adult learning progressions: a disorienting dilemma, self-examination, a critical assessment of assumptions, recognition of one's discontent, exploration of new options or actions, a planning course of action, acquiring knowledge and/or skills to implement said plan, carrying out the plan, and a reflection on lessons and experiences of the tried plan or perspective (Apte, 2009; Mezirow, 2000). Each of these stages was identified in my participants thinking. Participants detailed an existing college-going knowledge set, they all had critically assessed their assumptions and understandings of college-going, they all acknowledged college-going has changed, they had identified potential actions to take to learn new information, and parents with older children were actively carrying out their plans. Without an existing schema transformative learning would not occur. Participants assessed how much knowledge

they believe they have retained from their schema, or more relevant, believe their knowledge to be antiquated and in need of refreshing.

Participants stated that they have disorienting dilemmas sparked by their children, by events about their children, by events that occur in their professional lives, or simply through casual entertainment where surprising and unknown information was shared with them passively. I present these findings and their association with transformative learning theory because this adult learning theory answers my first research question, as well as its sub-question:

1. How do parents with soon-to-be high school students form knowledge about the college-going process?
 - a. How do parents form knowledge about a specific higher education institution?

See Table 3:

Table 3

The Addition of Transformative Learning Theory

Experienced College-going for Themselves	<u>Time Elapsed ~20-35 years</u> →	Reframing College-going for Their Children
<i>Active Knowledge Seeking and Passive Knowledge Digestion</i>	<i>Passive Knowledge Digestion</i>	<i>Active Knowledge Seeking and Passive Knowledge Digestion</i>
<p>Technology Paper Admission Application Analog and Paper Communication Mail, Telephone Printed Research and Marketing Books, Pamphlets, Magazines</p> <p>Family Parents' Expectations and Support Siblings' Influence Finances Limited by Technology</p> <p>High School Limited Support Limited Time Limited by Technology Other Kids' Processes Utilized One Year</p> <p>Outside Network Limited by Technology</p> <p>Personal Network Limited by Technology Limited by Proximity to Others Limited by Mobility</p>	<p>Parents Went to College → Graduate School → Started Professional Work → Became a Parent → Chose Home Neighborhood → Informal Learning →</p> <p>College-going Rise in Cost → Rise in Application #s → Adapted to Technology → Globalization → COVID-19 → Rise of Zoom → Test-Optional Admission →</p>	<p>Technology Digital Admission Application Digital Communication Zoom, Email, Smartphones, SMS Digital Research and Marketing Internet, Smartphones</p> <p>Family Formed Expectations for Child Older Children Sibling's Influence Finances</p> <p>Identifying New High School Robust Support Know Child Know Process Other Kids' Processes Utilize Four Years Accessible by Technology</p> <p>Outside Network Accessible by Technology</p> <p>Employed Network Colleagues' Children's Processes Accessible by Technology</p> <p>Personal Network Accessible by Technology</p>
<pre> graph LR A[Disorienting dilemma] --> B[Self-Examination] B --> C[A critical assessment of assumptions] C --> D[Recognition of one's discontent] D --> E[Exploration of new options or actions] E --> F[A planning course of action] F --> G[Acquiring knowledge and/or skills to implement said plan] G --> H[Carrying out the plan] H --> I[Reflection on lessons and experiences of the tried plan or perspective] </pre>		

I assert that parents learn about college-going processes and colleges specifically by progressing through the stages of transformative learning theory, leaning on their personal schema to reestablish their understanding of college-going in order to support their children. The personal schema is the key piece of their inner self (Dirkx et al., 2006; Posters et al., 2020; Newman, 2014). Their personal schema is tested by the stimulus of the outer world—today's college-going process and the society we live in (Hoggan, 2016). Important variables that cross each of these stages are time and motivation. Parents must be motivated to learn and must have the time to engage in each stage to form knowledge.

The Phases and Stages of College-going and Research Question 2

I presented college-going sources of knowledge that were based in the scholarship reviewed in this paper. Jackson (1982), Litten (1982), and Kotler (1976), offered early college-going theory. This paper utilizes the work built off them with that of Hossler and Gallagher (1987), Hossler and his teaming up with many colleagues throughout the late '80s and early '90s, to the work of Perna (2006) in describing four distinct layers that impact college choice. My presentation of these models is critical because the participants applied to their own colleges during the time this research was presented; this research is like a time capsule that frames these adults' personal college-going schemas. Because of the relationship of this scholarship with my second research question:

2. What information sources do parents with soon-to-be high school students suspect they will access and prioritize in order to form college-going knowledge?

I present Table 4 to highlight how these different sources are grounded in college-going scholarship:

Table 4

The Addition of College-going Scholarship

Experienced College-going for Themselves	Time Elapsed ~20-35 years →	Reframing College-going for Their Children
<i>Active Knowledge Seeking and Passive Knowledge Digestion</i>	<i>Passive Knowledge Digestion</i>	<i>Active Knowledge Seeking and Passive Knowledge Digestion</i>
Technology Paper Admission Application Analog and Paper Communication Mail, Telephone Printed Research and Marketing Books, Pamphlets, Magazines	Parents Went to College → Graduate School → Started Professional Work →	Technology Digital Admission Application Digital Communication Zoom, Email, Smartphones, SMS Digital Research and Marketing Internet, Smartphones
Family Parents' Expectations and Support Siblings' Influence Finances Limited by Technology	Became a Parent → Chose Home Neighborhood → Informal Learning →	Family Formed Expectations for Child Older Children Sibling's Influence Finances
High School Limited Support Limited Time Limited by Technology Other Kids' Processes Utilized One Year	College-going Rise in Cost → Rise in Application #s → Adapted to Technology → Globalization → COVID-19 → Rise of Zoom → Test-Optional Admission →	Identifying New High School Robust Support Know Child Know Process Other Kids' Processes Utilize Four Years Accessible by Technology
Outside Network Limited by Technology		Outside Network Accessible by Technology
Personal Network Limited by Technology Limited by Proximity to Others Limited by Mobility		Employed Network Colleagues' Children's Processes Accessible by Technology
Habitus, Layer 1 Higher Education Context, Layer 3		School and Community Context, Layer 2 Social, economic, and policy context, Layer 4

I assert that parents turn to sources within the reviewed college-going models, specifically sources in the habitus, school and community context, higher education context, and the social, economic, and policy contexts as highlighted by color above. This research also assesses how these sources have changed in the past 40 years. New technologies have created efficiencies, and some of these efficiencies create new disorienting dilemmas.

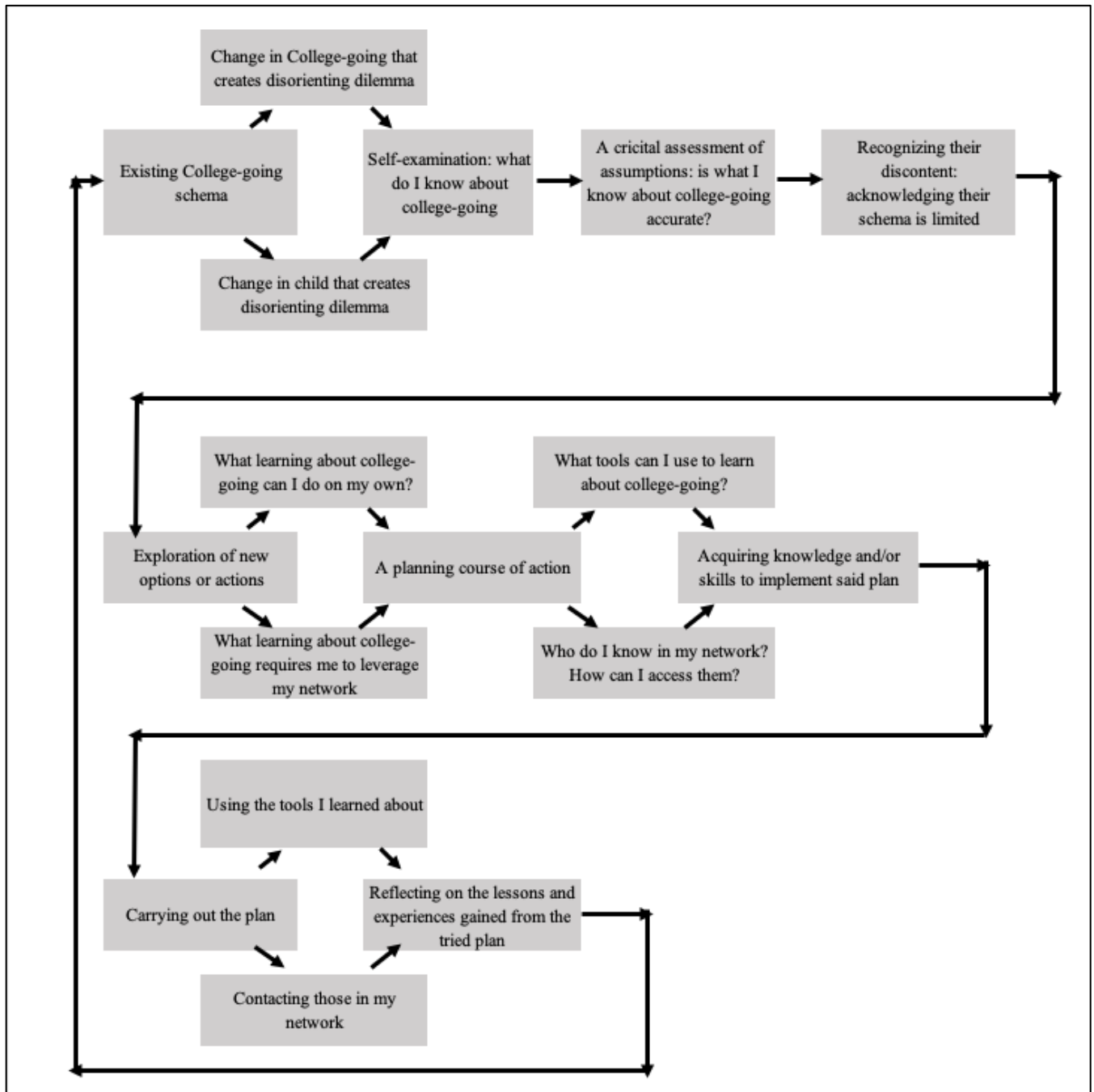
Some of these tools are accessed due to my parents' social capital. Their social capital allows for access to various insider networks—like “good” college counselors, college preparatory schools like the research site, or employment at organizations with highly educated colleagues. Participants' social capital also allows them to utilize new technologies as they arrive. In my interviews I did not discuss what technological devices these parents would access this college-going information from, but in my interviews, it was prevalent through observation that the participants had access to an internet connected computer and mobile phones at minimum.

Summary Theory

My study sought to understand how parents with soon-to-be high school aged children formed knowledge about college-going. Through the theoretical frameworks, guided by my research questions, I present Figure 1. Figure 1 illustrates the cyclical nature of a parents' existing college-going schema and how transformative learning theory, as practiced in the parents' surrounding environment, cycles analysis and reflection back through to the formation of new college-going knowledge. This figure represents an idealized linear path. Participants have not progressed through college-going thinking, yet, but the data reveals these steps based in transformative learning theory:

Figure 1

Summary Theory



Implications

My study revealed how parents with soon-to-be high school students learn about college-going. The findings revealed that participants were strongly influenced by their existing college-

going schema and had to be exposed to some kind of disorienting dilemma to set them on the path to new knowledge. To obtain this new knowledge, parents had to examine what their current schema told them, and then be exposed to new information sources. Some of these information sources were actively sought out, while other information sources were passively digested. Technology's changes in the participants' adult lives, as well as the access to different layers of people networks, revealed what sources they would turn to for new college-going knowledge. I present three implications of my research that are framed by these understandings: those that impact high schools, colleges, and families.

High Schools

The first major implication of these assertions starts with the high school, and directly with the school-based college-going professionals. As one of the more suspected sources of information, there is already an embedded expectation at independent schools that these professionals will help parents and students through the college-going process. I build beyond items that were already stated as occurring in this research like group meetings, one-on-one meetings, and giving access to technology, to say that high schools should:

1. Create a parent advisory council, made up of parents who have gone through the college-going process recently. This group will act as a network source for current parents.
2. Create an alumni advisory council, made up of recent graduates of their high school. This group will act as a network source for current students and parents.
3. Provide parents and students with an internal anonymous question hotline/forum that will be monitored by counselors, the parent advisory council, and the alumni advisory council. This hotline or forum allows for the school to offer answers from the perspective of the school, versus a contact that is distant from their culture or geography.

4. Hold more training sessions with teachers and coaches. Considering these two sources' roles in college-going guidance for the participants, it would benefit the high school to make sure their colleagues' college-going schemas are up-to-date.
5. Have more communication delivered via the mail.
6. Promote access to printable versions of digital college-going documents, like a printable application.
7. Promote the understanding of vocabulary relevant to today's college-going.

These recommendations are built out of findings presented in chapter 4.

Other parents and other kids from the high school would be trusted information sources in the personal network; a council would make these two groups' more formal in their positive influence (Froiland & Davison, 2013). Having strong parent partnerships between the parents and the school enhances the school environment and showing families how peers attained college enrollment can support parents' college-linking activities (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Engberg & Wolinak, 2009). Further, students are used to having a community feel from other students, and parents could benefit from another access point into the school's college-going culture (McKillip et al., 2012; Minor & Benner, 2017). Offering an anonymous hotline or forum that is moderated by school contacts would allow for the misinformation that could be potentially shared in a large Facebook Group to be more managed and addressed properly. Since teachers and coaches spend an abundance of time with students and have direct communication with parents, it is also important for secondary schools to make sure they are current with their information and college-going understanding (Griffin et al., 2011).

Further, Gary's wife's college professors' send Christmas cards; he mentioned his does not. In order to establish trust there may be warm gestures like these which can be felt by

receiving familiar physical mail. As a college counselor that receives many emails from colleges to celebrate National Counselors' Week, as an example, it would be nice to declutter my email inbox and see some of this gratitude appear in my physical mailbox. Parents are used to receiving information via mail. Lastly, high schools defining what the college-going language is, and making sure parents understand how phrases have evolved, will set a foundation for participants to have conversations with school-based resources, colleges, and their family. All of these actions support a positive college-going culture (Knight & Duncheon, 2019).

Higher Education

The second major implication of my study is directed at higher education institutions. I had not considered the stark differences the college application process has faced since the participants initially applied to their undergraduate college to today. Paper documents and the telephone reigned supreme. With today's easily created and sent digital messages, colleges can overwhelm families with their electronic marketing. With today's easily replicated digital applications, the process has grown distant from what today's parents recall as a paper driven process. To support these parents' college-going knowledge formation I advise colleges to:

1. Create a parent advisory council of parents of current students. This group can act as a resource for families to get to know the totality of the university beyond a visit or website.
2. Create a student advisory council of current students. This group can act as a resource for parents of prospective students, as well as prospective students in a similar fashion to the parent advisory council.
3. Provide prospective parents and students with an internal anonymous question hotline/forum that will be monitored by college officials, the parent advisory council, and

the alumni advisory council. This hotline or forum allows for the college to offer answers from the perspective of the school, versus a contact that is distant from their culture or geography with no risk to a parent's prospective college applicant's candidacy.

4. Invite more high school teachers and coaches; neighborhood contacts like scouts' leaders, religious leaders, and other community influencers; and professional conferences to campus.
5. Host more college-going trainings for alumni, faculty, staff, and on-staff coaches that discuss the admissions process and prospective family behaviors.
6. Encourage an honest and total representation of the community by showcasing more than the shiniest buildings and positive aspects to visitors.
7. Have more communication delivered in the mail to declutter digital marketing.
8. Make the existing printable versions of the college application more prominent on admissions' websites. Even if colleges require digital submission a parent may appreciate holding an actual application like they did in their past.
9. Stick to a consistent vocabulary and strive to use verbiage that is similar to other colleges' vocabulary around college-going.

These recommendations are built out of findings presented in chapter 4.

Colleges can subscribe to similar enhancements as high schools. Knowing that parents pursue the knowledge of other parents, other kids, and reviews' websites it can be more beneficial for them to facilitate the participants' interactions with members of their community or their processes (Taylor, 2019). Without this facilitation parents are left to identify contacts or sources on their own, which could lead them to webpages or groups that do not share accurate knowledge. Further, if parents are making the investment to visit a college campus, it behooves

the college to share its experience in totality. These revelations support parents when supporting their children from all walks of life (Caskey, 2018; Coker & Glenn, 2017). Do not just throw a party and show families the shiniest buildings.

Since neighborhood contacts, employed contacts, and personal network contacts are leveraged by the participants to form college-going knowledge, it would be beneficial for colleges to host as many of these people on their campuses as possible. This hosting better informs these network contacts so that they can provide accurate knowledge to parents like the participants (Griffin et al., 2011; Marcus, 2021). Including “points of pain”, or areas of campus that are not the most positive, allows parents to better assess a colleges’ fit for their child. Colleges should own their strengths and weaknesses.

Lastly, since the participants first experienced college-going as a paper document and telephone business, being transparent about where printable versions of critical college-going documents, like applications, can be found is helpful. Parents can then hold a college application in their hand and see what their children are being asked to complete. In today’s college-going, parents are not given access to their child’s applications by default—for rightful reasons—but a parent can still ask their children to outline what will be input online by completing a paper version of these documents. This step goes beyond simply using a website or social media post to communicate key information (Perna et al., 2021; Peruta & Shields, 2017). Using a consistent language across the higher education landscape also supports parents’ better understanding today’s college-going (Taylor, 2019).

Families

Parents and their children make up a family unit. This research investigates how a parent inquiring to have their child join a specific high school community forms college-going

knowledge. I draw implications in this section based on my findings and the assumption that the participants want their 8th grade child to attend college, due to their inquiring to join the research site's 9th grade. With this understanding parents and families should:

1. Make time for college-going knowledge formation but do not forget about the importance of high school and youth in its totality.
2. Define parameters for high school success, including whether or not the identification of a future goal must be achieved while in high school.
3. Parents reflect on their existent college-going schema and admit what they do not know or acknowledge what they believe has changed about today's college-going.
4. Identify college-going resources before the intensity of the later high school years increases.
5. Understand how the cost of college-going may not be best measured by money, and identify what cost is too high.
6. Recognize today's 8th graders' life is different than what parents' 8th grade's lives were.
7. Recognize relatives and siblings impact the formation of a college-going schema.
8. Recognize the privilege a neighborhood, profession, and school community can provide and appreciate how every college-going journey in these settings can be unique.
9. Assess the end game of sending children to private high school. Is it for education or is it to add to the competition?

These considerations are built out of findings presented in chapter 4.

Since participants state that college-going thinking for today's 8th grader starts in 9th grade or earlier, there is a temptation to intensify college-going behaviors earlier in a child's educational career. It is important for parents to define what they expect as high school success

as well as for parents to identify what their college-going resources are before this intensity arrives. This assertion supports Engberg and Wolniak's (2009) and Robinson and Roska's (2016) claims that linking identified college networks supports seeking out college information, and goes a step further than Froiland and Davison's (2013) analysis on parent expectations. A parent has to form knowledge on which they can create expectations. If parents' aspirations are too high then there can become a tension between them and their child, as well as a tension with their child's school. Identifying resources before the intensity of applying to college allows parents to have a brainstormed plan of who they will contact and what information they will reach out for. Having accurate college-going knowledge is critical to forming a family's college aspirations (Knight & Duncheon, 2019).

Further, since the outer world surrounding 8th graders has changed since when the participants were in these shoes, parents must accept that there are new avenues to knowledge that can make their child an expert in something completely unexpected. Role models and guides can be found from any corner of the world via technology, and parents can engage with their children about how growing expertise is valued by them (Tsuei & Hsu, 2019). Since children have this wide access to information, parents have to recognize that even their own children can develop horizontally different strengths and weaknesses to compound their already genetic differences.

Parents of means have the power to choose their neighborhood which greatly impacts the schools, friends, and activities their child engages with (Robinson & Roska, 2016). Parents' own education and profession also grant access to specific knowledge which can support their college-going knowledge formation. It is important for parents to recognize that learning about college-going does not mean comparing their own children's processes to other kids' college-

going processes, as much as it involves learning about the process itself. It is easy to rely on others when people, mentors, teachers, family, have been knowledge cements throughout the participants' lives.

Lastly, there needs to be an assessment as to why the families are choosing to send their kids to private schools. One of the participants asked me to question the end game of these four years, asking if the private high school experience was intended to educate or if it was simply to put their family into the feeder mentality's competition (Wolniak & Engberg, 2007). This participant expressed having serious conversations with their partner about this question, and they asked I cast it upon every family. It is a great question.

Recommendations for Future Research

As parents continue to become more engaged with their children's college-going it will be increasingly important to study their behaviors. I presented previous studies that focus on the student themselves. I also presented research that speaks about the parents' influence on college-going, but there is limited research about how parents approach college-going knowledge formation in an effort to support their children. I focused on these parents and how they will learn about new evolutions in college-going, as well as what sources they suspect they will use. I encourage continued research to grow this scholarship by doing the following studies.

First, to add transferability it is recommended that scholars add additional research sites. With more research sites there can be expanded understandings of how the parents with children in this age group understand today's college-going and suspect they will form new knowledge. Additional research sites could be private schools similar to my study's research site (Van Zanten, 2009), or they could be public schools. It would also be interesting to explore different geographic areas (Blagg & Blom, 2018).

Second, it would be interesting to see how my 10 participants grow in their college-going knowledge. Interviewing this same set of participants on a yearly basis until their 8th grader enrolls in college would allow their suspected behaviors to be compared to actual behaviors. This longitudinal study could develop a model of how parents use transformative learning to form knowledge about college-going over time (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Mezirow, 2000; Perna, 2006; Van Zanten, 2009).

Third, interviewing parents of different aged children could mark other sources of knowledge formation. Because the participants have children in the 8th grade they are in a specific timeframe in their children's lives. With participants that had older children, they were able to speak more towards their experiences with later staged college-going and what they had learned (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Mezirow, 2000; Perna, 2006). A future study could explore parents in this later stage. A future study could also explore parents at an earlier stage of college-going, since two of the participants stated college-going thinking starts in elementary school.

Lastly, a future research study could find scholars applying other adult learning theories to a set of parents with children in this age group. I heavily rely transformative learning theory's stages. A new study could explore how a different adult learning theory may describe how parents with soon-to-be high school students form knowledge about college-going (Newman, 2012; Newman, 2014).

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

Today's college-going is different than college-going of the late 1980s to early 2000s. There have been increased college-going costs, new technologies, increased globalization, and more students from multiple walks of life enrolling in higher education. Because parents play a

pivotal role in influencing how their children engage in college-going I found it necessary to formally research how they learn about unknown facets of the college-going process or form knowledge about an unknown university. I assert that it is important to know how parents form this knowledge since there are hundreds of thousands of universities around the world, and it is impossible for one person to have such a wide-ranging understanding of the landscape of higher education in its totality.

Increasingly, today's parents, especially those targeting a private secondary school for their children, attended college themselves. The participants clearly reflected on this existing college-going knowledge when they spoke with me. This existing college-going knowledge will be tested in the near future, as their 8th graders grow into the actual application process. I know that this study and its implications can support practitioners and parents. I have already found my results influence my practice as a college counselor.

I have grown as a practitioner of college counseling, specifically in supporting parents' own knowledge formation in conducting this study. When fielding phone calls from parents I now understand that their medium for communication, their habit, is to pick up the phone. When I insist parents meet with me over Zoom since a meeting will only need 20 minutes, and they insist on being in-person I know that being at school and being in my presence is more familiar. Ultimately, being able to apply transformative learning theory, influenced by college-going scholarship, to form this study's results and summary theory will allow practitioners to be better, and for parents to be better. That way, when a child yells out to their parents with a question about college-going, or asks for their opinions about a college at the dinner table, parents will have a path to an accurate answer and an understanding that their experience in college-going is different than their children's soon-to-be college-going experience.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Date:

Time:

Location:

Background questions

1. Tell me about your work life since the age of 25?
2. What has your formal education looked like since the age of 18?

How you learn

3. Considering I am researching how parents learn, how would you describe your own awareness of *how you* learn something new? If it's helpful, reflect on a recent time you learned something new.

How did you learn it? What sources of information did you use? Where did you go first?

4. Explain a time or situation when a piece of information you didn't know knocked you off guard or disoriented you.

What emotions do you feel when you come across something you don't know about or know how to use? How do you react to these emotions? What do you do?

Learning about and from your child

5. As you reflect on your life as a parent, please list out how others share information **about** your 8th grade child with you?

Which of these methods are most valuable to you and why? Least valuable?

Which of these methods are you most comfortable with and why? Least comfortable?

Where do you get the most unexpected information about your child?

What do you do if you need to better understand information that is being shared with you about your child?

How do you question the information that is being shared with you about your child?

How do you feel vulnerable when others share information with you about your child?

6. As you reflect on your life as a parent, please list how your 8th grade child shares information with you?

Tell me about a time your 8th grader surprised you with their knowledge? How do you feel when your child surprises you? How often do they surprise you?

Tell me about a time your 8th grader was more of an expert in something than you? How did you know they were more of an expert than you? How do you feel when they are more of an expert than you?

Tell me about a time you had to question the accuracy of the information your 8th grader shared with you? How do you seek out information to confirm or reject what your 8th grader has shared with you?

How do you feel about your 8th grader becoming more knowledgeable about something than you?

You, the high school, and college-going expectations

7. Knowing that your 8th grader is progressing into high school soon, what are *you* looking for in a school community?

How does your and your child's interests in a desired school community align?

8. With what you have learned about searching for and applying to different high school communities, how do you think searching for and applying to colleges will be the same? Different?

9. What role do you think *you* will have as your child starts thinking about and eventually applying to colleges?

How do you suspect your child will involve you in their thinking and process? How important to you is it that you are a part of your child's thinking about colleges?

10. What role do you think your high school will have as your child starts thinking about and eventually applying to colleges?

How do you expect your child's high school will involve you in your child's process? How important to you is it that your child's school keep you a part of your child's process?

11. Please explain how comfortable you are with your child using the resources available to them to navigate the whole process of searching for, applying to, and selecting a college?

How might that comfort level change over the next four years? What supports or barriers might impact your comfort level?

You and college-going

12. How do you think the whole going to college process has changed since the year 2000?

13. How do you think the whole going to college process has stayed the same since the year 2000?

14. When would you say the whole going to college process starts for today's students?

15. What do you think are the most important college-going parts and pieces in today's whole going to college process?

What parts and pieces do you think you know more about? How do you know more about them?

What parts and pieces do you think you know less about? What steps would you take to learn more about a part of today's college-going process you know less about? When do you know you've learned enough to form your own understanding about a part of today's college-going process?

16. What information about a specific college do you already know that you think may be important in your child's process?

How do you know about this college? Why might this knowledge be important to your child's process?

17. Say your child comes to you and wants to consider going to a college you haven't heard of. How do you react?

What steps would you take to learn about a specific college you know little to nothing about? When do you know you've learned enough to form your own understanding of a college?

18. At this time, would you say you or your child knows more about the various US colleges and universities out there?

If your child knows more, how comfortable are you with this knowledge gap? How might you increase your knowledge?

If you know more, how do you plan on sharing your knowledge, if at all?

19. At this time, would you say you or your child knows more about the expectations and processes that make up a complete college-going process?

If your child knows more, how comfortable are you with this knowledge gap? How might you increase your knowledge?

If you know more, how do you plan on sharing your knowledge, if at all?

20. Are there other people in your orbit who may be more knowledgeable about the various US colleges and universities and/or the college-going process? Like a knowledge broker?

Who might you turn to for information about colleges and the college-going process? Why would you reach out to them? How do you know their information is accurate?

21. What other information/sources did you think you will turn to when forming knowledge about colleges and college-going?

What sources of information might you prioritize or turn to first, second, third?

If you had to identify a moment when you know you have formed knowledge about a college or a college-going component, what types of milestones or moments do you think you'd identify?

22. Today, do you feel equipped as a parent and a learner to learn about colleges and the college-going process if you wanted to?

How might your feelings change over the next four years of high school?

23. As you reflect on our discussion today, is there anything you are thinking about related to college-going and how you learn that you think I should have asked?

Would you like to add any additional thoughts?

Appendix B: Introductory Communication

Dear ,

My name is JJ Anthony and I am a doctoral student at the University of Memphis. I am also employed at the [Research Site] where you have inquired to have your student join the 9th grade class. I am conducting a research study on parents with a child in this age group and how they, as parents, learn and form knowledge, specifically about the overall college-going process.

I am recruiting participants and I am hopeful you are interested? Your information was pulled at random from [Research Site's] inquiry pool to receive this notice. There are no other ties to [to the Research Site] or [the Research Site's] admissions process. Participation would involve me interviewing you over the course of 45 minutes - 60 minutes in-person at an agreed upon space or over Zoom. You will be using a pseudonym to create anonymous responses and I will record our conversation. I will then compare your answers to other participants' responses to see what resources parents may utilize to learn and learn about college-going.

There are no known risks involved in this research and there will be no benefits or compensation provided. If you could kindly reply with your willingness to participate I would appreciate it. Thank you for considering.

Sincerely,

JJ Anthony

Doctoral Student

R. Eric Platt

Faculty Advisor

Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent for Research Participation

Title

Forming College-Going Knowledge: An Analysis of Soon-to-be High School Parents

Researcher(s)

Joseph “JJ” Anthony, University of Memphis

Advisor: Dr. R. Eric Platt, University of Memphis

Researchers Contact Information

541-212-1709, j.anthony@memphis.edu

901-678-4229, replatt@memphis.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The box below highlights key information for you to consider when deciding if you want to participate. More detailed information is provided below the box. Please ask the researcher(s) any questions about the study before you make your decision. If you volunteer, you will be one of about 10 people to do so.

Key Information for You to Consider

Voluntary Consent: You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to learn how parents may approach learning about the many facets of college-going. We also hope to identify milestone moments for when parents believe they have cemented knowledge as well as a priority listing of suspected information sources.

Duration: It is expected that your participation will last 1-2 hours across 1 day to 7 weeks.

Procedures and Activities: You will be asked to meet with the researcher (in-person or over Zoom) to be interviewed. The researcher will conduct a follow-up to make sure any characterizations of your answers is reflective of your intentions.

Risk: To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. However if discussing your own lived experiences or speculating on your child's suspected college-going process may make you uncomfortable there is no obligation to participant.

Benefits: Participants may benefit from forward thinking as well as reflecting on past lived experiences. Overall, your willingness to take part in this research may, in the future, help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

Alternatives: Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate

Who is conducting this research?

Joseph "JJ" Anthony of the University of Memphis, Department of Leadership is in charge of the study. His faculty advisor is Dr. R. Eric Platt of the University of Memphis, Department of Leadership. There may be other research team members assisting during the study. There is no financial interest or conflict of interest related to this research.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose is to assess how parents at the dawn of high school for their child form knowledge about the aspects of college-going. You are being invited to take part in a research study because you have inquired to have your child join the [Research Site's] 9th grade community.

How long will I be in this research?

The research will be conducted at the Bellevue Library (Nashville, TN), an establishment convenient to the participant, or over Zoom. It should take about 45-60 minutes for the interview. A follow-up interview of equal length may be needed if clarification is needed. A follow-up email message will occur to confirm characterized statements are accurate.

What happens if I agree to participate in this Research?

If you agree you will be asked to coordinate with the lead researcher to find a mutually convenient time to meet and be interviewed for up to 60 minutes. You will be audio recorded while answering the researcher's questions if in-person. If your agreed upon location requires you to drive you will need to be able to drive and meet at the agreed upon location. If your interview is to be conducted virtually, you will be asked to log on to Zoom and be able to participate in the session. A Zoom session will be recorded for audio and video. You can skip any question that makes you feel uncomfortable or stop at any time.

You may be recontacted after your interview for a follow-up interview or to review any quotes.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

Information collected for this research will be used to identify common themes around knowledge formation in parents. Findings and results of this study may be published and shared at conferences. However, your name will not be used. Findings will be presented as combined results and any direct quote, if used, will use a pseudonym or be addressed anonymously. Your name will not be used in any public forum or published publicly.

We will make every effort to keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law.

How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?

We promise to protect your privacy and security of your personal information as best we can.

Although you need to know about some limits to this promise. Measures we will take include:

- Conduct research in a private setting.
- Keep electronic communication in password protected accounts.
- Digital records will be kept on password protected computers only accessible by the research team.
- Digital records will be erased after the study is completed.
- Paper records will be shredded after the study is completed.
- Files will have limited to no identifiable information.
- Identifiable information will be kept on a separate password protected file apart from the collected data.
- We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is.

Individuals and organization that monitor this research may be permitted access to inspect the research records. This monitoring may include access to your private information and any applicable records. These individual and organization include (Edits List below as appropriate for your research

- Institutional Review Board
- Government regulatory agencies

Research team members are required to report the following if a team member suspects child abuse or neglect, or suicidal thoughts. TN Laws may require this suspicion be reported. In such case, the research team may be obligated to breach confidentiality and may be required to disclose personal information.

What if I want to stop participating in this research?

It is up to you to decide whether you want to volunteer for this study. It is also ok to decide to end your participation at any time. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decided to withdraw your participation. Your decision about participating will not affect your relationship with the researcher(s) or the University of Memphis.

Will it cost me money to take part in this research?

There are no costs associated with participation in this research study unless you need to pay for the cost of getting to the study site.

Will I receive any compensation or reward for participating in this research?

You will not be compensated for taking part in this research

Who can answer my question about this research?

Before you decide to volunteer for this study, please ask any questions that might come to mind. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Joseph “JJ” Anthony at 541-212-1709, j.anthony@memphis.edu or Dr. R. Eric Platt at 901-678-4229, replatt@memphis.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705 or email irb@memphis.edu. We will give you a signed copy of this consent to take with you.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have had the opportunity to consider the information in this document. I have asked any questions needed for me to decide about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions through the study.

By signing below, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been given a copy of this consent document. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, my legal representative or I may be asked to consent again prior to my continued participation

As described above, you may be audio/video recorded while performing the activities described above. Audio/video recordings will be used for coding, or combining interview answers across participants into themes. Initial the space below if you consent to the use of audio/video recordings as described:

____ I agree to the use of audio/video recordings.

Name of Adult Participant

Signature of Adult Participant

Date

Researcher Signature (To be completed at the time of Informed Consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understand the information described in this consent and freely consent to participate.

Name of Research Team Member **Signature of Research Team Member**

Date